


**The phenomenon of absent fatherhood: perceptions,
experiences and challenges of absent fathers and
adolescent children**

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The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a classical building with six columns and a pediment, with the text 'UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE' below it.

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ABSTRACT

The escalating statistics of children who are growing up without the involvement of their fathers is a serious social problem not only in South Africa but globally. Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (2021) indicates that 42% of children in South Africa live with their mothers only as compared to 4% of children who only live with their fathers. The statistics highlight the seriousness of the problem of absent fatherhood in South Africa. The study aimed to explore the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood. Bowen's family systems theory was used as the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The study used a qualitative approach and an explorative and descriptive design. Collected data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps of thematic data analysis, and the five themes which emerged were: perceived causes of absent fatherhood, constructions of fatherhood, factors influencing fathers' absence, adolescents' experiences of absent fatherhood and challenges faced by adolescents with absent fathers. The findings indicated that the role of a father as a provider received much emphasis from the participants in their constructions of fatherhood. The adolescents had painful experiences of their fathers' absence, and some of them believed that their lives could have been improved if their fathers were present and involved. Absent fathers highlighted maternal gatekeeping and unemployment as factors that influenced their absence. A few of the fathers were absent from the lives of their children as a result of their choice. The participants cited financial deprivation as one of the major challenges of growing up in absent-father families. Social fathers played an important role in the upbringing of the adolescent participants. Therefore, based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that fathers be involved in the lives of their children.

KEYWORDS

Absent fatherhood

Adolescent

Bowen family systems theory

Child

Family

Family member

Fatherhood

Father involvement

LIST OF ACRONYMS

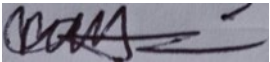
ATMs:	Automatic Teller Machines
BFST:	Bowen Family Systems Theory
COVID-19:	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
DIC:	Drop-In Centre
DSD:	Department of Social Development
FST:	Family Systems Theory
HIV:	Human Immune Virus
IDP:	Integrated Development Plan
NCCPP:	National Child Care and Protection Policy
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIMH:	National Institute of Mental Health
N1:	National Road One
RSA:	Republic of South Africa
SABC1:	South African Broadcasting Corporation One
Stats SA:	Statistics South Africa
WHO:	World Health Organisation

DECLARATION STATEMENT

I declare that the study entitled, "*The phenomenon of absent fatherhood: perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children*", is a result of my research. All the sources used in this study have been indicated and fully acknowledged by means of complete references.

Name: Witness Moila

Date: June 2023

Signed: 

DEDICATIONS

This study is dedicated to my children Lethabo, Lesedi and Kabelo. Daddy loves you so much.

I also wish to extend my dedication to the memory of my late friend, Vutomi Freeman Valoyi, who encouraged me to work hard during the application process of this study. May your soul continue to rest in eternal peace, Khalanga.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Fatherhood is one of, if not the most, daunting roles a man can encounter at any stage of life (Gamboa & Julian, 2019). Salami and Okeke (2018) used the term ‘absent father’ to refer to fathers who are unable to participate actively in the fathering roles expected in terms of social, emotional, economic and protective contributions and providing for their children. Father loss in adolescence can often be compounded by the turbulent changes a child is experiencing at this stage of development (O’Dwyer, 2017). Yi and Nel (2020) indicated that some of the primary reasons for the father absence are unemployment, divorce, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) epidemic and cultural factors. Also, Kamau (2018) has added that fathers have been known to be physically absent due to an array of reasons from migration, divorce, death and abandonment. Apart from natural causes such as premature deaths of fathers contributing to absent fatherhood, divorce and teenage pregnancies play a major role in this social issue and problem (Morwe et al., 2015). Patel and Mavungu (2016) concluded that widespread father absence is influenced by materialistic constructions of fatherhood and masculinity; socio-economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment of fathers; cultural factors such as customary practices like ‘ilobolo’ and ‘damages’; and relationship breakdowns of various kinds. In the South African context, the absent-father phenomenon through the lens of the nuclear family would appear to be biased and ignoring the role of the extended family in child raising (Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020).

Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (2020) reported that approximately 7, 2 million or 41, 8% of the households in South Africa were headed by women. A study by Matlakala et al. (2019) noted that the issue of absent fathers causes more harm than good, as participants stated that there are a lot of negative influences that are being brought about by the father's absenteeism. Father absence has also been on the rise in Africa, with Namibia having the highest number of non-resident fathers in Africa, followed by South Africa (Herbert & Princess, 2017). Despite the extensive literature on masculinity and fatherhood, it remains a mystery why so many South African fathers disengage from their child(ren)'s life/lives (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Londt et al. (2017) indicated that there is a significant need to explore and describe the various nuances about fatherhood, specifically in South Africa. There is a need for an alternative understanding of manhood and responsible fatherhood (Matlakala et al., 2019).

Previously, in South Africa, absent fatherhood was attributed to Apartheid which promoted migrant labour practices (Morwe et al., 2015). East et al. (2020) indicated that more commonly, children are growing up in single-parented homes, which are often characterised by an absent father. Father absence is of great concern and is prevalent in South Africa (Smith et al., 2014). Freeks (2021) argued that the absence of a father has been constructed as socially detrimental and a dilemma for most children in South Africa, as the lack of a father figure means the child has no positive male role model in the home. Often, the issue of absent fathers is related to family dysfunction and leads to other social problems (Matlakala et al., 2019). Herbert and Princess (2017) indicated that a father absence in a homestead has psychological and sociological effects on children's behaviour. Londt et al. (2017) added that the absence of a father in the family during childhood reportedly affects the developmental stages of a child's life. The impact of the absent father and the circumstances of his absence were seen by some participants (Gerrand & Nduna, 2021) as negatively affecting their lives. La Guardia et al. (2014) argued that women from father-absent homes experienced earlier onset of menarche

than those from father-present homes, and that, women who experienced early menarche also reported earlier sexual intercourse than those who experienced later menarche. It was also the participants' perception that their children were suffering as a result of parental alienation because their fathers could no longer share in their children's lives (Bosch-Brits et al., 2018). Morwe et al. (2015) stated that children who have absent fathers are treated with disdain, particularly those born out-of-wedlock and those of divorced parents, however, those whose father is deceased are treated with much caution and sympathy.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed study was underpinned by the family systems theory (FST) approach by Murray Bowen, which is described as a form of general systems theory, focusing on what goes on at the family level rather than merely examining individual family members (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). An absent father, which is a change in the system affects the functioning of the entire system, thus the family cannot function effectively within society (Mabusela, 2014). The relevance of the FST to this study was that the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children enhances the lives of the children. Similarly, Lamb and Lewis (2010) shared that children with involved fathers have higher levels of social competence and capacity for empathy, greater self-control, higher self-esteem, more positive child-father and adolescent-father relationships, better social skills and peer relationships, more prosocial sibling interactions, more increased cognitive competence, fewer school adjustment difficulties, better academic progress and fewer behavioural problems. On the other hand, Mabusela (2014) mentioned that it is important to remember that the existence of differences between groups of children growing up with and without fathers does not mean that every child growing up without a father has developmental problems or that all children whose fathers live at home develop appropriately. Haefner (2014) stated that the application of Bowen's FST provides an organised analysis of relationships and tools to improve communication between members,

recognising that these triangles exist in various levels of dysfunction in all families. To be able to work effectively within a family systems paradigm, we need to understand how the family system functions and the various roles that significant family members play (Ross & Deverell, 2004). In order to understand family behaviour, the family systems approach addresses communication, transactional patterns, conflict, separateness and connectedness, cohesion and adaptation to stress (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). Therefore, this study focused on exploring how absent fathers and adolescent children are affected by the aspect of separateness.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Freeks (2017) highlighted that the increasing number of absent fathers has become not only a dilemma but a serious debate in South Africa, especially on subjects such as morals, maturation of children, children development, relationships and replacement of fathers. Statistics highlight the seriousness of the problem of absent fatherhood phenomenon, as Stats SA (2021) has reported that only 32, 7% of children in South Africa live with both parents; 42% of children live with only their mothers; and 4% of children live with only their fathers. Patel and Mavungu (2016) stated that women and children are likely to bear the greatest burden as a result of the father absence. The burden carried by the maternal relatives in caring for children of absent fathers is a major concern (Makofane, 2015). Furthermore, Freeks (2020) believes that to compound matters, the number of absent fathers is still on the increase in South Africa. Patel and Mavungu (2016) detailed that limited research has been conducted on how men perceive father absence. Cabrera (2019) was of the opinion that there is still much to learn about fathers as research on fathers still lags behind the research on mothers. Therefore, it was very important for this study to include absent fathers when investigating the phenomenon of absent fatherhood as Volker and Gibson (2014) advised that greater quantities of father involvement and father support have been found to reduce the development of problem behaviours in adolescents. Van den Berg and Makusha (2018) described father involvement as an

overarching term for several categories of interaction between fathers and children that include, but are not limited to, emotional support, communication, financial support and caregiving. Fathers should be involved in the lives of their children as their involvement has also been positively associated with benefits to children's social, emotional, behavioural and cognitive development (Volker & Gibson, 2014). Arguably, this study filled the gap in the literature by investigating the phenomenon of absent fatherhood focusing on the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children. Besides, this study made recommendations on how social services and pieces of legislation relating to fatherhood should be shaped to mitigate the problem of absent fatherhood.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood?

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Aim of the study

The study aimed to explore the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood.

1.5.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were:

- To explore the perceptions of absent fathers and adolescents on absent fatherhood.
- To explore the factors that lead fathers to be absent from their children's lives.
- To explore the experiences and challenges faced by adolescent children with absent fathers.

1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

The study used a qualitative approach which Lune and Berg (2017) referred to as the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things. Hennink et al. (2020) indicated that one of the most distinctive features of qualitative research is that the approach allows you to identify issues from the perspective of your study participants and understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to behaviour, events or objects. The qualitative researcher is concerned with understanding rather than explanation, with naturalistic observation rather than controlled measurement and with the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider as opposed to that of an outsider predominant in the quantitative paradigm (De Vos et al., 2011). An exploratory and descriptive research design, which Neuman (2011) refers to as research whose primary purpose is to examine a little-understood issue or phenomenon and to develop preliminary ideas about it and move towards refined research questions, was applied. On the other hand, Reiter (2017) indicated that exploratory research seeks to provide new explanations that have been previously overlooked, and it can do so through the active involvement of the researcher in the process of amplifying his/her conceptual tools to allow for raising of new questions and provide new explanations of a given reality from a new angle. Atmowardoyo (2018) defined descriptive research as a research method used to describe an existing phenomenon as accurately as possible. The choice for exploratory research design is informed by an argument by Patel and Mavungu (2016) that limited research has been conducted on how men perceive father absence. This study described the phenomenon of absent fatherhood, as Sahin and Mete (2021) alluded that descriptive research is a research method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon studied.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Stats SA (2021) indicated that 42% of children in South Africa live with their mothers only compared to 4% of children who live with their fathers only. The phenomenon of absent fatherhood has far-reaching consequences for both the absent fathers and the children (including the family as a whole). This study was significant on the basis that it contributed to the body of knowledge on how fathers should be involved in the lives of their children. This study also assisted social services practitioners and policymakers to align their services with the current dynamics when dealing with the issues around absent fatherhood.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Fatherhood

It is a construct that embraces a broader range of socially constructed, negotiated and enacted gendered identities and parenting functions, developed and sustained by societal and cultural systems of meaning within given historical contexts (Taylor et al., 2013).

Absent father

Van den Berg and Makusha (2018) state that the term “absent father” is used to refer to a father that is neither physically living in the same household as his child, nor involved in the child’s life. Louw (2018) argued that an absent father is seen as a birth father being either physically or emotionally uninvolved in his child’s development.

Father involvement

It is described as the practical, financial or engagement of a father in the life of his children (Van den Berg & Makusha, 2018).

Family

The White Paper on Families (DSD) (2013) defines a family as a societal group that is related by blood (kinship), adoption, foster care or the ties of marriage (civil, customary or religious), civil union or cohabitation and go beyond a particular physical residence.

Family member

A family member in relation to a child means a parent of the child; any other person who has parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child; a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt or cousin of the child; or any other person with whom the child has developed a significant relationship, based on psychological or emotional attachment, which resembles a family relationship (Children's Act, 2005).

Child

A child is described as a person under the age of 18 years (Children's Act, 2005).

Adolescent

World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020) describes an adolescent as an individual aged 10 to 19 years.

1.9 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One: It is an introduction to the study which also provided the context and background of fatherhood and absent fatherhood in South Africa. The chapter detailed an overview of the importance and rationale of the study, the research question, aim and objectives of the study. It briefly introduced the theory on which the study was formulated, the research methods applied, the significance of the study and ended with the definition of terms.

Chapter Two: The chapter provided a detailed presentation of the theoretical framework, which underpinned the study. The study was underpinned by Bowen Family Systems Theory.

Chapter Three: The chapter outlined an in-depth literature review on the construction of fatherhood, absent fatherhood, father involvement, perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fatherhood, adolescence and absent fatherhood and the legislative framework.

Chapter Four: The chapter provided the research methodology applied in the study. It included an in-depth discussion of the qualitative methods used in the study, as well as the study population and sample, data collection procedure, data analysis, data verification, ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

Chapter Five: The chapter discussed and presented the study findings based on the themes and sub-themes. The findings were integrated with previous literature as discussed in Chapter Three and linked with the theoretical framework as outlined in Chapter Two.

Chapter Six: The chapter discussed the conclusion of the study. It also summarised the study chapters and made recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a detailed background of the study. The current chapter outlined the theoretical framework which underpinned the study. The chapter further summarised the theoretical understanding of the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood. The study was underpinned by the Family Systems Theory (FST) approach by Murray Bowen (1913-1990), which is described as a form of general systems theory, focusing on what goes on at the family level, rather than merely examining individual family members (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000).

2.2 BOWEN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

The Bowen family systems theory (BFST) model provides a framework to view the individual as part of the family (Haefner, 2014). Each member contributes to the family's functioning effectively, including the father's role in the family (Reetsang, 2020). Alzoubi (2018) states that members of the family do not function or behave separately, but within the circle of the system that shapes their feelings, thoughts and functions. An assessment of the child or adolescent also requires an assessment of the family structure of that child or adolescent (Haefner, 2014). Cabrera et al. (2018) indicated that family systems models need to acknowledge that fathers are parents too. A father plays imperative roles in families and in his children's cognitive and social development and subsequent adult position and behaviour (Gyimah, 2021). Mabusela (2014) views an absent father as a change that affects the functioning of the entire system and without whom the family cannot function effectively

within society. The absent father can be seen as a missing part of the system (Varney-Wong, 2019).

A family can be thought of as a system, a family relationship system, in which the functioning of each member is related to the functioning of every other member (Kerr, 1981; Titelman, 2014; Willis et al., 2021). Willis et al. (2021) further stated that the emotional connection has so much impact on the thoughts, feelings and actions of individual family members that the family is seen as a multifaceted system. The relationship systems that Bowen observed in families have much in common with relationships observed in the natural world (Metcalf, 2011). When a parent and a child live apart, the household environment is disrupted, parental monitoring is diminished, and stress and uncertainty are introduced (Marteletto et al., 2016). Parental separation is very likely to affect a child's relation to the non-resident parent (Walper et al., 2015). Family systems theory is important because it was derived from the direct study of one type of natural system, the human family (Bowen & Kerr, 1988). Ross and Deverell (2004) argued that, to be able to work effectively within a family systems paradigm, we need to understand how the family systems function and the various roles that significant family members play. What differentiates Bowen's theory from other family systems approaches is its emphasis on the sensitivity human beings have to each other at a biological level (Kott, 2014). Family systems theories help explain why family members behave as they do towards one another (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000).

2.3 ORIGIN OF BOWEN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

The main part of family systems theory (FST) evolved rapidly for about six years, between 1957 and 1963 (Bowen, 1976). Bowen and Kerr (1988) argued that FST radically departed from previous theories of human emotional functioning by its conceptualisation of the family as an emotional unit. In the mid-20th century, with psychoanalysis prevailing in mainstream

thinking, this systems perspective was not only seen as a radical departure from an individual lens, but it also reconceptualised a person's emotional functioning from a psychological into a scientific framework (Palombi, 2016). In 1954, Bowen moved to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to study families with a schizophrenic member, instead of focusing on the schizophrenic individual (Metcalf, 2011). Based upon his research at the NIMH and his exploration of the family relationship system, Bowen developed a family systems theory, later called the Bowen Theory, to distinguish it from other systems theories developing at the same time (Papero, 2014). Bowen's devotion to his psychoanalytic training was set aside after his move to the NIMH in 1954, as he began to shift from an individual focus to an appreciation of the dimensions of families as systems (Brown, 1999). Murray Bowen, a developer of the BFST, was a pioneer of family psychotherapy (Haefner, 2014). BFST is described by Rabstejnek (2009) as one of several family models developed by mental health pioneers in the decade or so following the Second World War. Bowen began using the term 'family systems theory' in 1966, and in 1974, he changed the name of this theory to the Bowen family systems theory, or, more succinctly, the Bowen theory (Bowen, 1976).

Bowen (1976) argued that it is grossly inaccurate to consider the family systems theory as synonymous with the general systems theory, although it is accurate to think of family systems theory as somehow fitting into the broad framework of the general systems theory. BFST separates itself from traditional literary psychoanalysis, which is distinctly more 'subjective' in its approach (Lippmann, 2020). Kerr (1981) argued that the family systems theory and associated therapy can be considered a logical step in development following the work of Sigmund Freud. Jakimowicz et al. (2021) indicated that a critique of Bowen theory was that fathers were barely mentioned in his early work. On the same hand, Lippmann (2020) concurred by stating that Bowen theory is not without its weaknesses, as there have been a series of critiques, who included Professor Carmen Knudson-Martin, who wrote a paper

critiquing FST as a paradigm that had been stretched too far, both as a representation of family dynamics and as a guide to clinical intervention. Other critics such as Pam (1993) stated that the BFST model provides a needed holistic approach but regards the ‘family’ as an abstraction in which teleology is inferred, responsibility diffused and individual dynamics obviated. In the late 1980s, this theoretical model was repeatedly criticised by feminist therapists as overvaluing personality characteristics associated with traditional masculine gender socialisation and undervaluing characteristics associated with feminine socialisation (Silverstein, 2005). Miller et al. (2004) stated that despite the prominent role that the Bowen theory has had in the evolution of marriage and family therapy, as well as its influence on current clinical practice, there is no empirical research supporting the effectiveness of the theory in clinical practice. As Bowen (1976) stated that people with better levels of differentiation marry spouses with equal levels of differentiation, another criticism was that there is no valid evidence that people marry someone who has the same level of differentiation (Miller et al., 2004; Lippmann, 2020). Bowen theory, like all theories of psychotherapy, failed to acknowledge the relation between the larger sociocultural context and both symptomatology and therapeutic change (Silverstein, 2005).

Miller et al. (2004) indicated that there is also little evidence that supports Bowen’s specific concept of sibling position, even though there is a large body of research literature demonstrating a general association between sibling position and personality characteristics. Bowen theory’s failure to address the inequalities of power between wives and husbands in both white and black families represents a serious limitation to its usefulness in helping families change (Silverstein, 2005). Hanlie (2017) argued that the intellectual system, which involves rational understanding and the ability to choose outcomes, is the major focus of Bowen’s differentiation process, where the feeling system is somewhat neglected. It is asserted that the Bowen theory focuses on being rational and objective in relation to emotional processes, which

relegates to a low priority the expression of emotions in therapy (Brown, 1999). Beck and Munson (1988) stated that Bowen's family systems theory has been increasingly influential on family therapists, even though it has been criticised as not being sufficiently "family-oriented" because it proposes to change an individual who, in turn, will affect family members. BFST consists of eight concepts which include differentiation of self, nuclear family emotional system, triangles, family projection process, emotional cut off, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position and societal regression (Jakimowicz et al., 2021).

2.4 CONCEPTS OF BOWEN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

Bowen theory consists of a system of eight interlocking concepts (Haefner, 2014; Brown, 1999). A concept about the nuclear family's emotional system and another about the family projection process had both been stated in Bowen's early descriptive papers (Bowen, 1976). From 1959 onwards, Bowen attempted to extend his theoretical orientation from a family concept of schizophrenia to a family theory that would encompass the full range of emotional illnesses (Kerr, 1981). Bowen (1976) indicated that the concept of the scale of differentiation of self was developed by the 1960s. The other concepts of the theory also had their roots in the 1950s (Kerr, 1981). Kerr (1981) further stated that the concept of triangles was started in 1957, then referred to as the 'inter-dependent triad'. The triangle's concept was sufficiently developed to be used in therapy by about 1961 (Bowen, 1976). The notion of a multigenerational process was part of a 1955 hypothesis about the development of schizophrenia, but it was not clarified until the 1959 to 1962 period when more families were available for study (Kerr, 1981). The sixth of the original concepts, sibling position, was poorly defined in the late 1950s, and it was not until the publication of Toman's (1961) book, *Family Constellations*, which orderly provided a structure to the idea (Bowen, 1976; Kerr, 1981). By 1963, these six interlocking concepts were sufficiently defined by Bowen to call them family systems theory (Kerr, 1981). In 1975, two additional concepts, emotional cut off and societal

regression, were added to the theory (Bowen, 1976). Papero (1983) stated that five of the concepts (triangles, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, scale of differentiation and multigenerational transmission process) were formulated directly by Bowen. Three of the theory's eight concepts apply to the overall characteristics of the family, whereas the other five focus on details within certain areas of the family (Bowen, 1976). The concept of sibling position is excluded from this discussion, as it is irrelevant to the current study. Herewith a discussion on seven of the eight concepts underpinning the BFST and their applicability to the current study.

2.4.1 Differentiation of self

The concept of differentiation of self defines people according to the degree of fusion or differentiation, between emotional and intellectual functioning (Bowen, 1976). Haefner (2014) stated that differentiation of self is the ability of individuals to function autonomously by making self-directed choices, yet remain emotionally connected to important relationships. In the interpersonal realm, differentiation refers to the ability to experience autonomy from others and intimacy with others (Peleg-Popko, 2002). Silverstein (2005) argued that Bowen's concept of differentiation of self is particularly well suited for helping women change because it advocates finding a balance between one's need for defining a unique self while remaining emotionally connected to the significant others. More differentiated spouses usually show less fusion, while less differentiated spouses experience more fusion, which leads to anxiety for couples (Bridge, 2019). Contrary to the general belief that women from absent-father homes are likely to loath men, many participants in a study by Makofane (2015) demonstrated maturity and understanding, which can be likened to good differentiation of self by not generalising their experiences to all men.

East et al. (2006) found that father absence appears to contribute significantly to life adversity factors, including maladaptive behaviour, poor academic achievement, low self-identity and risky behaviour. The mainstream literature on fatherhood indicates that boys growing up without father figures are more likely to experience emotional disturbances, including displaying aggression, violent behaviours and vulnerability to drug abuse (Langa, 2014). Varney-Wong (2019) stated that a child internalises abandonment by his/her father as inner abandonment by the self. Adolescents who are exposed to absent-father households may manifest different behavioural problems (Sylvester, 2010). In general, the negative effects of father absence on child-wellbeing and academic outcomes are well documented (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014). The effects of father absence on an individual depend on his/her level of differentiation of self. Similarly, Mabusela (2014) mentioned that it is important to remember that the existence of differences between groups of children growing up with and without fathers does not mean that every child growing up without a father has developmental problems or that all children whose fathers live at home develop appropriately. An individual who has achieved a relatively high level of differentiation of self can maintain a more or less equal balance of gratifying individuality and togetherness needs (Silverstein, 2005). The findings from a study by Peyper et al. (2015), which focused on the experiences of young adult women with emotionally absent fathers, showed a poor level of differentiation among the participants as they indicated that most of the participants mentioned that they struggled to trust other people, and they also reported feelings of worthlessness and uselessness. The concept of differentiation of self is relevant to the current study as Peyper et al. (2015) mentioned that participants doubted themselves regardless of good performance and positive feedback from others. A well-differentiated self, while acknowledging the importance of family and social groups, can withstand conflict, rejection and criticism and separate emotionally and intellectually from the family of origin, whereas the poorly-differentiated self requires

acceptance and approval of others for thinking, acting and saying (Haefner, 2014). The applicability of the ‘differentiation of self’ concept to the current study was also necessitated by the utterances of Bowen (1976) that well-differentiated people can cope better with life stresses as the findings of a study by Velasco et al. (2016) revealed that children with absent fathers made the best of the situation they found themselves in.

2.4.2 Triangle

Triangling is a process where a third person enters a dyadic relationship to bring stability to the system (Varney-Wong, 2019). Haefner (2014) stated that when tension between two people develops, anxiety can be relieved by bringing in a third person. A two-person system may be stable, as it is calm, but when anxiety increases, it immediately involves another most vulnerable person to become a triangle (Bowen, 1976). Patel and Mavungu (2016) cited conflict-ridden relationships, a desire for vengeance after the collapse of a relationship, resentment and a lack of proper communication as contributing factors leading to the exclusion or limited engagement of fathers in their children’s lives. Triangling can become problematic when a third party’s involvement distracts the members of a dyad from resolving their relationship impasse (Brown, 1999). An application of BFST provides an organised analysis of relationships and tools to improve communication between members, recognising that these triangles exist in various levels of dysfunction in all families (Haefner, 2014).

Mabelane et al. (2019) argued that children whose parents remained single were less likely to present with behavioural problems, as they experienced less parental conflict than children from two-parent families. Brown (1999) indicated that when one member of a relationship triangle departs or dies, another person can be drawn into the same role. When tensions are very high in families and available family triangles are exhausted, the family system triangles with people from outside the family such as police and social agencies (Bowen, 1976). Union

dissolution opens the options for parents to re-partner and remarry, thus potentially triggering additional changes in children's family composition and parenting experiences (Walper et al., 2015). In cases where the new partner or stepfather accepts the responsibility of caring for the child from a previous relationship after a divorce or separation, the biological father's access to this child may become conditional on the approval of the step-father (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Parents could triangulate a child to serve as a distraction from the conflict in their marital relationship (Heiden-Rootes et al., 2010). The concept of triangles is relevant to the current study, as Haefner (2014) indicated that the most common pattern is the father-mother-child triangle, with the tension being between the parents and the father moving to the outside position.

2.4.3 Emotional cut off

Bridge (2019) describes emotional cut off as the separation and isolation from the family of origin to escape from conflict. People who are emotionally cut off find intimacy profoundly threatening, thus, often, they tend to isolate themselves from others and their emotions, deny the importance of family and display an exaggerated façade of independence (Peleg-Popko, 2002). Bridge (2019) highlighted that when there is cut off with the past, it is likely to also have marital conflict, withdrawal and emotional cut off with the children. La Guardia et al. (2014) found that young women without fathers in the home lacked a certain sense of security in males, which was present when there was a strong father and daughter bond. Sekgale (2017) believed that children whose fathers are absent often experience emotional challenges because of their curiosity about who exactly their biological father is and how he might be behaving. Children often get curious about knowing who their fathers are, more especially when they reach the adolescent stage where everyone tends to start making sense of their families (Matlakala et al., 2019).

The study by Peyper et al. (2015) that focused on the experiences of young adult women with emotionally absent fathers found that participants seemed to have the desire to experience their father's affection and to hear from their fathers that they loved them, but, unfortunately, they did not experience or hear it. Research suggests that children with absent fathers do care about them, though they experience the loss (Nduna, 2014). Gyimah (2021) indicated that when fathers are separated from their children, they encounter a loss of role, anger, frustration, anxiety and depression. The degree of unresolved emotional attachment to the parents is equivalent to the degree of undifferentiation that must somehow be handled in the person's life in future generations (Bowen, 1976). An absent father who distances himself from the life of his child depicts the applicability of this concept to the study, as Papero (2014) stated that in the face of emotional intensity in the family, people distance themselves from one another.

2.4.4 Nuclear family emotional process

Bowen (1976) stated that this concept describes the patterns of emotional functioning in a family in a single generation. The concept of family emotional system, then, describes the emotional chain that occurs among people in families, reactions that tie the emotional functioning of one family member integrally to another (Kerr, 1981). Parental separation is very likely to affect a child's relation to the non-resident parent (Walper et al., 2015). Pitsoane and Gasa (2018) indicated that South Africa has many single-parent households, with an increase in the number and proportion of absent but living fathers. If a child is raised by a single mother with little to no contact from a father figure, the perspectives and attitudes of the mother in relation to the sexual behaviour could be influential to the development of both adolescent males and females (La Guardia et al., 2014). East et al. (2006) asserted that children in women-headed single-parent families may have varying degrees of contact with their fathers. Families whose relationships are cold and unsupportive (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018) are vulnerable to

emotional and physical health problems, including substance abuse problems and various emotional tribulations.

Magqamfana and Bazana (2020) argued that in the South African context, the absent father phenomenon through the lens of the nuclear family would appear to be biased and to ignore the role of the extended family in child raising. The burden carried by the maternal relatives in caring for children of absent fathers is a major concern (Makofane, 2015). Inherent in these conservative readings are idealised conceptions of fathers as omnipotent, as people who bring stability and security and enforce discipline in families without whom the families are conceived broken (Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020). From a natural systems perspective, the development of the child cannot be divorced from the emotional system within which the child's family is embedded (Palombi, 2016). The concept of the nuclear family emotional system is relevant to the current study, as Shaheen and Akhtar (2021) reported that the absence of a father from a family may disturb the family structure and put the adolescents in adverse situations. The findings by The General Household Survey (Stats SA, 2020) indicated that 41,8% of the households in South Africa were headed by women, which highlighted the dysfunctionality of some nuclear families, as most fathers are absent from their families. Therefore, the current study needed to include the concept of the nuclear family emotional system in order to understand how the absence of fathers from their nuclear families affected the children and other family members.

2.4.5 Family projection process

The family projection process describes the primary ways in which parents transfer their emotional problems to their children (Huang & Pryor, 2018). Alzoubi (2018) stated that the family projection process implies a social, physical or emotional impairment of a child in the mother-father-child triangle. The family projection process explains the process of emotional

impairment of one or more children (Bridge, 2019). Furthermore, Bridge (2019) indicated that in the beginning, projection is usually only towards one child. Bowen theory opens up the understanding of the role of the family projection process in impinging upon the functioning of the developing child (Palombi, 2016). During the family projection process, the children can thus be blamed and victimised by one parent for the difficulties in the family which actually originated from the parental dyad (Huang & Pryor, 2018). Brooks (2017) stated that family projection exists in all families to some degree and represents one way that anxiety is managed. The child who absorbs this projection is more vulnerable to compromised functioning (Huang & Pryor, 2018). The more the adults in the family projected their anxiety onto a child, the more anxiety that child absorbed (Brooks, 2017). The concept of the family projection process applied to this study in the sense that, in times of parental conflicts, when separating from the mothers, fathers also direct the conflict towards and cut their ties with their children. The conflict with the mother is also directed towards the children, and the father will want nothing to do with the children.

2.4.6 Multigenerational transmission process

The family projection process continues through multiple generations (Bowen, 1976). Fingerman and Bermann (2000) argued that the larger family system rekindles old emotional patterns, behaviours and roles, although individual family members may have developed other patterns with their spouses and children, co-workers or friends. Bowen discovered that the process by which individuals within a family develop a more robust sense of self occurs slowly and involves exploring how each is part of a multigenerational family system (Palombi, 2016). Given the high number of children that grow up without regular contact with their father figure in post-apartheid South Africa (Mavungu et al., 2013), it is likely that a high number of fatherless fathers may be a contributing factor to the fathers themselves becoming uninvolved fathers, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle. As argued by Perez (2016), fatherless children do

not want to create fatherless families, so they become obsessed with guiding their children's destinies so that those children do not go through anything as they did because they never had good role models and were never taught how to make good decisions, resulting in bad choices that ultimately lead them back to square one. On the contrary, a study by Langa (2014) found that it was evident that the lack of fathering experiences did not automatically lead to transgenerational transmission of poor or absent fathering. It clearly shows that the multigenerational transmission process depends on a person's level of differentiation of self, as the study by Langa (2014) further stated that many participants spoke about their fantasies to be different fathers as compared to their absent fathers. The concept of a multigenerational transmission process was relevant to the this study, as Khanyile (2019) alluded that the notion of fatherhood and masculinity is, in some cases, entrenched in past experiences with our fathers. Understanding the concept of a multigenerational transmission process was necessary for the this study to highlight how the phenomenon of absent fatherhood is transmitted from one generation to another.

2.4.7 Societal (emotional process) regression

Bowen (1976) identified a link between family and society that was sufficiently trustworthy for him to extend the basic theory about the family into the larger societal arena. Bowen believed that emotional problems in the family are similar to emotional problems in society (Bridge, 2019). In the 1960s, there was growing evidence that the emotional problems in society were similar to emotional problems in the family (Bowen, 1976). Hall (2013) highlighted that the emotional process in society is an abstraction that epitomises how families interact with each other within particular historical periods. Fatherhood is socially constructed, and paternal involvement changes over time (Mavungu et al., 2013). Lesch and Kelapile (2016) indicated that social pressures seem to construct and dictate the meaning of fatherhood, therefore limiting the potential role that fathers could play in their children's lives. In a highly

patriarchal societal context, men are perceived to be the main bearers of gendered beliefs and practices such as the notion that care is women's work (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Pitsoane and Gasas (2018) found that fathers who are uninvolved in adolescent boys' lives were denounced as exposing them to behavioural challenges that cripple the essence of their societal functioning. Richter et al. (2010) argued that contributing biologically to the conception of a child does not necessarily make a man into a father. In African communities, it is not only biological fathers who provide role models but also other male figures (Makhanya, 2016). Fatherhood refers not only to the role assumed by biological fathers but also to the social involvement of father figures of various kinds (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Chauke and Khunou (2014) advised that for the enhancement of societal wellbeing, the media needs to acknowledge different conceptions of fatherhood through a presentation of balanced stories of fatherhood and a focus on positive notions of fatherhood. The concept of societal emotional process was relevant to this study, as Matlakala et al. (2019) stated that African cultures see fathering as the responsibility of the community as a whole and not the sole responsibility of the biological father.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the Bowen Family Systems Theory and described how the theory related and applied to the study. BFST is based on the notion that members of the family do not function individually and in isolation but rather function as a system. Members of the family behave or function within the circle of the system that shapes their feelings, thoughts and functioning. The theory consists of eight interlocking concepts, and only seven concepts which were relevant to this study were outlined in detail in this chapter. At the core of Bowen's theory is the concept of differentiation of self, which stresses that a person's level of differentiation determines how he/she reacts to anxiety or pressure. The next chapter is the literature review

which discussed in detail other research studies which covered the same or related topic as this study.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provided a detailed discussion of related previous research regarding constructions of fatherhood, father involvement, absent fatherhood, perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fatherhood and the legislative framework. The concepts were discussed to give an overview in exploring the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding the absent fatherhood phenomenon.

3.2 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

3.2.1 White Paper on Families in South Africa

The White Paper on Families views the family as a key development imperative and seeks to mainstream family issues into government-wide and policy-making initiatives in order to foster positive family well-being and the overall socio-economic development in the country (DSD, 2013). Also, the White Paper on Families acknowledges that absent living fathers is another common and increasing phenomenon affecting families in contemporary South Africa. Strategic priority 1 (7) of the White Paper (DSD, 2013) encourages fathers' involvement in their children's upbringing, thus, it seeks to elaborate or revise current laws and social policies that restrict fathers from being involved in their children's lives and replace them with those that create an environment where fathers have the opportunity to care for, engage with and support their children and consider the introduction of paternity leave. Besides, Strategic priority 1 (7) of the White Paper (DSD, 2013) aims to use the formal education system and informal sources such as the media to construct and maintain social norms and positive attitudes regarding the roles of fathers in the lives of children, ensure more effective

enforcement of maintenance payments by absent fathers, warrant that fathers are treated equally by the courts in custody decisions, intensify creation of employment opportunities and encourage responsible co-parenting by both mothers and fathers. On promoting and strengthening responsible parenting, the White Paper (DSD, 2013) states that parents or caregivers will be encouraged to play their expected roles in the upbringing of their children. The White Paper (DSD, 2013) further states that where there is a case of parental breakdown or its absence, means will be sought of strengthening this area.

3.2.2 Children's Act 38 of 2005

Section 28 (1) (b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) states that every child has the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment. As stated in Section 20 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2005), the married biological father of a child has full parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child. The unmarried biological father of a child who does not have parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child acquires full parental responsibilities and rights upon satisfying the conditions set out in Section 21 of the Children's Act. Section 22 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 provides an opportunity for a biological father of a child who does not have parental responsibilities and rights to enter into parental responsibilities and rights agreement with the mother or any other person who has parental responsibilities and rights in respect of a child. Gyimah (2021) indicated that families with children need to agree during the divorce process on where the child lives, who will be the guardian, how will visitation rights be organised and child maintenance and support. In terms of Section 35 of the Children's Act, a person who contravenes the parenting plan agreement by refusing the co-holder of parental responsibilities and rights access to the child or also fails to notify another person of the changes in terms of residential address, is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year. However, Sekgale (2017) alluded that most

of the fathers who are absent because of the maternal families alienating them have little knowledge of this law, thus they remain powerless and never attempt to fight the injustice. In a study by Makhanya and Matthias (2017), none of the participants knew that they could either automatically acquire responsibilities and rights or obtain them through agreement with the mother or through the courts.

3.2.3 Maintenance Act 99 of 1998

Section 15 (3) (a) (i) of the maintenance Act 99 of 1998 (RSA, 1998) indicates that the duty of supporting a child is an obligation which the parents have incurred jointly. Makhanya and Matthias (2017) specified that all unmarried fathers, whether or not they have responsibilities and rights, are legally required to provide maintenance. When women resolve to not care about the father's absence, this may mean they stop pursuing him for maintenance and raise the child single-handedly, often on a limited income (Manyatshe & Nduna, 2014). In South Africa, the media and public discourse on child support and fatherhood tend to indiscriminately shame and criminalise fathers that face challenges with financial provisions for their children (Chauke & Khunou, 2014). Chauke and Khunou (2014) highlighted that in America, enforcement agencies have aggressively pursued non-resident parents who do not pay child support. Gyimah (2021) indicated that most fathers are dissatisfied with the divorce procedures, child custody and maintenance arrangements and the system has been blamed for being prejudiced in fatherhood and divorce debates. Sekgale (2017) argued that most fathers find themselves in awkward positions wherein the law enforces the payment of maintenance but disregards or pays less attention to the prevailing struggle for them to have access to their children. The Maintenance Act has contributed greatly to getting fathers to support their children financially, however, the Act still does not contribute to dealing with the major problem of father absence (Khanyile, 2019). Chauke and Khunou (2014) argued that the maintenance system downplays the emotional and psychosocial role played by fathers.

3.2.4 National Child Care and Protection Policy

The National Child Care and Protection Policy [NCCPP] (DSD, 2019) noted that fathers are absent from the lives of nearly half the children in the country. The NCCPP (DSD, 2019) indicated that parents, in terms of the governing legal instruments, are the primary duty-bearers responsible for the upbringing, development and protection of their children. The parental responsibilities and rights, as outlined in the NCCPP (DSD, 2019) include the duty to care for the child, the right to maintain contact with the child, the duty to act as guardian of the child and the duty to contribute to the maintenance of the child. The NCCPP (DSD, 2019) stipulates that where the biological mother is a child herself, her parents or guardian will have full parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child until the mother turns 18 years old. The surrogate mother, as per the NCCPP (DSD, 2019), has no parental responsibilities and rights. The NCCPP (DSD, 2019) further states that the child will have no claim for maintenance or succession against the surrogate mother, her husband or partner or any of their relatives. The NCCPP (DSD, 2019) encourages co-parenting. Family strengthening is defined in the NCCPP (DSD, 2019) as the deliberate process of providing families with opportunities, networks, relationship-building and protection to help meet their needs, especially in times of adversity.

3.3 CONSTRUCTIONS OF FATHERHOOD

Lesch and Kelapile (2016) indicated that social pressures seem to construct and dictate the meaning of fatherhood, therefore limiting the potential roles that fathers could play in their children's lives. Although there is much research on how youth are affected by the absence of their fathers, arguably, there is little known about how the absence of a father affects the father's perceptions of fatherhood (Hunter, 2018). The notion of fatherhood and masculinity is, in some cases, entrenched in past experiences with our fathers (Khanyile, 2019; Lesch & Kelapile, 2016). Salami and Okeke (2018) argued that the meaning of the term "fathering" rests heavily on the presence of a child in the family because a married man who is yet to have a

child cannot be called a father. On the contrary, a study by Makofane (2015), which considered the aspect of social fathering, indicated that participants whose grandfathers and maternal uncles fulfilled the father role did not miss the physical and emotional presence of their fathers. In African communities, it is not only biological fathers who provide role models but also other male figures (Makhanya, 2016).

Morrell et al. (2016) indicated that the definition of fathers, often understood as males responsible for impregnation, has widened to include men who are not the biological fathers but provide financial support, are present in the home and engage in childcare. Inherent in these conservative readings are idealised conceptions of fathers as omnipotent, as people who bring stability and security and enforce discipline in families without whom the families are conceived broken (Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020). Molongoana (2015) believes that fathers, more so black fathers, associate fatherhood with being able to provide financially for their families contrary to the western concept of fatherhood which considers emotional support as well. When fathers in a study by Lesch and Kelapile (2016) were asked about how they understood the meaning of fatherhood, financial responsibility for children featured most prominently in their responses. Madhavan et al. (2014) indicated that far less attention has been paid to how men reconfigure fathering roles after the dissolution of a relationship with their mothers. Despite not working, the majority of the men (Maxwell, 2018) referred to a provision in their conceptualisations of good fatherhood. Güder and Ata (2018) argued that fathers are fundamental figures in supporting every developmental aspect of their children. It is critical to foster alternative fatherhood constructions in South Africa that include and value other forms of paternal caring (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016).

Traditionally, fatherhood has been viewed in black South African cultures as a collective and not as an individual process (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016). As argued by Tau (2020), in African

ways of being, doing and knowing, fatherhood necessitated the significance of a male adult caring for the needs of the children. Makhanya (2016) indicated that father-child care, contact and involvement are affected by several factors, one of which is the cultural practice of damage payments. In terms of African culture, a man and his family acknowledge pregnancy by bringing a “down payment” to the girl’s family as a gesture of apology for the “damage” (making a girl pregnant) and to facilitate provisions for the child’s needs (Nduna, 2014). Sekgale (2017) stated that even if a man might have not fully married a woman but has at least sent delegates from his family and clan to represent him where he has impregnated a woman or had a baby, it is only then where two families know each other that he can exercise his fatherhood roles liberally. Lesch and Kelapile (2016) specified that, according to a Setswana culture and custom, unless the father of a child has paid damages to the mother’s family, the child belongs to the mother’s family and thus only has access to the ancestors of the mother’s side of the family. Yi (2019) stated that if a child is born out-of-wedlock, a man’s access to the child may be limited or denied until he pays “lobola”.

A study by Mabelane et al. (2019) concluded that for some participants, not knowing their father’s whereabouts and lack of contact with him were viewed as a cultural disadvantage because they believed that certain rituals have to be performed by members of the paternal family to prevent misfortune. In a patriarchal culture, a father’s identity is taken as a source of pride by the family, and its absence can lead to an identity crisis (Farooqi & Khan, 2021). Poor employment prospects limit men’s ability to pay the bride price and afford a marriage, without which there are cultural restrictions on a couple living together (Madhavan et al., 2014). Molongoana (2015) viewed the traditional requirement of paying damages as problematic, as fathers subjected to these practices are typically poor fathers. Negative constructions of fatherhood in the media messages are detrimental to positive ideas of fatherhood (Chauke & Khunou, 2014). Yi (2019) believed that fatherhood today seems to be a role in the transition,

from an older, traditional model of the hardworking but unavailable figure responsible for the family's welfare, to a father who is personally and emotionally involved in the day-to-day rearing of his child(ren).

3.4 FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Morrell et al. (2016) stated that there is a global recognition of the importance of the fatherhood role and of involving fathers in childcare. For fathers to make a meaningful impact on the lives of their children, they must maintain a consistent and positive presence (Gamboa & Julion, 2019). Furthermore, Morrell et al. (2016) argued that involvement is influenced by whether the father is physically present or has a continuous presence in the lives of his child(ren). The majority of fathers have long working hours that take them away from their families and unreliable transport, thus adding to the long hours away from home, and unequal pay at work from other races, thus hindering their involvement in parenting (Langa, 2016). Salami and Okeke (2018) claimed that race in South Africa also plays a significant role in how much fathers participate in their children's development. In a study by Magqamfana and Bazana (2020), participants expressed a need to be involved with their fathers and to want to learn from their fathers. About fatherhood, it is prudent that for positive influences on a child, a father takes part in their life (Nkurunziza, 2018). The father's relationship with the biological mother of his child is another critical factor in father involvement (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016; Hunter, 2018). Molongoana (2015) shared that maternal attitudes towards the father, as well as the quality of the co-parenting relationship, may also affect the degree of father involvement.

Reetsang (2020) stated that in South Africa, gauging father involvement has become particularly problematic owing to familial complexities and financial and cultural constructions. It is important to understand the role of the father's involvement with demographic factors such as age and gender differences and how these account for adolescents'

risky and self-harm behavioural problems (Idemudia et al., 2016). Madhavan et al. (2014) indicated that much of the research on father involvement, thus far, has been driven by a concern for the child and adolescent well-being, particularly in the context of “father absence”. Furthermore, Morrell et al. (2016) stated that in some countries where paternity leave and other proactive state policies are in force, father involvement is high. Freeks (2017) has shown that the involvement of the father helps in the formation and consolidation of the child’s general identity, including his/her sexual identity. It has been established that father involvement and attention positively affect the academic success of their children (Güder & Ata, 2018). All the participants in a study by Makhanya and Matthias (2017) expressed a desire to be involved in their children’s lives because of their life experiences of not having a good father figure.

3.5 ABSENT FATHERHOOD

The term ‘absent father’ refers to the physical and emotional absence of a biological father during the child’s childhood or adolescence due to parental relationship breakdown (Makofane, 2015). Mabusela (2014) stated that father absenteeism is due to several factors, namely, fathering out of wedlock, deserting and abandoning his child, divorce, domestic instability such as being physically present yet emotionally absent, work or social dislocations, namely, father residing in a different household as the rest of his family members and absence through death. Padi et al. (2014) indicated that a working definition of father absence includes a person who had never met their father due to either death or disappearance during the early stages of the child’s life and also those who know the father but may experience feelings of abandonment and an overwhelming sense of loss and grief. Father absence in South Africa manifests largely in three ways, namely, the father not engaging with the child, does not financially support the child or is partially but not fully present in the child’s life (Reetsang, 2020). It is concerning that there is an increase in absent fathers since the years of apartheid (Varney-Wong, 2019).

Sikweyiya et al. (2016) indicated that gender-based violence and absent fathers might be two epidemics that excessively affect women and children in South Africa.

Hunter (2018) believed that fatherlessness is more than whether a father shares the same address as his child; it is the lasting negative effects associated with his absence. There is more to being a father than being a financial provider; there is the emotional role and being a role model for the child (Langa, 2016). Perez (2016) argued that fatherless children do not want to create fatherless families, so they become obsessed with guiding their children's destinies so that those children do not go through anything as they did but because they never had good role models and were never taught how to make good decisions, they make bad choices that ultimately lead them back to square one. The burden carried by the maternal relatives in caring for children of absent fathers is a major concern (Makofane, 2015). Napora (2019) claimed that the absence of the father in the family provokes, in the mother, a stronger tendency to discipline the adolescent children and to raise her expectations. Padi et al. (2014) quantified that several researchers have written on father absence as a result of imprisonment and how this is experienced and socially constructed by the affected young people. Manyatshe and Nduna (2014) argued that gaps remain in addressing the issue of unknown and undisclosed fathers.

3.6 PERCEPTIONS OF ABSENT FATHERHOOD

In a highly patriarchal societal context, men are perceived to be the main bearers of gendered beliefs and practices such as the notion that care is women's work (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Salami and Okeke (2018) maintained that there is a significant composite contribution of socio-economic factors and fathers' perceptions of fatherhood to the challenges faced by children whose fathers are unable to participate in their socio-educational development. Furthermore, Salami and Okeke (2018) stated that the father's socio-economic status, coupled with their perceptions of a father's role, is capable of affecting the extent to which they meet their

responsibilities of provision, protection, guidance and career support. Lesch and Kelapile (2016) believed that in South Africa, little is known about fatherhood from the perspectives of unmarried men with restricted contact with their biological children. As indicated by Maxwell (2018), discourses of involved fatherhood, in particular, were deeply engrained in the participants' talk about what it meant to be a good father, especially around wanting to establish close and meaningful relationships with their children. Fathers perceived the children's mothers and also the mother's families as gatekeepers to them having contact with their children (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016). In a study by Reetsang (2020), adolescents have pointed out social and emotional development as factors to which a father should contribute. In a study by Makhanya (2016), the participants' views of fatherhood were consistent with the social construct of masculinity which views fathers as providers, role models and breadwinners. Patel and Mavungu (2016) stated that many fathers in their study voiced the perception that female partners and their families often only related to them as "ATMs" (Automatic Teller Machines).

3.7 CAUSES OF ABSENT FATHERHOOD

Payne (2019) indicated that many different factors are hindering fathers in fulfilling their fathering roles, especially within the South African family. The absence of a father from a child's life could be due to multiple reasons and each reason differently impacts a child (Farooqi & Khan, 2021). The most frequently mentioned causes of paternal absence are divorce and separation, death and career demands (Qureshi & Ahmad, 2014). Herbert and Princess (2017) argued that here in Africa, the causes of father absence are more or less related to those in the western world with a few more factors that point to the peculiarities of this continent. Hereunder is a discussion of the factors which contribute to absent fatherhood:

3.7.1 Divorce

Divorce was attributed as another reason for father absenteeism (Herbert & Princess, 2017). Bosch-Brits et al. (2018) indicated that the high divorce rate in South Africa leads to a larger number of care and contact disputes, which, in turn, leads to a higher occurrence of parent alienation in South Africa. Divorce is an unpleasant, stressful and painful experience for all involved but mainly for the children who may not fully understand what problems their parents may be going through (Oseko, 2018). Perez (2016) directed that some men consider divorce a complete severance where, in ending their marriages to their wives, they also abandon all emotional and financial responsibilities for their children and then believe that they have the right to create new lives. Similarly, Mabusela (2014) designated that participants who had children while they were married relinquished their roles as fathers after the divorce. In most of these divorce cases, women become the dominant custody of the children, and fathers are often granted visitation or rejected after divorce (Gyimah, 2021). Divorce has been shown to diminish a child's future competence in all areas of life, including family relationships, education, emotional well-being and future earning power (Anderson, 2014).

3.7.2 Inability to provide financially

Molongoana (2015) argued that in South Africa, the inability of fathers to provide financially is among the most common and significant reasons associated with father absence. The importance of being able to provide financially for children and families has become the defining point of fatherhood within most families in South Africa (Khanyile, 2019). The majority of men in a study by Yi (2019) defined their father's role in terms of their breadwinner responsibilities with minimal direct involvement in child rearing. The flaw in legitimising fatherhood only through signifying the provider role is that it marginalises men that are socioeconomically unable to provide (Chauke & Khunou, 2014). Sekgale (2017) stated that being a father is attached to being a breadwinner in most rural families where women do not

usually work. Some fathers are excluded by the child's mother or her family against their will when they are, or have become, unable to make any material or financial contribution to the child (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). In South Africa, unfortunately, the role of the father being a provider is highly valued (Langa, 2016). According to the unmarried fathers' accounts (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016), mothers and their families privileged the father's financial contribution above any other kind of involvement by the father, and they also viewed the father's financial contribution as a prerequisite for access to or contact with children. Maxwell (2018) indicated that the men's lack of work was conceptualised by some as a barrier to the enactment of the kind of good fatherhood they aspired to have. For some men, the inability to provide financially for children makes fathers feel that they are less of fathers (Khanyile, 2019). Chauke and Khunou (2014) showed that when a father is unable to financially provide for his child(ren), his parenting status and powers are relinquished. Herbert and Princess (2017) reported that most respondents expressed that they felt the void left by their fathers due to the financial strain that they experienced.

3.7.3 Maternal alienation

In a study by Gamboa and Julion (2019), fathers noted that their attempts to be positively involved with their children were often met with maternal, familial and societal constraints. Makhanya (2016) noted that maternal families negatively influenced father-child involvement by hindering fathers from visiting their children due to separation from the mothers and the father's failure to meet cultural requirements of damage payments. Lesch and Kelapile (2016) concluded that men often felt that the mother of their child withheld access to the child to control or punish the father. Maxwell (2018) argued that men's hostile relationships with ex-partners, on the other hand, were presented as a barrier to their demonstrating good fatherhood.

3.7.4 Migrant labour

Parental migration was seen to be a major contributor to the father absence (Herbert & Princess, 2017). Dating as far back as the period of colonisation up until the apartheid era, many black fathers were separated from their children due to migrant labour practices (Sekgale, 2017). The National Child Protection Policy [NCPP] (DSD, 2019) indicated that family structures and living conditions are a legacy of the divisive social and economic policies of apartheid which separated families, leaving women and children in under-resourced homelands, while men moved to cities as labour migrants with little contact with or involvement in their children's lives. The NCPP (DSD, 2019) further noted that many children live in families where they are separated from their biological parents. The historical context of families of the Black family system in South Africa was ruptured by colonisation and then by the migrant labour system of apartheid, resulting in many single female-headed households (Varney-Wong, 2019). Yi (2019) argued that the migrant labour system was one of the reasons for the disruption of Black family life.

3.7.5 Incarceration

In South Africa, incarceration is a significant issue that contributes to the absence of fathers (Molongoana, 2015). Londt et al. (2017) stated that when fathers are separated from their children through incarceration, the outcomes are generally negative. However, Londt et al. (2017) shared that the reality may reflect a different aspect, namely, whether the biological father lived with his child(ren) prior to his incarceration, or whether he was simply the biological father with his constructions of fatherhood. Incarceration has calamitous consequences for all family members, especially for children (Molongoane, 2015). Dickerson (2014) indicated that incarceration as a cause of fatherlessness is also more prevalent in African-American and Hispanic families. There has been an increasing interest in studying families where the father's absence occurs as a result of imprisonment (Molongoana, 2015).

The main findings of the study by Londt et al. (2017) revealed that incarcerated fathers had trouble maintaining their role as fathers, prior to, and after, incarceration. The incarcerated fathers struggled with being absent from the lives of their children (Londt et al., 2017).

3.7.6 Death

Death contributes to fatherlessness (Dickerson, 2014). Herbert and Princess (2017) found that death proved to be the most prevalent factor that led to the father absence. Morwe et al. (2015) alluded that natural causes such as premature deaths of fathers contribute to absent fatherhood. Conclusively determining the possible effects of parental death on children is thus difficult because the issue is multifaceted (Molongoana, 2015). In the literature, it is stated that the death of the father can have different effects depending on its time (Ucar, 2018). The results from a study by Dupraz and Ferrara (2019) showed a negative and persistent effect of paternal death on children's later life outcomes.

3.8 EXPERIENCES OF ABSENT FATHERHOOD

An unemployed father who is unable to provide for his family tends to feel emasculated and unable to fully assume the role of a father (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Most of the fathers in a study by Mabusela (2014) experienced emotional challenges or distress due to being absent from their children's lives. Although many of the participants (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016) blamed the mothers or mothers' families for their limited or lack of involvement in their children's lives, most of them articulated feelings of regret and guilt. Sekgale (2017) believed that children whose fathers are absent often experience emotional challenges because of their curiosity of about who exactly their biological father is and how he might be behaving. Mabelane et al. (2019) argued that children whose parents remained single were less likely to present with behavioural problems, as they experienced less parental conflict than children from two-parent families. Contrary to the general belief that women with absent fathers are

likely to loath men, many participants demonstrated maturity and understanding by not generalising their experiences to all men (Makofane, 2015).

A study by Peyper et al. (2015) found that participants seemed to have the desire to experience their father's affection and to hear from their fathers that they loved them, but, unfortunately, did not experience or hear it. Research suggests that children with absent and unknown fathers do care about them, though they experience the loss (Nduna, 2014). Varney-Wong (2019) stated that the experience of absence is often met with longing. Despite the lack of a positive fathering experience, many participants in a study by Langa (2014) revealed their desires to be good fathers in comparison with their absent biological fathers. Furthermore, Mabelane et al. (2019) stated that the fluidity and diversity that marked the participants' views in their interpretation of a family reveal complex and dynamic experiences of the roles of mothers and other family members. Most children who have experienced a parental union dissolution have contact with their fathers, either uninterrupted or intermittent, throughout their lives (Madhavan, et al., 2014).

3.9 CHALLENGES OF ABSENT FATHERHOOD

Many South African communities are facing the challenge of the father absence (Freeks, 2017; Chauke & Khunou, 2014). When fathers are separated from their children, they encounter loss of role, anger, frustration, anxiety and depression (Gyimah, 2021). Patel and Mavungu (2016) found that other consequences arising from being denied access to one's child included depression, alcoholism and an unproductive work life. Black fathers in post-apartheid South Africa face enormous challenges remaining involved in their children's lives as a result of very high levels of unemployment and union instability (Madhavan et al., 2014). In a study by Mabusela (2014), absent fathers were hurt and pained for not being able to exercise their roles as fathers, thus losing their identity as fathers. Even though young unmarried fathers face

challenges, such as unemployment and child maintenance payments, they still desired to be fully responsible for their children, both financially and emotionally (Makhanya, 2016).

Reetsang (2020) indicated that having an external locus of control orientation is just one of the behaviours that children with absent fathers experience with their families. Father absence is widely acknowledged as a key contributor to delinquency, leading to efforts to promote father involvement with youth to deter juvenile delinquency (Simmons et al., 2018). Payne (2019) specified that the implications for children living apart from their biological fathers, or having an uninvolved father or disengaged father-child interactions may be accompanied by a greater risk of adverse outcomes and detrimental effects such as risky behaviours, externalising problems, social problems and a lack in academic performance. The mainstream literature on fatherhood indicates that boys growing up without father figures are more likely to experience emotional disturbances, including displaying aggression, violent behaviour and vulnerability to drug abuse (Langa, 2014). Peyper et al. (2015) stated that most of the participants mentioned that as they could not even trust their fathers, they struggled to trust other people, and they also reported feelings of worthlessness and uselessness and mentioned that they doubted themselves regardless of good performance and positive feedback from others. A child internalises abandonment by his/her father as inner abandonment by the self (Varney-Wong, 2019). Mabusela (2014) argued that children usually carry the mark of their father's absence, suffering resentment and persistent feeling of deprivation.

A study by Sekgale (2017) reported that most of the participants were unemployed, thus the absence of the children's fathers often left a gap in the economic needs of the children. Nduna (2014) indicated that an undisclosed biological father identity deprives children of paternal ancestral protection and denies them their right to claim maintenance. Evidence from a few studies conducted in South Africa suggests that young people who grew up with absent fathers

tend to be treated differently in their maternal homes, or often suffer physical, sexual and emotional abuse perpetrated by significant people in their lives (Sikweyiya et al., 2016; Morwe et al., 2015). Findings from a study by Herbert and Princess (2017) revealed that father absence has a bearing on the educational performance and progress of children.

3.10 ADOLESCENCE AND ABSENT FATHERHOOD

Adolescence is a stage of human development in which the father's influence is critical (Iretor-Oscar et al., 2021). Furthermore, Iretor-Oscar et al. (2021) stated that adolescents have long been regarded as a group of people who are searching for who they are to find some form of identity and meaning in their lives. Adolescents are more likely to take risks and experiment when they are with peers than when they are alone (Blakemore, 2019). Yi (2019) found that most young children and adolescents grew up with little knowledge of their fathers as important figures in their lives. Similarly, Iretor-Oscar et al. (2021) indicated that adolescents face the challenge of living without a father or having no father-figure to look up to. The absence of a father from a family may disturb the family structure and puts the adolescents in adverse situations (Shaheen & Akhtar, 2021) and might negatively affect the well-being of adolescent children (Mushunje, 2020). Matlakala et al. (2019) indicated that adolescent children often get curious about knowing who their fathers are. Increased worry about parental divorce and a new family are reasonable preoccupations among adolescents recently separated from their fathers (Gobbi et al., 2015). Pitsoane and Gasa (2018) alluded that the fathers who are uninvolved in the adolescent child(ren)'s life/lives were denounced as exposing them to behavioural challenges that cripple the essence of their societal functioning. Father absence may have an impact on how adolescents feel and consequently behave (Mushunje, 2020). Living apart from adolescents tends to compromise with the father's role, which may result in a worse family function, which, in turn, leads to externalising-internalising problems (Shaheen & Akhtar, 2021). Adolescent boys who grew up in families without fathers were cited as facing several

behavioural challenges, as they lack a strong male figure to emulate (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018). Gillette and Gudmunson (2014) found that girls who experienced their father absence at any time during their childhood had lower educational experiences as adolescents.

An uninvolved parenting style has been found to have the most negative effects on adolescent outcomes when compared to other parenting styles (Hoskins, 2014). Markowitz and Ryan (2016) pointed out that many studies have identified links between the father absence from the home and socioemotional problems in adolescence. Adolescents from single-parent homes are more likely to be sexually active than their dual-parent peers (Webster et al., 2014). A study by Gobbi et al. (2015) found that compared with adolescents living with both parents, those separated from their fathers reported higher levels of depressive symptoms and family-related stress four to six months post separation. Interestingly, a study by Markowitz and Ryan (2016) revealed that non-resident fatherhood was not associated with depressive symptoms in adolescence within families and that only late father departure was associated with higher levels of delinquency. Londt et al. (2017) found that the sudden separation of father and adolescent child was a difficult and serious experience. Mothers may take on new roles of monitoring and disciplining adolescent children after the father leaves, and these adjustments may cause tension (Gobbi et al., 2015). La Guardia et al. (2014) stated that school counsellors are ideally positioned to offer support groups for adolescents from father-absent homes regarding relationship issues.

3.11 CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it appears that fatherhood is socially constructed through the father's ability to provide materialistic support to a child and not much is emphasised on a father's engagement with the child. The phenomenon of absent fatherhood continues to be a major problem affecting many communities. Divorce, the father's inability to provide

financially and maternal alienation appear to be among the major causes of absent fatherhood. Children whose fathers are involved in their lives enjoy great benefits than those whose fathers are uninvolved in their lives. Whereas several policies and legislations have been developed to promote support of children and co-parenting, it appears that many fathers are unaware of such policies and legislations which aim at empowering them to be involved in their children's lives.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an in-depth review of the literature related to the current study topic. This chapter provided a detailed discussion of the methodology used to conduct the study to achieve the aims and objectives as outlined in Chapter One. A discussion is provided on the research approach and design, population and sampling, as well as the research setting. This chapter further provided a discussion of the data collection and analysis procedures, as well as the pilot study which was conducted before the main study.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question for this study was: *What are the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood?*

4.3 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

4.3.1 Aim

This study aimed to explore the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood.

4.3.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- Explore the perceptions of absent fathers and adolescents on absent fatherhood.
- Explore factors that lead fathers to be absent from their children's lives.
- Explore the experiences and challenges faced by adolescent children with absent fathers.

4.4 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

The study used a qualitative approach which Lune and Berg (2017) refer to as the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things. Qualitative approach allowed the researcher to identify issues from the perspectives of the study participants and understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to behaviour, events or objects (Hennink et al., 2020). The qualitative researcher is concerned with understanding rather than explanation, with naturalistic observation rather than controlled measurement and with the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider as opposed to that of an outsider predominant in the quantitative paradigm (De Vos et al., 2011).

The study used an exploratory research design which Neuman (2011) refers to as research whose primary purpose is to examine a little-understood issue or phenomenon and to develop preliminary ideas about it and move towards a refined research question. On the other hand, Reiter (2017) indicates that exploratory research seeks to provide new explanations that have been previously overlooked, and it can do so through the active involvement of the researcher in the process of amplifying his/her conceptual tools to allow him/her to raise new questions and provide new explanations of a given reality from a new angle. The choice for an exploratory research design was informed by an argument by Patel and Mavungu (2016) that limited research has been conducted on how men perceive father absence.

4.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.5.1 Research setting

Given (2008) describes a research setting as the physical, social and cultural site in which the researcher conducts the study and where data are collected. Observing a study setting before the start of data collection allows investigators to premeditate any practical challenges inherent

in the organisation, structure or layout of the study setting (Majid, 2018). The study was conducted in Botlokwa, in the Molemole Local Municipality, Capricorn District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. Botlokwa is 60 km north of Polokwane city along the N1 road and is rural with an estimated population of about 30 000 individuals, with the majority being young people (Morifi, 2012). Molemole has significant potential in terms of tourism, due to its rich heritage and cultural resources and its location advantage (the N1 links Molemole to Zimbabwe) (Rapholo, 2018). The 2021/2022 Integrated Development Plan (IDP) for Molemole Local Municipality (2021) indicates that 55% of households in Molemole are headed by females. This implies that more than half of the households in Molemole are without fathers as they are headed by females, therefore, it was necessary for it to be considered as the location of the study to understand its high rate of absent fatherhood.

4.5.2 Population and sampling

Neuman (2011) defines a population as the abstract idea of a large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample and to which results from a sample are generalised. The population for a study is that group about whom we want to be able to draw conclusions (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). The population for this study comprised of absent fathers who were uninvolved in their children's lives and adolescent children whose fathers were uninvolved in their lives.

A sample is a small set of cases a researcher selects from a large pool and generalises to the population (Neuman, 2011). Absent fathers were sourced through the use of snowball sampling where the existing study subjects recruit future subjects among their acquaintances (Naderifar et al., 2017). Snowball sampling is often used because of the sensitivity of the topic (Browne, 2005), and the reason for applying it in this study was because fatherlessness is a sensitive topic (Brown, 2018; Labuschagne, 2023). Therefore, it was very helpful in this study for absent

fathers to be recruited through snowball sampling by other absent fathers with whom they shared common characteristics and experiences. Two absent fathers who met the inclusion criteria were approached, and the study information sheet was shared with them to obtain their consent to participate in the study. The two participants who met the inclusion criteria were then asked to share the information sheet, consent forms and the researcher's contact details with other participants who met the inclusion criteria. Adolescent children were sourced through the use of the purposive sampling method which Lune and Berg (2017) describe as the researcher using their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this population. The inclusion criterion for adolescents was telephonically discussed with the Drop-In Centre management who then purposefully identified and arranged a meeting with the mothers/guardians of adolescents who met the inclusion criteria for the researcher to discuss the study information sheet with them and to obtain their consent. A drop-in centre is a community-based facility providing basic services aimed at meeting the emotional, physical and social development needs of vulnerable children (DSD, 2014). Mothers/guardians who agreed with their adolescents forming part of the study were asked to share the study information sheet with their children for the adolescents to be able to sign assent forms being aware of the aim and objectives of the study. The reason for purposive sampling was to match the sample with the aim and objectives of the research, thus improving the rigour of the study and the trustworthiness of the data and results (Campbell et al., 2020).

The study included eight adolescents between 10 and 19 years (WHO, 2015) whose fathers were not involved in their lives and eight biological fathers who were either emotionally, physically or financially absent from their children's lives more than 12 months. The study excluded absent fathers who had been absent from their children's lives for less than 12 months. Adoptive fathers, step fathers and social fathers were also excluded from the study. Adolescents whose biological fathers were absent from their lives for less than 12 months were excluded

from the study . Ten absent fathers and ten adolescents were recruited to participate in the study. However, after conducting semi-structured interviews with eight absent fathers and eight adolescents, the interviews were ceased after no new codes were generated, suggesting data saturation (Majid, 2018). Data saturation was reached when there was enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain new information was attained, when further coding was no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015) and/ no new themes were emerging (Johnson et al., 2020).

4.5.3 Pilot study

Walliman (2006) describes a pilot study as a pre-test of an interview guide or other type of survey on a small number of cases to test the procedures and quality of responses. Two absent fathers and two adolescents whose fathers were uninvolved in their lives were purposively sampled to participate in the pilot study. The study information sheet was outlined to them and they consented to participate in the pilot study by signing consent and assent forms. The pilot study was conducted prior to the main study with a few respondents possessing the same characteristics as those of the main investigation to ascertain certain trends (De Vos et al., 2011). The aim of pilot testing (Kallio et al., 2016) was to confirm the coverage and relevance of the content formulated and the preliminary guide and to identify the possible need to reformulate questions and test their implementation of it. The pilot study provided an opportunity to make adjustments and revisions to the main study (Kim, 2010). The pilot study revealed that both interview guides (Appendices G, H) contained repeated questions. After the pilot study, question two of both interview guides was removed as it mirrored the first question. The pilot study further revealed that questions seven and eight of an interview guide with absent fathers (Appendix G) were alike. As a result, question eight with absent fathers was removed from the interview guide. The pilot study helped clarify questions that were unclear to the

respondents. The strategy of asking questions was revised to include more examples so that the questions could be clear to the participants.

4.5.4 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, which make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee, plus the interviewer has a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself (Leavy, 2020). An interview schedule, a set of questions read to the respondent by an interviewer, who also records responses (Neuman, 2011), was used as a tool for data collection. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the management of the Drop-In Centres (DICs) in the Botlokwa area. After the permission to conduct the study was granted, a meeting with adolescent children's mothers/guardians was arranged at the Drop-In Centres where the study information sheet (Appendix B) was outlined to prepare participants to form part in the study. Mothers/guardians who agreed with their children forming part of the study signed consent forms (Appendix E) whereas the adolescents had to sign assent forms (Appendix F). Two sets of interview schedules were developed: absent fathers (Appendix G) and adolescents (Appendix H). The interviews with the adolescents were conducted at the Drop-In Centres which complied with COVID-19 regulations. Absent fathers were sourced through snowball sampling, and the study information sheet (Appendix A) was shared with them, and they signed their consent to participate in the study (Appendix D). A venue in the community was utilised to do data collection with the absent fathers. Interviews were conducted in Sepedi and English which are the dominant languages used in the study area.

4.5.4.1 Preparation of participants

During the preparation phase, the researcher planned and made decisions about the best ways to contact potential interviewees, obtain informed consent, arrange interview times and locations convenient for both participant and researcher and test the recording equipment (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The researcher explained the study inclusion criteria to the management of Drop-In Centres who assisted in purposively selecting the participants, and the meetings with the adolescent participants' parents/guardians were held where the researcher requested permission for their adolescents to participate in the study. Parents/guardians who agreed with their children forming part of the study were asked to sign consent forms (Appendix E), and they were asked to share the study information sheet (Appendix C) with their children so that they could sign assent forms (Appendix F) being fully aware of the aim and objectives of the study. It was highlighted during the meetings with the participants that their participation in the study was voluntary; they could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty and their identity remained anonymous.

Two absent fathers who met the inclusion criteria were approached, and the study information sheet (Appendix A) was shared with them to obtain their consent to participate in the study. They were asked to share the information sheet, consent forms and the researcher's contact details with other participants who met the inclusion criteria. Taking into consideration the Protection of Personal Information Act no.4 of 2013 (RSA, 2013), absent fathers who met the inclusion criteria and were interested in the study were asked to contact the researcher telephonically for further clarification on the aims and objectives of the study and also to sign consent forms. Informed consent ensures the full knowledge and cooperation of subjects, while also resolving, or at least relieving, any possible tension, aggression, resistance or insecurities in the subjects. Interviews were audio-recorded to retain a full un-interpreted record of what was said (Walliman, 2006). During individual interview sessions, permission to audio-record

the interview was sought from the participants. Participants were made aware that they were at liberty to withdraw from the investigation at any time (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

4.5.4.2 Individual interview sessions

During the data collection process, all COVID-19 protocols were adhered to by providing and ensuring that all participants had mask, sanitiser was provided before and after the interview, social distancing of 1.5 to 2 metres apart and only one participant and the researcher were allowed into the room for the interview at a time. During the interview, the researcher and the participant sat 1.5 to 2 metres apart, and interview times were staggered to minimise contact and interaction with participants. Voluntary counseling sessions were arranged with Social Workers and Psychologists for the participants who required counselling to further minimise the risk. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in English and Sepedi depending on the participant's preference, as DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) stated that questions should use familiar language, short and jargon-free. Interviews with the adolescents were conducted at their Drop-In Centres. That was done to allow the participants to feel comfortable expressing themselves freely while being in their natural environment. A venue in the community was utilised for data collection with the absent fathers. As per the interviews of the adolescents, COVID-19 regulations were also adhered to with the absent fathers wearing masks. For those who did not have one, a mask was provided, hands were sanitised before and after the interview, and the researcher and the participants sat 1.5 to 2 metres apart during the interview. Only the researcher and one participant were allowed into the room for the interview and were socially distanced (1.5 to 2 metres apart). Interviews were staggered to minimise contact and interaction with participants. Interview sessions lasted about 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the participants. Interviews took place until data saturation was reached. Data saturation is reached when no new analytical information arises

anymore, and the study provides maximum information on the phenomenon (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

4.5.4.3 Field notes

Field notes are a written account of the things the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks about in the course of interviewing (De Vos et al., 2011), and they were recorded. Field notes were completed immediately following every excursion into the field (Lune & Berg, 2017). Recording events as they happen or shortly afterwards ensure that details, and indeed the entire event, are not lost to memory (Mulhall, 2003). Field notes were recorded as closely as possible in time to when events were observed (Mulhall, 2003) to help the researcher not to forget the important details, behaviours that took place. Field notes contained a comprehensive account of the respondents themselves, the events taking place, the actual discussion and communication and the observer's attitudes, perceptions and feelings (De Vos et al., 2011). Detailed field notes about the overall study setting assisted in a robust understanding of the participants' lives, contextualising their responses to the phenomenon of interest (Phillipi & Lauderdale, 2018). Also, field notes assisted the researcher to analyse data, as they (data) contained the researcher's observations and participants' reactions during individual interview sessions.

4.5.4.4 Data analysis

The study used thematic data analysis which Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Thematic analysis can be used to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experiences, views and perspectives and behaviour and practices; experiential research seeks to understand what participants think, feel and do (Braun & Clarke, 2017). The following steps of thematic data analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) were manually applied to the study:

- Familiarisation with the data took place when the researcher was immersed in the data to the extent that he was familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. Developing more insight into the data occurred during the familiarisation phase. The interviews and field notes were transcribed where after they were read repeatedly to note down the initial codes.
- Initial codes were generated by working systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item and identifying interesting aspects in the data items that could form the basis for repeated patterns (themes) across the data set.
- Themes were created by sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes.
- Themes were reviewed and the researcher checked whether to combine, separate or discard the initial themes.
- Themes were defined and named by identifying the essence of what each theme was about and determined what aspect of the data each theme captured.

Finally, the report was produced by providing a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data revealed.

4.5.4.5 Self-reflexivity

Probst (2015) stated that reflexivity is an important tool that enables the researcher to stay engaged in ethical self-awareness throughout the research process. The researcher ensured reflexivity by turning off the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognise and take responsibility for his situatedness within the research and the effect it could have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and their (data) interpretation (Berger, 2013). Reiter (2017) emphasises that we need to include ourselves in

our investigation and introduce a strong self-reflexivity into the core of the research process. During interviewing, being self-reflective helped the researcher to identify questions and content that he tended to emphasise or shy away from and to become aware of his reactions to interviews, thoughts, emotions and triggers (Berger, 2013). Through sharing our experiences and debating the decisions we made, we offer insights into reflexivity in qualitative research which will be of value to others (Reid et al., 2018). Having the experience of growing up with an absent father, the researcher remained constantly alert to avoid projecting his experience and using it as the lens to view and understand the participants' experience (Berger, 2013).

4.5.4.6 Data verification and trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the following constructs, as outlined by Lincoln and Cuba (1999), were applied:

- **Credibility/Authenticity** is the alternative to internal validity in which the goal is to demonstrate that the enquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject has been accurately identified and described (De Vos et al., 2011). Lincoln and Cuba (1999) indicate that strategies for increasing the credibility of qualitative research include prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, triangulation of different methods, peer debriefing, member checks and formalised qualitative methods, such as grounded theory and analytic induction. The interviews with the participants were audio-recorded, and field notes were compiled to ensure that the study accurately captured and reflected the data provided by the participants. The results of the study were discussed with the participants for approval and clarification. Constant debriefing sessions between the researcher and the supervisor were also ensured to increase the credibility of the study. Such collaborative sessions were used by the researcher to discuss alternative approaches with the supervisor who drew attention to the flaws in the course of action (Shenton, 2004). The study also applied the process of triangulation

by asking different questions, seeking different sources (absent fathers and adolescents) and using different methods (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

- **Transferability** is the alternative to external validity which involves transferring the study findings from a specific situation or case to another (De Vos et al., 2011). Babbie and Mouton (2001) state that transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied in another context or with other respondents. The study ensured transferability by collecting sufficiently detailed descriptions of data in context and reporting them with sufficient detail and precision (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). A detailed description of the phenomenon under scrutiny was an important provision for promoting credibility, as it helped to convey the actual situations that have been investigated and, to an extent, the contexts that surround them (Shenton, 2004). Purposive sampling was applied to select the locations and informants that differ from one another (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Transferability was further ensured by referring to the theoretical framework to show how data collection and analysis were guided by the concepts and models. Data from different sources were also used to corroborate, elaborate or illuminate the research in question.
- **Dependability** concerns the researcher's attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for the study, as well as changes in the design created by an increasingly refined understanding of the setting (Lincoln & Cuba, 1999). The dependability of the study was ensured by clearly describing the research design, data collection process and how the implementation process was to be conducted. To address the dependability issue, the processes within the study were reported in detail, thereby enabling future researchers to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results (Shenton, 2004). Participants from each category (absent fathers and adolescents) were interviewed with a similar interview guide (Appendix G and Appendix H).

- **Confirmability** captures the traditional concept of objectivity (De Vos et al., 2011). It is also about the need to ask whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another (Lincoln & Cuba, 1999). The study ensured that the findings were reflected, as they were without biases by providing quotes from the participants that depicted each emerging theme (Cope, 2014). The researcher further ensured confirmability through self-reflexivity by being unbiased towards the participants' views. The study ensured confirmability by making sure that the findings were the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Neuman (2011) further indicates that ethical issues are the concerns, dilemmas and conflicts that arise over the proper way to conduct research. The following ethical principles were applied to the study:

4.6.1 Permission to conduct the study

Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from the University of the Western Cape Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and also from the management of Drop-In Centres in Botlokwa for using their institutions as the research sites.

4.6.2 Informed consent

Participants were asked to sign consent and assent forms (Appendices B, C, D) upon getting detailed information about the aim and objectives of the study, as De Vos (2011) indicates that informed consent ensures the full knowledge and cooperation of subjects, while also resolving, or at least relieving, any possible tension, aggression, resistance or insecurities in the subjects. In addition to adolescents signing assent forms (Appendix F), their mothers/guardians had to

sign consent forms (Appendix E), as Babbie and Mouton (2001) state that the person involved in research should have the legal capacity to give consent.

4.6.3 Voluntary participation

The major tenet of research ethics is that participation must be voluntary, and no one should be forced to participate (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Voluntary participation was ensured by only selecting participants based on their willingness and availability to participate in the study. Participants were made aware that they were at liberty to withdraw from the investigation at any time (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) without any penalty.

4.6.4 Confidentiality and the right to anonymity

Participants were ensured of their right to privacy which implies the element of privacy and their right to confidentiality which indicates the handling of information in a confidential manner (De Vos et al., 2011). Privacy and confidentiality are important ethical issues in any research, especially in relation to the power imbalance between children and adults (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). Lane et al. (2019) furthermore stated that children may be more vulnerable in interactions with adults resulting in unequal power dynamics. To address the ethical issues of power imbalances, the adolescent participants were guaranteed their right to privacy which implied that the interviews were conducted in the absence of their parents and drop-in centre personnel. The adolescents were further encouraged to feel free to share their perceptions and that they were reminded that they can quit whenever they feel uncomfortable to continue with the interviews. The use of language during the interviews was simplified for the adolescent to understand the questions as Lane et al. (2019) argued that researchers should carefully reflect on the language they use to talk about research with children and the process they use to construct representations of children in research. Permission to audio-record the interviews was requested, and after the interviews, the audio-recordings were immediately copied onto the

researcher's computer after they were deleted from the audio-recording device. The audio-recorded interviews were kept in a password-protected folder which is known to the researcher only. To further ensure the confidentiality of participants, the transcriptions were identified with codes and stored in a lockable filing cabinet personal to the researcher. The participants were ensured that when compiling the research report, their information would not be divulged and that only codes would be used to interpret their responses.

4.6.5 No harm to participants

It is important to emphasise that the issue of not harming people is of particular concern when we investigate certain more “vulnerable” groups in society (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Neuman (2011) alluded that a core ethical principle is that researchers should never create unnecessary stress in participants. Because subjects can be harmed psychologically in the course of a study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001), the researcher looked for the subtlest dangers and guarded against them. The risk was furthermore minimised by arranging voluntary counseling sessions with Social Workers and Psychologists for the participants who required counselling.

4.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A limitation of a study design or instrument is the systematic bias that the researcher did not or could not control and which could inappropriately affect the results (Prince & Murnan, 2004).

This study encountered the following limitations:

- The study initially planned to involve five DICs from Botlokwa, and only three of responded positively to form part of the study. The other two did not respond.
- As the process of recruiting adolescents was handled by the DIC managers, during an interview with one adolescent, it was realised that the father was present, thus the interview was cancelled as the criterion of inclusion excluded adolescents whose fathers were present and taking care of them.

- The population of this study was largely limited by race as only black South African fathers and adolescents constituted the sample population, therefore, the findings cannot be generalisable.
- All adolescents had never met or had a relationship with their fathers, It therefore, limited the perspective and experiences of adolescents who has lost contact or had an estranged relationship with fathers that were present at some stage of their lives.
- The study initially planned to include ten absent fathers and ten adolescents. However, as a result of data saturation, only eight absent fathers and eight adolescents were interviewed.

4.8 CONCLUSION

The chapter provided a detailed discussion of the research methodology. It also outlined how the actual research process unfolded, including the pilot study. The research question, aim and objectives, research approach and design and ethical considerations were also discussed. The next chapter discussed the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to explore the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding the absent fatherhood phenomenon. The study achieved its objective by using a qualitative methodology approach. Data were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, and the process of data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps of thematic data analysis.

The study achieved its aim, as guided by the following key objectives:

- To explore the perceptions of absent fathers and adolescents on absent fatherhood.
- To explore factors that lead fathers to be absent from their children's lives.
- To explore the experiences and challenges faced by adolescent children with absent fathers.

Table 5.1 presents the demographic profiles of the study participants. During the analysis of data collected from the absent fathers and adolescents, five major themes with subsequent sub-themes emerged.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF PARTICIPANTS

The study involved sixteen participants of which eight participants represented absent fathers, and the other eight participants comprised of adolescent children whose fathers were uninvolved in their lives.

Table 5.1 Demographic data of the absent fathers

	Age	Language	Area of residence	Employment status	Duration of separation	Number of children separated from
P1	45	Sepedi	Sekhwama	Employed	19 years	3
P2	42	Sepedi	Dipatene	Unemployed	6 years	1
P3	39	Sepedi	Nyakelane	Employed	13 years	2
P4	23	Sepedi	Springs	Unemployed	3 years	1
P5	30	Tshivenda	Ga-Polatla	Employed	2 years	1
P6	38	Sepedi	Ga-Polatla	Unemployed	7 years	2
P7	35	Sepedi	Sekhokho	Unemployed	5 years	2
P8	35	Sepedi	Mangata	Unemployed	6 years	1

The study consisted of absent fathers who were between the ages of 23 and 45. Still, in terms of age, the absent fathers' sample was dominated by those who were in their 30s. Seven of the absent fathers who participated in the study spoke Sepedi, and one spoke Tshivenda. The absent father who spoke Tshivenda also understood Sepedi, which was used to conduct the interview. Sepedi is one of South Africa's official languages spoken mostly in the Limpopo province (Manamela, 2019). The absent father participants who took part in the study were residents from various sections of the Botlokwa area, which Morifi (2012) described as an area situated 60 km north of Polokwane city along the N1 road. Two absent fathers were from Ga-Polatla; one from Sekhwama; one from Dipatene; one from Nyakelane; one from Springs; one from Sekhokho and one from the Mangata area. The majority (five) of the absent fathers were unemployed. In terms of the number of children separated from their fathers, the number ranged from one to three, with the majority being those who were separated from their three children. The children whom the absent fathers were separated from were between the ages of 2 to 19 years old, and none of the absent fathers ever resided with their children. Therefore, fathers were absent for the duration of their children's lives.

Table 5.2 Demographic data of the adolescents

	Age	Gender	Language	Name of DIC	School grade	Duration of separation from the father
P9	14	Female	Sepedi	Hope	7	14 years
P10	12	Male	Sepedi	Hope	5	12 years
P11	13	Female	Sepedi	Maphosa	6	13 years
P12	13	Female	Sepedi	Maphosa	6	13 years
P13	15	Female	Sepedi	Maphosa	6	15 years
P14	10	Male	Sepedi	Bakgalaka	5	10 years
P15	12	Male	Sepedi	Bakgalaka	7	12 years
P16	15	Female	Sepedi	Bakgalaka	10	15 years

The adolescent participants of this study were between the ages of 10 to 15 years old. Five female and three male adolescents participated in the study. In terms of language, all the adolescent participants spoke Sepedi. The adolescent participants were sourced from three Drop-In Centres from various sections of the Botlokwa area. Care and support services are provided in Drop-in Centres (DIC's) from several sections within Botlokwa. Two participants were from Hope DIC, three were from Maphosa DIC, and the other three were from Bakgalaka DIC. The adolescents who took part in the study were in grades 5 to 10 respectively, with the majority of them being in grade 6. Seven of the adolescents were still at the primary school level, whereas the other one was already in high school. All the adolescents indicated that they did not know their fathers. This suggested that they had been separated from their fathers for the duration of their existence, ranging from ten to fifteen years.

5.3 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Data collected from the absent fathers and the adolescent participants through semi-structured interviews were analysed and categorised into major themes and sub-themes. Five major themes emerged during the analysis of data collected from the absent fathers, and the adolescents: perceived causes of absent fatherhood, constructions of fatherhood, factors influencing fathers' absence, adolescents' experiences of absent fatherhood and challenges

faced by adolescents with absent fathers. The findings were discussed and presented as supported by the excerpts from the transcribed data collected from absent fathers and adolescents, relevant literature and the theoretical framework underpinning this study to support and/or negate the emerged themes and the study findings. Table 5.3 presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the collected data.

Table 5.3 Themes and sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Theme 1: Perceived causes of absent fatherhood	Sub-theme 1.1: Parental separation
	Sub-theme 1.2: Father abandonment
Theme 2: Constructions of fatherhood	Sub-theme 2.1: Perceptions of fathers as providers
	Sub-theme 2.2: Fathers as disciplinarians and protectors
	Sub-theme 2.3: Fathers as role models
	Sub-theme 2.4: Absent fathers' perceptions of their absence
Theme 3: Factors influencing fathers' absence	Sub-theme 3.1: Maternal alienation/gatekeeping
	Sub-theme 3.2: Fathers' choice of non-involvement
	Sub-theme 3.3: Unemployment
Theme 4: Adolescents' experiences of absent fatherhood	Sub-theme 4.1: Desire for a father's presence
	Sub-theme 4.2: Adolescents' experiences of social fatherhood
	Sub-theme 4.3: Resilience of adolescents with absent fathers
Theme 5: Challenges faced by adolescents with absent fathers	Sub-theme 5.1: Painful experience of having an absent father
	Sub-theme 5.2: Psychological impact of absent fathers on adolescents
	Sub-theme 5.3: Financial deprivation

5.3.1 Theme 1: Perceived causes of absent fatherhood

Khanyile (2019) indicated that many factors contribute to the issue of absent fathers in South Africa. Velasco et al. (2016) equally reported that several factors are contributing to fatherlessness, since nearly half of all children experience the absence of their fathers during

their childhood years. Qureshi and Ahmad (2014) listed divorce and parental separation, death and career demands as the most frequently mentioned causes of paternal absence. Fatherlessness can happen in the form of divorce or separation, death, desertion, illegitimacy, work demands and state interventions (Mbhele, 2018). Absent fathers and adolescents in the current study pointed out that parental separation, father abandonment, maternal gatekeeping/alienation and unemployment are factors that contribute to absent fatherhood. This theme was discussed in detail and supported by two sub-themes: parental separation and father abandonment.

5.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Parental separation

Waldron et al. (2015) defined parental separation as a change in marital and/or cohabitation status for reasons of relationship dissolution. Parental separation has become a more common experience in most countries (Kreidl et al., 2017). Makofaane (2015) stated that definitions for the concept of “father absence” stem from the fact that some parents are never married or did not cohabit, while others are in parental separation or divorced. In a Tanzanian study, Lawson et al. (2016) indicated that divorce and parental separation are common and are typically associated with the physical separation of fathers and children. Separations such as divorce, incarceration or migration have been linked with negative effects on the entire family system (Stent, 2014). Some of the absent fathers who participated in this study highlighted parental separation as one of their perceived causes of being absent fathers.

“In most cases, you are separated from the mother and in a new relationship. In my case, I became absent because of separation from the mother of my child. Because I am not working, I am denied access to the child” (Participant, 2).

This father’s description illustrated how some fathers’ relationships with their children are affected by their separation from the mothers of their children. The father’s views also suggest that some fathers are absent from their children’s lives because they are preoccupied with new

relationships. Being denied access to their children as a result of parental separation is one of the challenges faced by absent fathers. This finding is confirmed by Walper et al. (2015) who stated that parental separation affects the child's relation to the non-resident parent. During separation from the child's mother, some fathers also project conflict towards the children. Bowen's concept of the family projection process is described by Huang and Pryor (2018) as a process by which the children can be blamed and victimised by one parent for the difficulties in the family which originated from the parental dyad. Yi (2019) found that the separation of fathers from their wives and children had deleterious effects on family life. From a BFST perspective, the anxiety of separation pertains to the family as a whole and is passed on trans-generationally (Palombi, 2016). Furthermore, Palombi (2016) stated that a disturbance in an individual is, therefore, seen as a reflection of a disturbance in the overall family system. BFST is a holistic approach that maintains that an individual cannot be understood outside of the multigenerational system of which they are part because family members are seen as being interconnected (Varney-Wong, 2019). Besides, Varney-Wong (2019) indicated that it can be assumed that an absent father in a family system will hurt all the family members, including his child.

For some absent fathers who participated in this study, the nature of the separation from their children's mothers was a contributory factor for their absence. They cited separation characterised by fights to be a cause of absent fatherhood, as they expressed their views in the following manner:

"Absent fatherhood is when you have fought with the mother during pregnancy which leads to separation" (Participant, 6).

"Separating with the mother in a bad way causes absent fatherhood. It also affects your relationship with the children. I think the mother is using the children against me. I don't worship her" (Participant, 3).

The views of these fathers entail that separating from their children's mothers through fighting also impedes them from exercising their fatherhood roles. Their unwillingness to resolve their conflicts with the mothers contributes to being absent fathers, which also affects their children. Conflict-ridden relationships, a desire for vengeance after the collapse of a relationship, resentment and a lack of proper communication are stated (Patel & Mavungu, 2016) as contributing factors, leading to the exclusion or limited engagement of fathers in their children's lives. This finding is supported by Dickerson (2011) who stated that in terms of FST, when there are conflicts within the family, paternal involvement is decreased significantly. A father's ability to remain involved in the lives of his children after a union dissolution may be limited (Köppen, 2018). This may be because some fathers project their conflict with the mother towards the children and thus cut off their relationship with the children. Children may experience emotional difficulties in separated families where conflict is present (Bell et al., 2022). On the other hand, Soares et al. (2017) stated that parental separation could potentially be less harmful to children if there was a high level of conflict within the family household prior to separation.

In another study conducted in Thailand, Penboon et al. (2019) stated that the high level of migration of working-aged adults resulted in the separation of family members, especially between parents and their children. Some of the adolescents in this study also cited parental separation as one of the causes of father absence. They wished their parents could apologise and forgive one another.

"When the parents have disputes, it leads to absent fatherhood. Parents should ask each other for forgiveness and solve their disputes" (Participant, 12).

"Parents sometimes fight and separate. They stay separately without talking to each other. They should come back and fix their problems as parents" (Participant, 9).

Through the voices of the adolescents, it was evident that they are affected by the separation of their parents, and they wish to be raised in households with two parents, as they stated that they wished their parents could forgive one another and resolve their disputes. Adolescents separated from their fathers reported higher levels of depressive symptoms and family-related stress (Gobbi et al., 2015). Parental separation can also increase stress levels within families and this, may contribute to changes in children's activities (Cano & Gracia, 2022; Lacey et al., 2014). This is confirmed by Stent (2014) who highlighted that FST recognises that disruptions in equilibrium and family coalitions can result in stress. Parental separation represents such a disruption to a family system which, in turn, could result in stress to the members of the family unit, particularly the children whose parents have separated. Findings from a study by Brown (2018) indicated that participants whose father absence was a result of divorce or parental separation reported unfavourable perceptions of their fathers. Those findings were confirmed by the current study, as one adolescent held a perception that a father choose to disappear after parental separation.

*“It is because parents fight and fail to resolve their issues and the father disappears”
(Participant, 14).*

This adolescent's perception that fathers just disappear is unfavourable to fathers who try to initiate contact after parental separation. Parental separation is associated with numerous changes, including the need to reorganise relations between parents and their children (Zartler, 2021). Stent (2014) stated that as systems theory acknowledges that systems are maintained through communication and a sense of connectedness or cohesion, maintaining these in the face of separation becomes important in preserving the family system. Therefore, even though the parents have separated, they should communicate about how the non-resident father should remain involved in the lives of the children to preserve the family system. The findings by Stent (2014) indicated that families were required to negotiate roles, boundaries and relationships to

manage the separation. Failure to explain to and prepare children for divorce makes it an unbearable experience for the developing child (Mhlongo, 2019). Gobbi et al. (2015) believe that family members, teachers, coaches, friends and healthcare providers should remain vigilant to depression symptoms and stress in adolescents post-separation. Whereas the findings of this study highlighted parental separation as one of the causes of absent fatherhood, children should not be made to experience father abandonment.

5.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Father abandonment

Child abandonment involves leaving a child in the care of another person without having any communication or interaction with the child (Herrera, 2019). Herrera (2019) further stated that father abandonment refers to fathers who were not present in their children's lives, whether because of dependency, divorce or incarceration. This definition of Herrera (2019) has its limitations in the sense that it does not outline whether it was the intention of the father not to be involved in their children's lives after divorce or incarceration or whether their absence is because of certain barriers encountered. In the context of this study, father abandonment refers to the situation where absent fathers voluntarily decide to leave their children and do not care about the growth and development of the children. An abandoned child refers to a child whose father chose to leave his child (Porres, 2017). The findings by Thwala (2018) indicated that the situation of being abandoned by biological fathers affected various aspects of the participants' lives.

“The reason for father absence is because fathers are neglecting their responsibilities and not taking care of their children” (Participant, 12).

“Absent fatherhood is caused by fathers who are not supporting and staying with their children. My family is not okay. They should take my father to the maintenance court” (Participant, 13).

The current study found that some adolescents who grow up without the involvement of their biological fathers felt that their fathers abandoned them. The current study's findings are supported by Mhlongo (2019) who found that the absence of fathers in the participants' lives was interpreted as an act of abandonment or of being rejected. The findings of this study on father abandonment relate to the concept of emotional cut off in BFST. Emotional cut off describes how family members manage their issues emanating from unresolved emotional issues with other family members such as parents, siblings, uncles, aunts and children, whereby they reduce or totally cut off emotional contact with them (Broderick, 1993). This means that a child who experiences abandonment by the father might not want anything to do with their fathers, thus emotionally cutting off all ties with the father. Fathers who are experiencing cut off with the past are likely to have marital conflict, withdrawal and emotional cut off with their children (Bridge, 2019). Despite their feeling of abandonment, the adolescents in this study longed to have the presence of their fathers in their lives. The adolescents provided different expressions of how they understand abandonment to be. The fact that these adolescents held a perception that their fathers should be reported to the maintenance court validates the findings by Crivello (2015) who stated that fathers who abandon their families condemn their children to poverty. Father abandonment caused the participants to experience many struggles throughout their lives (Herrera, 2019).

Lesch and Kelapile (2016) stated that most of the fathers had given up on having contact with their children. People who are emotionally cut off often tend to isolate themselves from others (Peleg-Popko, 2002). The fact that fathers are not initiating contact makes the participants feel that their fathers do not care for or love them (Mhlongo, 2019). The adolescents in this study provided their perceptions of their fathers which were characterised by the feeling of being deserted by their fathers. This finding is supported by the following statements from the adolescent participants:

“I think my father has another wife. He does not care about us” (Participant, 10).

“It does not affect me in a good way. I think my father does not think about me” (Participant, 15).

These adolescents struggle with the thought of knowing that their fathers are out there and not caring about them. Their views contain a suspicion that the reason their fathers are not involved is because of their new relationships. Kamau (2018) indicated that a child who loses a father to divorce or abandonment struggles more with this absence than a child whose father is absent due to death. In a study by Taylor (2016), the participants acknowledged that they struggled consistently with emotional pain, feelings of anger and grief due to abandonment from their fathers. A child who grows up experiencing emotional cut off by the father will develop hatred towards the father. For other children, being emotionally cut off or experiencing abandonment by their fathers might result in the feeling of being worthless. Such children might feel that they are unwanted, as their fathers have abandoned them. Shame may arise from perceived rejection that gives rise to a sense of being worthless due to the experience of abandonment (Varney-Wong, 2019).

Most of the participants in a study by Gerrand and Nduna (2021) were willing to forgive their fathers for abandoning them. Regardless of having experienced abandonment by their fathers, the participants wished to experience their father’s love (Mhlongo, 2019). Some of this study’s participants outlined a wish for their fathers to be there and support them:

“My family should make sure that they find my father so that I can also know him” (Participant, 15).

“My family should write a letter to my father and let him know that I need him in my life” (Participant, 14).

The thoughts of these adolescents wanting their fathers in their lives show that they are willing to let go of the fact that their fathers have abandoned them. The adolescents’ statements show

that they do not hold grudges against their fathers for the abandonment. The participants in a study by Louw (2018) provided a glimpse of how their lives have been affected by the absence of their fathers during their upbringing due to abandonment. Absent fathers who have abandoned their children also cut off themselves emotionally from their children. The next theme explored the constructions of fatherhood.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Constructions of fatherhood

Morwe et al. (2015) stated that fatherhood has always been associated with security and the provision of resources. On the other hand, Nathane and Khunou (2021) argued that fatherhood has been defined from a Eurocentric, middle-class perspective which assumes fatherhood to be mainly biological. Nathane and Khunou (2021) opined that fathering as a social process that is in line with the African relational worldview is a collective responsibility of all adults in the extended family and community. Fatherhood is shaped by the joint forces of the individual, family, workplace, social policy and cultural values (Xiangxian, 2020). Absentee fatherhood is a product of a geographically mediated materiality of father-offspring affective exchange (Adebayo, 2020). In their construction of fatherhood and of themselves as future fathers, Nilsen and Sagatun (2015) depicted participants drawing on and negotiating a specific culturally embedded meaning system. Adebayo (2020) indicated that those who think of absentee fatherhood as a problem worry about their children and long to be with them in the flesh. Fatherhood is a life-altering experience that evokes feelings of authority and responsibility (Morwe et al., 2015). Nathane and Khunou (2021) concluded that social fathers present a positive picture of what positive fatherhood can look like in African contexts and challenge biologically based notions of fatherhood. Revisiting the traditional African understanding of fatherhood as a role that is not only associated with biological fathers is significant for facilitating a reconstruction of fatherhood, parenting and family connections (Nathane & Khunou, 2021).

Mushunje (2020) cautioned that the roles of the father in the family and the lives of the children differ from culture to culture and have been changing over time. Where the breadwinner model and feminisation of housework arguably placed men at a distance from their children, new approaches to parenthood and parenting emphasise and require an involved relationship with and investment in children (Shaw, 2019; Jethwani et al., 2014). The primary roles of a father are generally regarded as caring, protecting and providing for the family in conjunction with the mothers (Phasha, 2021; Phasha et al., 2022). McGill (2014) stated that now the fathers are expected to be more equal partners in parenting, spending time nurturing children and performing both interactive and physical caregiving activities. The concept of differentiation of self is central to Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) because it determines how roles, rules and boundaries are constructed in the family (Erden & Safi, 2018). When asked what about the role of the father within the family, participants in this study provided their perceptions of a father's role according to three constructs namely: a provider, a disciplinarian/protector and a role model. The adolescent participants only described the role of fathers as a provider, whereas the absent fathers described the role of fathers according to all the above-listed constructs. This theme was further discussed in four sub-themes namely: perceptions of fathers as providers, fathers as disciplinarians and protectors, fathers as role models and absent fathers' perceptions of their absence.

5.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Perceptions of fathers as providers

Liu (2019) stated that in most societies, fathers were defined as breadwinners. Consistently, generation after generation, we have accepted and fostered the concept of a father as a provider and a strong authority figure (Perez, 2016). The concept of fatherhood moved away from the social aspect and emphasised and favoured the financial responsibility of the biological father (Meyer, 2017). Most participants in this study associated the role of a father with that of a provider. This finding corroborates the views expressed by all participants in a study by Meyer

(2017) that it is a man's responsibility to provide financially for his family, as this affirms his masculinity or manhood. Some absent father participants provided their perceptions of their provider role as the most important role in the lives of their children. They expressed their perceptions in the following quotations:

"A father is very important. A father is a provider and a protector" (Participant, 1).

"A father should be responsible. Fathers should provide for their offspring" (Participant, 5).

These absent fathers' perceptions prioritise the provider role of the father as being important within the family. It was also important to note that fathers in this study also perceived their protector role as being important. The finding concurs with Mushunje (2020) who stated that the most prominent role assumed by the father in the family is that of a breadwinner. The perceptions of the participants emphasised their conceptions of the roles and responsibilities of fathers as consistent with the traditional notions of the father as the provider (Molongoana, 2015). The breadwinner ideal is the only 'required' role of non-resident fathers, and it depends upon men's ability to attain secure jobs paying family-sustaining wages (Jethwani et al., 2014). From a BFST point of view, a father is an important part of the family system without whom the family members struggle to meet their basic needs. The father's provider role is very crucial for the survival of the family system.

The participants in a study by Murray and Hwang (2015) stated that the role of a father is a breadwinner or a provider. A father emphasised the provider role of a father. He provided the following perception of the role of the father in the family:

"A father should support his children financially. He should also support the mother with childcare" (Participant, 6).

An adolescent participant shared the same perception of the father's role:

“A father should work and provide food. He should take good care of us and our mother” (Participant, 10).

Whereas the perceptions of these participants emphasised the provider role of the father, it was also important to note that they highlighted the aspect of childcare as one of the roles of a father. The participants also agreed that a father should assist the mother in caring for the children. Fathers should exercise their childcare role and not view it as “assisting” or doing a favour to mothers. Another adolescent participant shared her sentiments with an emphasis on the provider role of the father. She provided the following description of a father’s role:

“A father should take care of his child and provide everything I want” (Participant, 16).

The emphasis on the role of the father only as the provider overshadows other important father roles, as Cowan and Cowan (2019) stated that a vicious cycle has been created in which fathers are seen as absent in the role of primary caretakers of young children. The provider role strain often leads to disengagement (Jethwani et al., 2014).

The adolescents who participated in this study also perceived a father’s role as a provider. Their descriptions of the provider role of the father were articulated as follows:

“A father should support his children. He should buy food and other necessities at home. He should also buy us clothes and school uniform” (Participant, 13).

“My father should take care of me. He should buy me clothes. He should show that I am his child” (Participant, 15).

The role of a father as per the views of these adolescents includes the provision of necessities such as food, clothing and providing care to the children. The adolescents in this study believed their fathers could take them out of poverty and one of them indicated that:

“It should show that he has a father in his life” (Participant, 15).

Mushunje (2020) has alluded that being a provider for one's family is crucial to the well-being of children to buffer them from poverty and malnutrition. Traditional fathers avoid showing their affection by focusing on their breadwinning role in the family, and they see childcare as women's work (Pekel-Uludagli, 2019). The inability to provide for the children was perceived as a failure to play a fatherly role by one absent father.

“A father is a breadwinner. Once you are not fulfilling your fatherhood roles, you are not a father to the children” Participant, 7).

The perception that a father cannot be recognised as a father due to his inability to provide undermines other fundamental father roles such as showing affection to children and also playing with them. However, Chauke and Khunou (2014) supported these fathers' perception as they stated that when a father is unable to financially provide for his children, his parenting status and powers are relinquished. The finding contradicts Meyer (2017) who stated that one does not need money to be a good father.

In contrast, with the financial or material provider role of the father, the role of the father as a provider of care for the children is gaining momentum. This was supported by one participant who emphasised a father's role in terms of playing with the children.

“A father should provide food for children and make sure that their basic needs are met. He should provide them with playing balls and toys and play games with them”. (Participant, 9).

The participant highlighted the important role of a father having to play with the child, which assists in creating a father-child bond. Mabusela (2014) reported that fathers are becoming more involved and share the role of caregiving and relieving the mothers in terms of looking after the children. Mabusela (2014) further indicated that fathers assist with nappy-changing, feeding, bathing or any activity-based routine. The role of caring fathers in the lives of children and families is very important and undisputed (Makusha et al., 2019). In the case of single-

mother families, the mother assumes the dual role of being the primary or sole provider of both financial and parental resources (Phasha, 2021). Some participants in this study also added their emphasis on care in their perceptions of a father's provider role.

“To be a father, you have to love your family and children. A father should show responsibility. As a father, you should provide clothes and a future for your children. The children should wear as I am wearing” (Participant, 3).

“A father should love and provide everything for the child. He should take care of me and provide Christmas clothes”. (Participant, 12).

For these participants, a father's role as a provider of care to the child is important in addition to the financial or material provider role. The emphasis on care from the participants is consistent with the findings of a study by Anderson et al. (2015) who stated that several fathers described their beliefs about their role as a provider changing to incorporate aspects of providing a positive relationship, enjoying their role and meeting the developmental needs of children. The findings of this study are also supported by Phasha (2021) who stated that participants still hold the traditional views about the role of a father as being there to ensure that the family is taken care of in terms of food, shelter, education and clothing. With a traditional gender division of labour in the care of children, women assume primary responsibility for physical care, while men provide financial care (Hatch & Posel, 2018). In many black communities in South Africa, parenting is predominantly seen as a feminine role (Khanyile, 2019; Nkurunziza, 2018). Matlakala et al. (2019) mentioned that in typical rural areas, fathers are still seen as sole providers in the family. Furthermore, Matlakala et al. (2019) stated that as a norm in society, mothers are expected to remain at home and look after the children, while fathers may even go far to look for employment to feed their families.

Contrary to assigning the role of childcare to mothers and a provider role to fathers, another absent father perceived the assignment of roles within the family as ‘unnecessary’.

“A father must just be supportive. He should not define his role to say I will do this. A father should just be supportive” Participant, 8).

This participant is of the perception that fathers should just be there in the lives of their children and play a supportive role without assigning certain roles to them. This participant’s perception of a role of a father is supported by Nkurunziza (2018) who indicated that there is no need to assign particular roles in a family because of one’s gender. Among those who critiqued BFST, Jakimowicz et al. (2021) argued that fathers were barely mentioned in Bowen’s early work. Therefore, it becomes very difficult to outline the role of the father within the family in terms of BFST, as the theory has barely mentioned fathers and their roles. The participants in this study not only perceived the fathers as providers but also as disciplinarians and protectors.

5.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Fathers as disciplinarians and protectors

When asked to share their perceptions of the roles of a father, some absent fathers in this study cited being a disciplinarian and a protector. A disciplinarian father was described by the absent father participants as someone who set the rules and enforce them within the family.

“A father is a head of the family in African culture. He sets and enforces rules within the family. A child who lacks guidance from the father will lack control” (Participant, 2).

“A father’s role is to protect the family. He should provide shelter and be responsible. I think somehow children lose control when a father is not involved. They become friends with children who lack parental control. The girl one will visit boyfriends” (Participant, 3).

These fathers believed that children can be out of control as a result of not having a father to discipline them. They also spoke about children lacking discipline because of their association with other children who lack parental control. Fathers emphasised that enforcement of discipline and serving as a source of protection or security to the children is important (Trivedi & Bose, 2020). The findings of this study corroborated with Lesch and Ismail (2014) who

stated that fathers as disciplinarians featured pertinently in the participants' fatherhood constructions. These findings were also consistent with Murray and Hwang's (2015) finding that some participants spoke about fathers being the main disciplinarians in the family. Hakoyama (2020) stated that fathers continue to take pride in being responsible disciplinarians and heads of their families.

Some of the absent fathers also emphasised the setting of rules for the family and enforcement of the rules as roles of a father. The following responses highlight their emphatic views of the father as a setter and enforcer of rules within the family:

"A father should set rules for the family" (Participant, 6).

"A father should reprimand a child's wrong behaviour and also praise good behaviour" (Participant, 5).

The enforcement of the rules, as per the participants' responses, was described through the reprimanding and praising of the children's behaviour. Reprimand refers to parental disciplinary activities during interactions with the child (Carone et al., 2016). Asici and Sari (2021) were of the view that many fathers still care about authority and think that a father must be a disciplinarian. The perceptions of fathers as responsible for setting and enforcing rules also mean that fathers are authority figures within the families. Phasha (2021) found that participants understood fathers to be the authority figures who make decisions as the heads of families. Parents are higher in the dominance hierarchy and control more of the decision-making processes (Robin & Foster, 2002). The control of the parents in the hierarchy of the family system includes setting rules and instilling discipline among the children. The findings of this study revealed that, for some fathers, a child's gender determined their level of involvement, as one absent father provided the following perception:

"A father is not supposed to beat a child, but he should discipline the child. He should also support the child. Since my child is a girl, 80% of development and

wellbeing depends on the mother. For me, it is about financial and emotional support and to discipline her as many mothers don't know how to discipline a child"
(Participant, 4).

The impression from this absent father's response places much of the responsibility of childcare on the mother while directing the provider and disciplinarian roles to the father. Fathers should be involved in every aspect of their children's development regardless of the gender of the child. The present father's ideal of sharing child-rearing tasks presumes fathers as heads of intact families (Jethwani et al., 2014). Although many of the participants in a study by Lesch and Ismail (2014) described the decision-making process as a collaborative one between husband and wife, they stated explicitly that fathers made the final decision. A father was described by another participant in this study as a 'hero' and a 'protector'.

"A father is a hero and a protector" (Participant, 7).

This father held a perception that it is a father's responsibility to protect children and families. The word 'father' conjures images to a child such as that of a strong man who will love, protect and provide for their needs (Makofane, 2015). All the fathers in a study by Lesch and Ismail (2014) spoke at length about protecting their children. A father is the primary disciplinarian whose role is to provide and enforce the rules (Ho et al., 2004). In her study titled "An application of Bowen family systems theory", Haefner (2014) stated that when a family member experiences a stressor that threatens the family unit, the whole family feels threatened and forms protective defences. The whole family reacts to the stressful experience of a family member on the basis that BFST considers family members to be functioning as an interconnected system rather than as individuals. It is the responsibility of the members of the family system to protect one another. In addition to fathers being perceived as providers, disciplinarians and protectors, fathers were also perceived by the participants in this study as role models.

5.3.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Fathers as role models

The third construct which emerged from the participants' perceptions of a father's role within the family was that of a father as a role model. Johnson et al. (2016) highlighted that role models are thought to influence young people in terms of modelling and direct socialisation. Role models are often seen as a way of motivating individuals to perform novel behaviours and inspire them to set ambitious goals (Morgenroth et al., 2015). The key to being a role model is the ability to set a positive example that a follower can mimic or learn from (Sanford Jr, 2021). This study found that half of the absent father participants perceived role modelling as one of a father's roles towards his children. Participants described a father as a role model and a teacher.

“A father is someone whom a child should learn from. He should teach a child about responsibility. A father should be a role model. The child might continue a cycle of absent fatherhood if you are not present” (Participant, 2).

The participant alluded that a father should be exemplary and possess qualities from which a child can learn. This participant also expressed his fear of a continuous cycle of absent fatherhood due to the father absence, as Bowen (1976), through BFST, alluded that certain basic patterns between the father, mother and children are replicas of the past generations and will be repeated in the generations to follow. The multigenerational transmission process means there is a repetition of family patterns such as roles and triangles through generations (Manthosi, 2020). The message conveyed by the participant above was that a boy child who does not have a father to model his behaviour on is likely to continue with the cycle of absent fatherhood. Another participant also provided his perception of a father as a role model, which is consistent with limiting the focus on a boy child. He expressed that as follows:

“Fatherhood to me means I have to be close to the child. The child should know me and follow my guidance...particularly a boy child” (Participant, 6).

Role modelling involves a father moulding a child's behaviour by providing guidance as this father has articulated. However, the focus on a boy child only undermined an important role that a father could also play towards the girl child. The findings of this study were contradictory to the findings of the study of Makhanya (2016) who stated that some participants viewed an ideal father for a girl child as a person who was role modelling a good husband and a provider. Role modelling behaviour of a father should be channelled to all the children regardless of the child's gender. Fathers not only viewed advising as a responsibility, but they also viewed it as a privilege, and some identified their fulfilment of the advising role as the best part of being a father (Jethwani et al., 2014). If fathers are involved with their children, they become role models and live by example (Freeks et al., 2015).

In their description of a father's role towards his children, other absent father participants in this study spoke about a role of a father as a leader and a role model. They expressed themselves as outlined in the following quotes:

"A father is naturally a leader. A good leader actually. You lead by example"
(Participant, 5).

"A father is someone children should feel proud of...a role model" (Participant, 7).

The participants outlined a leadership characteristic of a father as something natural. Their description of a role model revolved around being exemplary to children for them to emulate the qualities of a father. Role modelling behaviour is not simply based on the advice and instructions given by the father, but also on the observation of the father's actions, which provides some form of guidance (Harvey, 2021). The findings of this study were supported by Phasha (2021) who reported that one of the roles of a father is to guide and model the conduct of the children in the family. Role models are often successful in an area young people see as important and have qualities with which they connect (Johnson et al., 2016). One absent father

in this study articulated his father as a positive role model in his upbringing. His explanation was captured in the following quote:

“My father was okay and our role model. He raised us well” (Participant, 3).

Despite growing up under the positive mentorship of his father, the participant became an absent father himself. Role modelling cannot be limited to biological fathers only, as Makhanya (2016) indicated that any interested man could be a male role model for a child. Many men in communities are motivators and mentors in families and to young people (Chauke & Khunou, 2014). Fundamentally, every father should be a positive role model because children look up to their fathers as examples of how to behave (Freeks, 2017). Contrary to the view that children look up to their fathers as examples of how to behave, Bowen (1976) stated that more differentiated parents can permit their children to grow and develop their autonomous selves without undue anxiety or without trying to fashion their children in their images. This means that within a family system, children should exercise their autonomy of being who they want to be rather than copying their parents. Also, BFST states that the parents and the children are each more responsible for themselves, and do not have to blame others for failures or credit anyone else for their successes (Bowen, 1976). The next sub-theme dealt with the absent fathers' perceptions of their absence.

5.3.5.4 Sub-theme 2.4: Absent fathers' perceptions of their absence

This study found that feelings of guilt, failure and regret characterised most of the absent fathers' perceptions of their absence from their children's lives. This finding corresponded with the findings of a study by Lesch and Kelapile (2016) who indicated that most of the participants articulated of their accord feelings of regret and guilt resulting from their lack of involvement with their children. Absent fathers who participated in this study shared their perceptions about their absence:

“It is painful and difficult for me. I am not okay. I am not updated about their (his children) progress. I am asking myself whether they eat or dress where they are. I feel as if I am failing as a parent. It is as if I dumped my children” (Participant, 3).

“I feel very bad. I don’t want my kid to be raised the way I was raised. I fought a lot to have access and I failed. I am not coping. I want to be there. I wish I could have a child somewhere just to be available for the child” (Participant, 5).

From their expressions, the participants perceived themselves as failures for not being involved in the lives of their children. The thought of not being involved in their children’s lives made the absent fathers in this study feel as if they failed as parents. Alienated fathers may mourn the loss of becoming an actively involved parent (Mokolobate, 2019). Other absent fathers also added their perceptions:

“It is a very heart-breaking feeling. I only see the child on the phone. I am unable to see and touch the child. I am heart-broken. When I see fathers walking with their children, I wish it was me and my child. I feel like I am failing as a father though that is not my intention. I try every day to cope, but it gives me stress as my child is growing up without knowing me. I wish for a situation to change” (Participant, 4).

“It is very bad. The child is your other half. If you hurt the child, you hurt your other half. I brag about my children. It is painful not to be involved” (Participant, 2).

The participants shared their feelings of pain and being heart-broken resulting from their lack of involvement in their children’s lives. The findings of this study concurred with the findings of a study by Taylor (2016) who indicated that all of the absent fathers disclosed that they have endured emotional pain as a result of their absence. All the participants expressed feelings of regret, wishing they could have done more or things differently to be present in the lives of their children (Taylor, 2016; Mabusela, 2014). Some absent fathers articulated how their absence from their children’s lives affected their cultural perspectives and principles. They stated:

“It is painful because as a father, I should be near my children. Not being involved in my children’s lives can sometimes cause me problems when life goes on” (Participant, 1).

“I am feeling so bad. Obviously, the child is not going to grow up knowing me and my principles. The child will not know my culture. It stresses me emotionally. Sometimes I feel like I can see a psychologist for counselling. My child is alive, but I am unable to see him” (Participant, 6).

These fathers believed that their absence from their children’s lives will bring bad luck in the future and also that their children will not know their cultural principles. All the absent fathers who participated in this study felt the pain of not being involved in their children’s lives. Some of them wished that the situations were different to enable them to be involved in their children’s lives. The fact that the absent fathers in this study felt the pain for not being involved in their children’s lives reaffirms the viewpoint of Detmer and Lamberti (1991) that a family is a group of interconnected individuals forming a system and reciprocally affecting one another in response to internal or external events. Even though fathers are absent from their children’s lives, some are still thinking about their children despite their absence. The next theme explored the factors that influence father absence.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Factors influencing fathers’ absence

Whereas there are many factors that lead fathers to be absent from their children’s lives, the findings of this study only revealed maternal gatekeeping, father’s choice not to be involved with their children and unemployment as factors that led fathers to be absent from their children’s lives. Maternal gatekeeping was perceived as a way of intentionally or unintentionally limiting the father’s access and involvement in child rearing (Coban, 2017). Miller (2018) indicated that maternal gatekeeping practices have mostly been associated with attempts to protect maternal identity and power, through which maternal privilege is reinforced and reproduced. Fathers in South Africa face enormous challenges in remaining involved in

their children's lives (Madhavan et al., 2014). Strier (2014) stated that fathers experience unemployment as a personal failure. Some fathers have a strong desire to bond with their children and aspire to transform themselves from absent fathers to caring fathers (Xiangxian, 2020). Some fathers do not make any effort to build relationships or initiate contact with their children. This theme was presented through three sub-themes: maternal alienation/gatekeeping, fathers' choice of non-involvement and unemployment.

5.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Maternal alienation/gatekeeping

Bosch-Brits et al. (2018) described maternal alienation as the process through which an alienating parent disrupts or undermines the contact and relationship between the child and the target parent during or after a high-conflict divorce, without profound reasons. Maternal gatekeeping involves how mothers encourage, discourage or control the non-resident father's parenting, and it often affects negatively the non-resident father's parental role and the quality of his relationship with the child (Violi et al., 2022). Arditi et al. (2019) found that the relationship quality of non-resident fathers and children's primary caregivers seemed to underpin narratives about men's involvement with children. Ryan et al. (2008) concurred by highlighting that in terms of FST, the quality of relations between the father and mother's family could influence father involvement in the same way the parents' relationship can impact father-child relations. FST assumes that parent-child relationships are central to children's development and adjustment (Amato et al., 2016). Nduna (2014) found that foster parents, typically maternal grandparents or aunts, acted as gatekeepers of information and access to and from the father. Fathers are discouraged from being involved in childcare by mothers who are reluctant to relinquish their parental control (Kim, 2022). Bosch-Brits et al. (2018) specified that when parental alienation has occurred, the child not only loses a father figure but there is also long-term emotional damage. This study found that most absent father participants were

uninvolved in their children's lives as a result of maternal gatekeeping, as a father who experienced maternal gatekeeping explained:

“Sometimes I don't care. Sometimes I do think about them and when I see other fathers with their children, I wish it was the same for me, but then, their mothers don't want me to have a relationship with them” (Participant, 7).

It is clear from the excerpt above that the participant's poor relationship with the mother of his children affected his role as a father and his engagement with his children. This finding concurred with Maxwell's (2018) report that men's hostile relationships with their ex-partners were presented as a barrier to their demonstration of good father involvement. Non-resident fathers are unlikely to be involved in their children's lives unless family members accept fathers as part of the family system (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). The father's relationship with the mother of his child remains a critical factor in the involvement of the father (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016). Another absent father complained about a mother's attitude and stated:

“It is because children are negatively influenced by their mothers. Children listen to their mothers too much. I tried to meet with my first born to convince her and siblings to come and see me. It didn't work well. Her mother and grandmother influenced her” (Participant, 3).

This participant believed that absent fatherhood is exacerbated by mothers who negatively influence their children against their fathers. The response of this absent father carried the message that some absent fathers try to initiate contact with their children but are prevented by the maternal families. Some children are also influenced to reject their fathers. It can be suggested that children who allow mothers to influence them against their fathers have low differentiation of self in terms of BFST. These are people who are less flexible, less adaptable and more emotionally dependent on those around them (Bowen, 1976). Gatekeeping occurs either when the relationship between the father and the mother has broken down or there have been tensions between them (Sikweyiya et al., 2017). The current study found that some fathers

are prevented from having access to their children by the cultural values and expectations of paying damages. Two absent fathers explained this in the following quotes:

“The maternal family will not allow me to see the child if I am not married to the child’s mother or paid damages. We broke up with the mother, and sometimes she just acts up” (Participant, 4).

“The ‘intlawulo’ (damages) and lobola stuff. The mother has not done anything to prevent me. It is just tradition preventing me to have access to my child” (Participant, 8).

The fathers believed they had to meet the cultural expectations of paying damages before they can be granted access to stay with their children. The inability of these fathers to pay damages contributed to the problem of them being absent fathers. The cultural practice of damage payments affects father-child care, contact and involvement (Makhanya, 2016). Unless the father of a child has paid damages to the mother’s family, the child belongs to the mother’s family (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016). The finding on the cultural expectation of paying damages as a barrier to father involvement confirmed the views of Molongoana (2015) who stated that the traditional requirement of paying damages is problematic as fathers subjected to these practices are typically poor fathers.

An alienated father’s self-worth and esteem will diminish due to being denied the opportunity to express moral commitment to his role as a father (Mokolobate, 2019). When asked about his reasons for being an absent father, another participant also blamed the attitude of his child’s mother. He articulated his uncertainty about the child’s paternity emanating from the mother’s attitude.

“The reason I am an absent father is because of the attitude of the child’s mother. When we are fighting, she says the child is not mine, and when we are not fighting she says I am the father. I am not sure about the paternity of the child” (Participant, 5).

This father's articulation conveyed a message that some fathers are absent from their children's lives due to the uncertainty about the child's paternity. This finding was confirmed by Hercher and Jamal (2016) who stated that the problem of misattributed paternity is not a new phenomenon, as it has been there for a long period. One absent father participant sought the assistance of the Social Workers and the courts to be granted access to the child.

“Most children don't have fathers because of the behaviour of their mothers. Sometimes men just run away from responsibility. In my case, the mother was refusing me access. I consulted the Social Worker and also went to court. The matter ended in the High Court” (Participant, 2).

The participant knew about his rights and responsibilities as a father, as he approached the Social Worker and the court for assistance. For co-parenting to be effective, parents should consider the best interests of the children and put their differences aside. Maternal gatekeeping is not in the best interest of the child. Section 28 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) states that a child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child. A News24 (2022) article reported that a Gauteng woman who refused to allow her children to spend time with their father was sentenced to a month in prison for contempt of court. The article further stated that the one-month sentence was, however, suspended on the condition that she immediately complied with the court order which granted the father access to the children. Van den Berg and Makusha (2018) highlighted that cases for fathers' rights to access and custody are mainly heard in the High Court which is expensive. Maternal alienation/gatekeeping is worsened by men's lack of knowledge about legislation that promotes father involvement by stating the responsibilities and rights of fathers. When asked about their knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of fathers in terms of the Children's Act, the majority of the absent fathers in this study displayed a lack of knowledge of those parental rights and responsibilities, hence:

“Aaah, I just know that maintenance law... that if the father is working he should support the child. The child should not rely on government grants” (Participant, 8).

“Fathers are forced to be involved in the children’s lives because they are taken to maintenance courts” (Participant, 7).

From their responses, despite having articulated the maintenance law and courts, the participants did not know the legislation that empowers them to acquire parental rights and responsibilities in respect of their children. In a study by Makhanya and Matthias (2017), none of the participants knew that they could either automatically acquire these rights and responsibilities, or obtain these through agreement with the mother or through the courts. Makhanya and Matthias further indicated that although the Children’s Act (2005) makes provision for mediation services to be provided by Social Workers, none of the participants in their study was aware of these services. Two absent fathers also admitted their lack of knowledge regarding legislation that advocates for father involvement:

“I don’t know legislations. When I have a problem, I consult Social Workers and the magistrate’s court” (Participant, 3).

“I don’t have too much information in relation to legislation. I believe the role of fathers is to protect children from dangers and strangers. The other role is also to take care of and guide them not to bully other children” (Participant, 5).

The lack of knowledge by the participants about their parental rights and responsibilities in respect of their children resulted in them not taking further steps when they encountered maternal gatekeeping. Mokolobate (2019) indicated that parental alienation strips the father of his autonomy to exercise his duties and rights as a father. Gatekeeping is a spill over of a mother’s negative behaviour towards the father from the inter-parental relationship system to the father-child relationship system (Stevenson et al., 2014). Concerning the ‘emotional cut-off concept of the BFST, Bridge (2019) alluded that when there is a cut off with the past, it is

likely to also have a marital conflict, withdrawal and emotional cut off with the children. The concept of emotional cut off applied to the current study's findings in the sense that an absent father who was alienated from accessing the child also became emotionally cut off from the child. Fathers who are excluded from the family system are limited to the extent to which they can be involved in children's lives (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). Members of the maternal families should act in the best interests of the children and not prevent fathers from being involved as such actions result in the children being emotionally cut off from their fathers. The next sub-theme focused on the fathers' choice of non-involvement.

5.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Fathers' choice of non-involvement

This study found that some absent fathers made a choice not to be involved in their children's lives. The findings corroborated the findings of a study by Mhlongo (2019) who stated that the participants perceived the absence of their fathers as a choice the fathers made. Whereas some of the fathers in a study by Lesch and Kelapile (2016) envisaged future involvement in their children's lives, one absent father participant in this study who was alienated from seeing his children surprisingly stated that he no longer cared about his children. He stated that:

"Life frustrations had made me not to care at all. I am frustrated as a person, as a father, and I am broke. I just don't care anymore. Either present or absent, it is fine" (Participant, 7).

The father gave up on wanting to be involved in the lives of his children and thus chose to be absent. Frustrations may result because of the failure to fulfil the ideal notion of manhood (Chili & Maharaj, 2015). Taylor (2016) stated that although the participants chose to be and remain absent, that did not prevent them from thinking about their children. When asked if being an absent father applied to him or not, one father responded:

"Yeah! It is because I am also not available for my kid. I don't have access to my kid. I am one of those fathers who are not available for their kids. The child is still

young and not having a problem. Someone out there is available on my behalf”
(Participant, 5).

The views expressed by this father highlighted how he admitted his status of being an absent father and made a choice to shift his fatherhood responsibilities to “someone” who could be involved in the life of the child. Thus, the father was comfortable with his choice of being absent from his child’s life. There has been an increase in the percentage of those who run away from their families and become involved in living together arrangements in substitute families, and when tensions build up in the substitute family, they cut off from that and move to another (Bowen, 1976). In the context of this study, these related to absent fathers who chose their non-involvement in their children’s lives. Bowen (1976) believed that people who cut off themselves from their original initial families are also capable of doing the same in substitute families when conflict arises. Duffill (2022) stated that losing a father due to his choice to leave may be one of the worst experiences in a child’s life.

Another father chose to give up on being involved in the lives of his children because he thought that it would look like he was after the children’s mother.

“Sometimes I just give up because fighting for my children seems like I want their mother back. They will grow up and know me” (Participant, 3).

This participant’s view corroborated Mabusela’s (2014) finding where one participant who rejected his fatherhood role continued with his life and did not bother to make any contact with the mother of his child or with the child. Furthermore, Mabusela (2014) stated that the father did not want to identify himself as a father and did not honour any obligations relating to being a father. When there is no strong relationship foundation between the mother and father, men might become absent and maintain their absence. Paternal disinterest was cited by participants in a study by Manyatshe and Nduna (2014) as a reason for finding it difficult to tell a child about a father who did not want them. Taylor (2016) found that absent fathers develop

justifications for their decisions to become and remain absent. This study suggests that fathers who chose to be absent from their children's lives have emotionally cut off themselves from the children in terms of BFST. People who are emotionally cut off isolate themselves from others (Peleg-Popko, 2002). Unemployment remains a further deterrent to fathers being involved with their biological children.

5.3.3.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Unemployment

Fatherhood in South Africa faces the context of high levels of unemployment and economic constraints to take up fatherhood roles and responsibilities (Yi, 2019). Many men living in South Africa are unemployed, and many do not live with their biological children (Sikweyiya et al., 2017). For the majority of absent father participants in this study, unemployment and the inability to provide financially for their children resulted in them being absent from their children's lives. One participant questioned why he could visit the child without having money to provide for the child.

“My financial status resulted in me being an absent father. How can you visit a child without having R100.00 for pampers? The maternal family will not welcome you” (Participant, 6).

The participant's view is in line with the materialistic constructions of fatherhood which values the provider role of the father and overlooks other important roles such as the provision of emotional support to the child. The opinion in the excerpt above shows that some fathers opt not to be there for their children when they have nothing to provide for the child. BFST is a theory of human behaviour that defines family units as complex social systems in which members interact and influence each other (Chukwudi & Nwokwule, 2022). Shifron et al. (1983) highlighted that each family member is affected by the increasing destruction of unemployment because the family functions as one whole system. Unemployment affects individuals within families, relationships within families and the family system as a whole

(Rosino, 2016). Fathers need to be emotionally present to form part of a positive parenting team (Mavongwana, 2021). Many men in a study by Sikweyiya et al. (2017) shared their frustrations about being unemployed, meaning they could not consistently provide financially for their children. For some absent father participants, unemployment and distance caused them to be absent from their children's lives.

“Yes, the financial situation. I have three siblings, and my mother is not working. I take care of them at home. The remaining money I send to the child. I am unable to pay transport to visit the child as she is staying in Mpumalanga province, and I am in Limpopo province” (Participant, 4).

“The mother is staying far, and sometimes money is a problem. Transport is expensive. Sometimes you become shy because you don't have anything to give the child. The child does not need anything but your presence” (Participant, 2).

Distance between the child's residence and these participants' place of residence played a huge role in fathers being absent from their children's lives due to the inability to pay for transport costs. For some participants in a study by Makhanya and Matthias (2017), a significant barrier to contact was that the mothers of their children subsequently moving to distant locations that were harder to visit. An absent father in this study experienced rejection from his children's mother because of his inability to provide.

“Fatherhood to me means a lot of things. Making sure that your offspring are under your shadow and taking care of them. If you are absent, it makes you less of a father. A father should be 100% involved. I am unemployed. I am broke. I want to be part of my children's lives, but their mother rejects me because I have nothing to give them” (Participant, 7).

The participant articulated his desire to be involved in his children's lives and being rejected on the basis that he was unable to play the provider role. The finding of this study corresponded with Sikweyiya et al.'s (2017) report that many men aspire to be involved fathers and to take some form of responsibility for their children. Fathers who are unable to provide material or

financial support may feel that they are failures (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Mokolobate (2019) stated that not being able to assume the paternal role brings a sense of guilt. Another unemployed absent father cited ‘intlawulo’ (payment of damages) as his reason for being absent from his child’s life.

“Before I stay with my child, I should marry. I must pay that lobola. I should do the right thing. The economy is not allowing it. I don’t have the financial means to do so. I can’t afford ‘intlawulo’ for my child to stay with me full time. That is basically the reason why I am an absent father” (Participant, 8).

This father still held the traditional view that he should pay the damages before staying with his child full time. African cultural practices have traditionally preconditioned access to the child and exercise of fatherhood role on such payments as ‘ilobolo’ or ‘intlawulo’ and the failure of most men to pay these could have severe implications for their roles as fathers (Mokolobate, 2019). Lesch and Kelapile (2016) indicated that ideas of fatherhood have also been associated with marriage to the mother of the child. In terms of African tradition, if a man impregnates a woman out of wedlock, he must show the maternal family respect and apologise to them by paying an amount of money agreed upon for ‘using’ their daughter (Gerrand & Nduna, 2021). Khanyile (2019) alluded that the cultural practice of ‘intlawulo’ makes the maternal family the primary custodians of the child and gives them the power to make decisions about the child without involving the father. The Children’s Act (2005) indicates that payment of damages is one of the factors to be considered when determining whether an unmarried father is eligible to acquire parental rights and responsibilities (Makhanya & Matthias, 2017). Limited financial means fuels the experience of provider role strain (Jethwani et al., 2014). Most of the participants in a study by Meyer (2017) stated that poverty plays a role in men’s resistance to taking responsibility for their children. Lesch and Ismail (2014) reported that fathers who were unable to provide for their children were distressed. The family system equilibrium is affected by the undesired unemployment status of the breadwinner (Shifron et

al., 1983). Furthermore, Shifron et al. (1983) stated that unemployment brings about experiences of fear, anger, bitterness, frustration and guilt by each family member both within and outside the family system. One does not need money to be a good father (Meyer, 2017). The next theme explored the adolescents' experiences of absent fatherhood.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Adolescents' experiences of absent fatherhood

Despite the social, cultural and economic circumstances into which children are born, father absence comes with its experiences and challenges (Osinga et al., 2021). Austin (2020) stated that fathers play a significant role in family dynamics, especially in the realm of influence on child development. In the case of involuntary separation, children experience great economic instability and emotional anxiety when separated from their fathers (Dreby, 2015). Velasco et al. (2016) indicated that children with absent fathers have strived to overcome the adversities of life and made the best of the situation they found themselves in. The findings of this study revealed that adolescents who grew up without their biological fathers' involvement were longing for their fathers and that those participants experienced social fatherhood provided to them by other male figures from their extended families, step-fathers and the community. The findings also revealed that some adolescents adopted resilience as their strategy for coping with the absent fatherhood phenomenon. This theme was presented in three sub-themes: desire for a father's presence, adolescents' experiences of social fatherhood and resilience of adolescents with absent fathers.

5.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Desire for a father's presence

Participants in a study by Peyper et al. (2015) expressed the desire to experience their fathers' affection and to hear from their fathers that they loved them, but, unfortunately, they did not experience or hear it. The emotional detachment is likely to elicit anxiety, with the child longing for attachment, yet not experiencing it (Tau, 2020). The experience of absence, as stated by Varney-Wong (2019), is often met with longing. This study found that adolescents

who grew up in absent-father homes desired to have their father's presence in their lives or to experience his love. All the adolescent participants indicated that they wished their biological fathers were involved in their lives so that they could be able to provide for their basic needs.

"I wish he was taking responsibility to provide for me. To buy me pens, pencils, shoes and clothes. He should provide Christmas clothes for me" (Participant, 13).

"My development is not okay. I miss my father. The treatment is not okay at home" (Participant, 14).

The views provided by the participants above indicate that children who grow up in absent-father homes desire the presence of their fathers so that they can close the emptiness that is caused by their absence, as well as providing for those that are lacking. The finding concurs with Nduna's (2014) claim that children with absent and unknown fathers care about them, though they experience the loss. BFST views the absent father as a missing link in the family system. The finding of this study that children of absent fathers desire their fathers' presence is on the basis that their family systems are incomplete without their fathers' involvement. This study found that all the adolescent participants lacked knowledge about their biological fathers' identities. They reported having never met or known their biological fathers. This finding is supported by Denov and Piolanti (2020) who indicated that participants could not conceive of meeting their fathers as they had never been present during their childhood. There is a lack of insight into the factors that discourage mothers, and other family members who may know, from disclosing the father's identity to the child even when asked (Nduna, 2014). Another participant who did not know her father stated that:

"The people on the streets tell me about my father. I wish he was there for me. They ask if I know him and when I say no, they say they are better than me because they know their fathers. I keep quiet" (Participant, 12).

This finding is supported by Padi et al. (2014) who stated that a child can grow up not knowing the father and acquire information about his identity from other people, in and outside the

family, or by eavesdropping on adult conversations. Children from an absent-father family admire their counterparts with a present father, and their father's absence makes them feel inferior compared to their peers with present fathers. Mhlongo (2019) indicated that participants felt that they were below the standards of their peers from their father present homes, as children with fathers have someone to provide for their needs, and they do not have. Because families do not function in isolation from other fundamental subsystems such as schools, communities and the larger society, children of absent fathers learn of the experiences of other children from such subsystems that have present fathers, and they desire to have the same experience had it been their fathers are present in their lives. Another participant asked her mother about her father, although she did not get the desired response.

"I don't know my father. I asked my mother about my father, and she said I should not worry. I wish my father could come so that I can know him" (Participant, 11).

Many participants not knowing their fathers (Langa, 2014) spoke about their wish to meet them. Manyatshe and Nduna (2014) found that some children asked questions about their fathers, and from the mothers' responses, it could be said that the children understood that the topic was an uncomfortable one. Sometimes the motivation for not disclosing the father's identity was based on protecting the child from possible abuse from the stepmother should the father want to take and raise the child (Nduna, 2014). Also, Nduna (2014) alluded that some of the mothers were worried that if they told the child and the child went and found his/her father, the father could still deny paternity and hurt the child, causing more frustration and anger for the child.

Mhlongo (2019) found that all the participants yearned to have meaningful relationships with their fathers. The participants did not only desire the emotional or financial presence of their absent fathers but also their physical proximity to serve as a source of security in their homes (Tau, 2020). Participants in a study by Brown (2018) reported that during their childhood, they

had been uncertain about what the absence of their fathers meant, and that resulted in confusion, longing, questioning and self-blame. This was evident in this study too, as a participant indicated that:

“I sometimes wish if my father were around to assist me with homework. At home, there is no one who assists me with homework” (Participant, 14).

From the perspective of the participant above, it could be concluded that some adolescents thought that their lives could be better if their fathers were involved in their lives. Some youth imagined and hoped that meeting and knowing their fathers could bring the possibility of receiving emotional and economic support (Denov & Piolanti, 2020). Children want to know what their life would be like if their fathers were around (Crouch, 2018).

“I wish my father were around to buy us things we want and to build us a nice home and to provide school uniform and presents on my birthday. I used to think that when I grow up, I would go to Khumbul’ekhaya and look for him. I used to love him, since I was young without knowing him, wishing to know who he is” (Participant, 9).

Khumbul’ekhaya was a television programme aired on SABC1 which journeys and reconnects families to their estranged family members (Mabusela, 2014; Nduna, 2014; Lesch & Kelapile, 2016; Thwala, 2018). Besides, Mabusela (2014) stated that the majority of the reconnections in Khumbul’ekhaya are between absent fathers and their children. Manyatshe and Nduna (2014) found that some participants have accustomed themselves to raising children who do not know their fathers. One participant spoke about how a family friend mediated for her child to meet the father (Manyatshe & Nduna, 2014). Matlakala et al. (2019) concluded that children who are growing up without a father have a sense of desire for their fathers’ presence. Children with an absent father yearn to be connected (Thwala, 2018). BFST views the absent father as a missing link in the family system. The findings of this study indicated that the children of absent fathers desire their fathers’ presence so that their family systems could be complete with

the father who is viewed as the missing link. Besides having the desire to have their fathers present in their lives, the adolescent participants also had the experiences of social fatherhood, which the next sub-theme addressed.

5.3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Adolescents' experiences of social fatherhood

Fatherhood refers not only to the role assumed by biological fathers but also to the social involvement of father figures of various kinds (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Childrearing is unlimited to biological parents; it is a collective responsibility and a result of traditional African practices that make provision for the care of children without centring mainly on biological parents (Nathane & Khunou, 2021). Yi (2019) stated that grandfathers, uncles and older brothers are important father figures. The definition of fathers has widened to include men who are not biological fathers but provide financial support, are present in the home and who engage in childcare (Morrell et al., 2016). This study found that most adolescents who had absent biological fathers were being cared for by social fathers.

“My uncle is the one who buys us food at home sometimes. When he comes back, I forget that I don't have a father” (Participant, 11).

“My uncle sometimes buys us clothes and food. My brother also buys me food and clothes as well” (Participant, 16).

These adolescents' experience of social fatherhood is supported by the findings of Makofane (2015) who stated that participants whose grandfathers and maternal uncles fulfilled the father role did not miss the physical and emotional presence of their fathers. Fathering is a social process that is in line with the African relational worldview as a collective responsibility of all adults in the extended family and community (Nathane & Khunou, 2021). Stepfathers also play an important role in caring for the children of absent biological fathers.

“My stepfather plays a role of a father to me. He treats me well, and he also buys me Christmas clothes” (Participant, 12).

Social fathers may include grandfathers, uncles, teachers, priests, older brothers and a mother's partner, who may singly or collectively provide for the children's livelihood and education and give them paternal love, potentially mitigating negative outcomes of the absence of a biological father (Varney-Wong, 2019). In many cases where biological fathers in African families are absent, male family members play a significant role in the lives of children as social fathers (Makhanya, 2016; Nathane & Khunou, 2021). Interestingly, one adolescent experienced much care and support from his maternal grandmother.

“My grandmother takes care of me. She buys us what we want. Sometimes she gives us pocket money when we go to school. You wouldn't go to school without pocket money. She basically assists us with anything. She even buys food for us”
(Participant, 10).

Makofane (2015) indicated that the burden carried by maternal relatives in caring for children of absent fathers is a major concern. The role played by social fathers is not only in terms of material provisions but also in emotional connection characterised by care (Nathane & Khunou, 2021). Nathane and Khunou (2021) added that the established role of social fathers in the lives of children whose fathers are absent is a great strength that exists in extended families. Where the actual father is missing, the gap in the children's lives compels the invention and production of social fathers and other father figures, and this proves the necessity of fathers in society (Mosholi, 2015).

In a study about boys' construction of fatherhood when their fathers are absent, Nilsen and Sagatun (2015) argued that despite the boys' fathers being absent, they (boys) are offered a repertoire of fatherhood through their social interactions with other people. This study finding on the aspect of social fatherhood is in line with FST's concept of 'societal regression', which indicated that Bowen (1976) identified a link between the family and society that was sufficiently trustworthy for him to extend the basic theory about the family into the larger

societal arena. This implies that children who are without father figures from within their families are cared for by other father figures from a broader societal context. When a father is absent frequently, other family members may step in to assist (Austin, 2020). The presence of supportive grandparents in father-absent children's lives may take away the shame of not having a father to buy them clothes or meet any of their financial needs if the mother is unemployed (Mhlongo, 2019). Other participants who experienced the care from social fathers in their families expressed themselves in the following manner:

“My uncle plays a role of a social father. Whenever I go to school, he gives me pocket money. When I am hungry, he makes me food because sometimes my grandmother gets tired” (Participant, 14).

“My uncle takes care of me. He assists by buying me school uniform, shoes and casual clothes so that I can look like other children” (Participant, 15).

Maternal uncles played important roles in the lives of these adolescents as social fathers. Social fathers, as conceptualised by the young participants (Nathane & Khunou, 2021), were mostly maternal uncles. Children in the African perspective belong to the extended family, and the entire community takes care of them both physically and psychologically (Mbhele, 2018). The phenomenon of absent fatherhood affects both the family and the broader society, as Bowen (1976) stated that the emotional problems in the family were similar to the emotional problems in the society. Children with absent fathers experience social fatherhood from their extended family members and other members of society at large. From a family systems perspective, a fatherhood role is not only limited to close family members, as it also includes other father figures in the larger society. All institutions, structures, establishments and community members must take on the responsibility of providing the child with the best possible outcomes for it truly takes a village to raise a child (Payne, 2009). Doiron and Lees (2009) added that all members of the community share some responsibility for raising children. The concept of societal regression proceeds in logical steps from the family to larger social groups and then to

whole society (Bowen, 1976). Some children of absent fathers experience social fatherhood from members of their communities and society at large. The next sub-theme dealt with the resilience of adolescents with absent fathers.

5.3.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Resilience of adolescents with absent fathers

The absence of the father undermines the available support system to a family, which would otherwise be useful for coping with difficult situations when they arise (Harvey, 2021). Zulu (2019) highlighted that resilience amongst youth is largely demonstrated by their ability to accept life hardships and view those hardships as learning life experiences. The current study found that some adolescents who grew up in father-absent homes resorted to being resilient as their strategy for coping with having an absent father. An adolescent participant attributed her resilience to the support she was receiving at home.

*“Because at home, I am well taken care of, I don’t think about him. In terms of academic performance, I perform well. It doesn’t affect me in a negative way”
(Participant, 12).*

The views expressed by the participant above concur with Mosholi’s (2015) assertion that the majority of children who grow up in absent-father homes experience having a strong support system such as mothers, other family members and the community, and that gave them the strength to pursue their ambitions in life. During an absent fatherhood crisis, a strong connection can be formed within the family system between the remaining parent and children due to reliance on one another (Stent, 2014). This will result in resilience by the remaining members of the family system, whereby they are not negatively impacted by the gap left by the absent father who is a missing part of the family system. However, the resilience expressed by the participant above is in contradiction with Qureshi and Ahmad’s (2014) finding that the absence of a father causes a severe decrease in academic performance. The findings by Oseko (2018) that students from father-absent families perform poorly in school, as compared to their

counterparts from intact homes, contradict the current study's findings. Most of the participants in a study by Zulu (2019), which was about resilience in black women who do not have fathers, portrayed themselves to be content with the identity and resources they were afforded by their mothers and did not feel the lack of having an absent father. A participant who made peace with her father's absence added:

"My father's absence doesn't affect me in a negative way. There is enough support at home. I am well taken care of. I used to think of him while I was still in primary school. Now it no longer affects me. I made peace with my father's absence. I just forget about him. I don't want to bother myself" (Participant, 16).

Despite the unpleasant emotional experience that they expressed of having an absent father and the effect it may have had on them, participants in a study by Mhlongo (2019) showed great resilience, and they continued to lead normal lives. Gerrand and Nduna (2021) interpreted 'forgetting about a father' as a form of emotional suppression. For two other adolescent participants, their strategy for coping with an absent father situation was in terms of playing with their peers. They have stated:

"I enjoy playing with other children. I am enjoying, and I don't like thinking about my father because I don't know him" (Participant, 10).

"I forget the situation by always playing with the other children. I play soccer" (Participant, 15).

This finding validates Louw's (2018) claim that other factors that contribute to resilience are friendships at school and adolescents' involvement in extramural activities. Mhlongo (2019) found that the participants had several strategies that they use to cope with the absence of their fathers, such as playing soccer, art-work, singing and doing school work. Furthermore, Mhlongo (2019) indicated that, according to these participants, the strategies help them not to think too much about the fact that they do not have fathers. Single mothers often rely heavily on extended family to help them raise their children (Louw, 2018). During destructive

challenges, resilient youth who do not have fathers can triumph (Zulu, 2019). Nordien-Lagardien et al. (2021) indicated that all systems undergo change, which influences the functioning of the system, which then tries to regain a sense of equilibrium. Resilient family members try to maintain a balance in the family system in the absence of the father. A basic tenet of FST is that the removal of one member of the family requires considerable adaptation throughout the system to compensate for this loss (Stent, 2014). Adolescent children in this study adapted to moving on with life without their fathers in their family systems. People whose intellectual functioning can maintain relative autonomy in periods of stress are more adaptable and more independent of their emotionality about them (Bowen, 1976). Papero (2000) highlighted that people with better degrees of differentiation correspondingly display greater resiliency in the face of anxiety, maintaining enhanced capacities for functioning that are simply unavailable to the less-differentiated person. It can be concluded that adolescents who experience absent fatherhood and can function with resilience are well differentiated in terms of the BFST. The next theme explored the challenges faced by adolescents with absent fathers.

5.3.5 Theme 5: Challenges faced by adolescents with absent fathers

Austin (2020) stated that high rates of intergenerational father absenteeism through a divorce, out-of-wedlock child bearing, incarceration and other issues leave children at a disadvantage in many ways. Also, Austin (2020) concluded that father absenteeism has an undeniable negative impact on a child's growth, development and potentiality. The relationship quality of non-resident fathers and children's primary caregivers seemed to underpin narratives about men's involvement in children's lives (Arditti, 2019). Sikweyiya et al. (2016) indicated that young people who grow up with absent fathers tend to be treated differently in their maternal homes, or often suffer physical, sexual and emotional abuse perpetrated by significant people in their lives. Some participants reported that the absence of their fathers was due to the interference of relatives and family members who prevented them from having contact with

their fathers, thus cutting them off. Adolescents in this study highlighted the painful experience of having an absent father, how this problem affected them psychologically and financially. This theme was then presented in three sub-themes: the painful experience of having an absent father, the psychological impact of absent fathers on adolescents and financial deprivation.

5.3.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Painful experience of having an absent father

There is a generalised acknowledgement that the children of absentee fathers are vulnerable to experiencing an array of suffering (Austin, 2020). Penboon et al. (2019) stated that pro-social behavioural problems are likely to be experienced by children whose fathers have been away for more than one year. This study found that adolescents had a painful experience of having absent fathers. All the adolescent participants provided different expressions of how they were pained for not being raised by their fathers. They also admired their peers who had involved fathers. One participant who was taken care of by his maternal grandmother provided the following expression:

“It is difficult. My grandmother sometimes does not have money. Whenever she receives her old age grant, the money covers the debts. She is unable to buy me what I want. The situation is painful. My granny is unable to provide for all our basic needs. Whenever my friends talk about their fathers, I keep quiet, and they say I am quiet because I don’t know my father. It makes me feel sad” (Participant, 14).

The above expression concurs with Harvey’s (2021) finding that stigma, shame and spitefulness are experiences likely to be associated with the state of being abandoned. Sekgale (2017) reported that children with absent fathers experience emotional problems. Bowen theorised that the emotional experiences and emotional dynamics of the family of origin are central to determining the individual’s level of differentiation of self (Calatrava et al., 2022). The key principle of FST is that a change in one part of the family system affects the whole system (Manthosi, 2020). In the context of this study's findings, a father whose absence

represents a change in the family system results in children's painful experiences of his absence. Other participants in this study narrated their painful experience of absent fatherhood as follows:

"I am not feeling okay when I am not staying with my father. I always hear other children talking about going to the mall with their fathers, and it makes me not feel okay. Other children wear 'magama' (expensive clothes), and I don't have one. Sometimes at school, other children talk about their fathers...even my friends say their fathers bought them clothes and gave them R100-00. Other children from next door sometimes speak about their fathers coming back with some presents. They also have big phones and I don't have one. My peers ask me when my father will come back and what he will bring to me, and when I leave them, they laugh at me. Another woman from our community, when we play with her kids and they go home crying, she comes and tells me that it is because I don't know my father". (Participant 11).

"It doesn't feel okay for the family because my father is not there, and I don't know him. All of us don't know him, and we never saw him. I ask myself why other children have their fathers, and I don't have mine". (Participant 12).

Some adolescent participants voiced their experiences of being stigmatised by their peers and other members of the community for not knowing their fathers. Others expressed feelings of abandonment by their fathers. About experiences, many participants in a study by Osinga et al. (2021) had emotional pain and missed their fathers, as they also related their father's absence to a variety of difficulties they met in their lives. Similarly, the participants in a study by Mhlongo (2019) expressed that they felt inferior to their peers because they saw that they were unable to get what their peers from father-present families were getting. Because families are interconnected, it is appropriate to view the system as a whole rather than as individual elements (Chukwudi & Nwokwule, 2022). Father absence from the family system is experienced painfully by his children, as Bowen (1976) stated that members of the family are emotionally interconnected. When the emotional interconnectedness between the adolescent

and the father is challenged by the absence of the father in the family system, it results in the adolescents' painful experiences. Father absence left some participants emotionally wounded, as they felt lost, unloved, hurt, rejected and betrayed by their unreliable fathers (Makofane, 2015). Participants added their views of their painful experiences of growing up in father-absent families:

“My father does not support me. When I sleep and when I wake up, I think about him. I think about calling him, and he is not there; it is painful. One day, he will come when I am old, and I will ask him why he did not support me since I was young ... you now come to me when I am older and now working”. (Participant, 13).

“My father’s absence affects me in a bad way. I think he doesn’t care about me. I did not grow well because I don’t know my father”. (Participant, 15).

This study found that some of the adolescent participants who grow up with the painful experience of having an absent father had questions about their fathers. This finding is supported by a letter from Josh McCumber titled “letter to my absent father” which was published on the Good Man Project. In his letter, Josh provided the following expression:

“I had a lot of questions and judgemental thoughts that ran through my mind, especially when Father’s Day came. In my twenties, I tried to be very busy on Father’s Day because if I stopped and thought about it, I could bring myself to tears with questions of ‘why?’”.

Some of the adolescents in this study thought their fathers did not care about them. Father absence had negative consequences on the adolescent participants, as they narrated their painful experiences. The next sub-theme focused on the psychological impact of absent fathers on adolescents.

5.3.5.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Psychological impact of absent fathers on adolescents

The psychological well-being of adolescents raised in father-absent families is compromised when they are denied of paternal involvement (Iretor-Oscar et al., 2021). Pitsoane and Gasa

(2018) believe that the lack of a warm and positive relationship with the father is associated with an increased risk of behavioural or emotional problems. This study found that some adolescents suppress their emotions towards their absent fathers. An adolescent participant provided the following expression:

“I just forget about my father. I don’t want to bother myself” (Participant, 16).

This adolescent’s response showed that she did not want to bother herself with negative emotions associated with thinking about her absent father. Trying to ‘forget’ negative emotions related to the father absence can be interpreted as a form of emotion suppression (Gerrand & Nduna, 2021). The psychological distress was mostly experienced when the fathers could not perform any of their parental roles (Magqamfana, 2019). Stigmatisation was identified by the current study as one of the psychological challenges which affected adolescents whose fathers are absent from their lives. This was evident through the views of adolescents who experienced stigma perpetuated by their peers at school.

“Other children at school tease me about not knowing who my father is” (Participant, 9).

“Other children when their fathers are back side-line me from playing with them. I remain alone, and it makes me wish if my father were here” (Participant, 11).

The experience of being stigmatised has a negative psychological impact on the adolescents. The findings of this study are supported by Denov and Piolanti (2020) who reported that participants highlighted that father absence represented a negative factor that was related to peer isolation, economic marginalisation and stigma. For another adolescent participant in this study, not knowing the father brought feelings of pain and sadness.

“I am not happy because other children know their fathers, and I don’t know my father” (Participant, 14).

This finding highlighted that children from absent-father families feel unhappy when they compare themselves with their peers from both parents' families. The findings of the current study corroborated with Mhlongo's (2019) claim that the participants felt unhappy, inferior and worthless. Sometimes children socially isolate themselves and develop emotional problems (Pitsoane, 2014). Witnessing other children receiving love and care from their fathers was a painful reminder for some adolescents about their absent father situation. This was evident when another adolescent provided the following expression:

"I am struggling. Whenever I write at school, I think about him. My heart feels pain when other children's fathers come to our school to collect their reports. I am not enjoying because I feel pain when other children hug their fathers" (Participant, 10).

This adolescent's painful experience was triggered by the admiration of his peers who are cared for by their biological fathers. In terms of the family systems theory, members of a family do not function in isolation from one another, as they are believed to operate as a system. Therefore, the adolescents' painful experience of their fathers' absence can also impact on other members of the family. The findings of this study highlighted how the problem of absent fatherhood impacts on the self-esteem of adolescents, as they compare themselves with their peers whose fathers are present and thought of them to be experiencing better than they are. The findings of Mhlongo (2019) suggested that the self-esteem of adolescents is negatively influenced by the absence of fathers. FST believes that members of a family are psychologically connected (Detmer & Lamberti, 1991). Therefore, the impairment in one part of the system affects the whole system psychologically. In the context of this study, the remaining members of a family system are psychologically connected to a father whose absence has negative psychological effects on them, especially his children. It is clear from the findings of this study that the absence of biological fathers from the lives of their children

affects the psychological well-being of their children. Besides, financial deprivation is a further challenge experienced by adolescents growing up without a father as discussed next.

5.3.5.3. Sub-theme 5.3: Financial deprivation

Molongoana (2015) stated that financial deprivation is among the common reasons for the father absence in South Africa. The prevalence of financial constraints occurs because of the absence of a father in the household (Mbhele, 2018). With the majority of adolescent participants having associated their father's role with that of a provider, it is unsurprising that this study found that most of them listed financial deprivation as one of the challenges of growing up in absent-father households. They related the difficulties they encountered because of their fathers' absence and also wished their fathers were there to provide them with financial and material resources. Another participant highlighted how the family's financial responsibility was a burden to a single parent, particularly the mother.

“Father absence is not okay. My mother is unable to buy us the things that we want. Sometimes we only eat food at school. We wouldn't be suffering this way if we had both parents. One parent cannot manage all the responsibilities alone” (Participant, 9).

The finding that this participant only ate food at school echoed Oseko's (2018) assertion that economic hardships can lower food consumption, affecting children's nutrition and health. Crouch (2018) supported this finding by stating that one of the most difficult and common stressors of being a single mother is experiencing ongoing financial hardships. Other participants added:

“My grandmother is our sole provider at home with the income she receives from her old age grant. My mother is unemployed” (Participant, 14).

“At home, they were talking about my father that if he were there, he was going to take care of me. I wish he was around and taking care of me like other children who have fathers” (Participant, 15).

In support of this finding, participants in a study by Mhlongo (2019) indicated that they had difficulties in having their needs met, as they felt that they struggled because their fathers were not contributing to their financial wellbeing. The absence of a father to provide for the family exacerbates the hardships felt by family members (Phasha, 2021).

“My grandmother sometimes says my mother should find a man who should take care of the family and children” (Participant, 11).

It is evident from the above excerpt that the father’s absence results in financial deprivation, which does not affect only the child but also the family as a whole. This is precisely why FST considers a problem for one family member to be a problem for the whole family. Financial deprivation for the child as a result of the father’s absence might result in reconsideration of roles for the members of the family system, as the mother often goes to look for employment to provide for the child’s needs, leaving childcare roles with other extended family members. The mother assumes a provider’s role which is a gap left by an absent father to maintain the equilibrium in the family system. The role of the father as a provider in the family diminishes due to his absence, thereby leading to negative consequences for the children and the low-income status of the family (Phasha, 2021). Another participant who experienced financial deprivation as a result of her father’s absence expressed how she admired her peers who were taken care of by their fathers.

“I admire other children who say their fathers have bought them presents” (Participant, 12).

An absent father means absent opportunities for children globally (Austin, 2020). Alongside the emotional challenges that the absence of a father brought forth, Denov and Piolanti (2020), the youth reported to be facing socio-economic challenges. The father’s absence may lead to a lower household income (TenEyck et al., 2021). Harvey (2021) concurred by stating that one of the major effects of a father absence is the decrease in the volume of resources available

within the family setting. Absent father families have to manage their income closely, also drawing on extended support networks to ensure that their basic physical needs are met (Louw, 2018).

5.4 CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study covered the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children who grew up in absent-father families. The findings indicated that the participants worried about parental separation and father abandonment as causes of absent fatherhood. Some adolescent participants wished their parents could forgive one another and resolve their conflicts. Others felt that their fathers had abandoned them. In their constructions of fatherhood, the participants in this study described the role of a father as a provider, a disciplinarian and a role model. Most absent fathers provided their perceptions of regret and guilt for not being involved in the lives of their children. Maternal gatekeeping and unemployment were found to be the main factors that influenced absent fathers not to be involved in their children's lives. A few fathers who participated in this study were uninvolved in their children's lives as a result of their choice. Despite their feelings of being abandoned by their fathers, the findings suggested that adolescent children from absent-father families desired for their father's presence. Most of them admired their counterparts who had involved fathers, and they wished their biological fathers to be involved in their lives. The study findings also highlighted the importance of social fathers in the lives of children with absent fathers, as most of the adolescent participants reported that they were being cared for by other male figures in their maternal families. The adolescents had painful experiences of their fathers' absence, and some of them believed that their situations could be improved if their biological fathers were not absent. Financial deprivation was cited by the participants as one of the major challenges of growing up in the absence of their fathers. The findings indicated that the families of children with absent fathers struggled to meet the basic needs of children in the absence of their

biological fathers. Whereas absent fatherhood had negative effects on the adolescent participants, some of them adopted resilience as their coping mechanism.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this chapter was to provide a summary of the whole study, including the conclusions of the findings. This chapter also provided recommendations to practitioners, government and for future research. This study aimed to explore the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding the phenomenon of absent fatherhood. The research question was answered through the use of qualitative research methodology which allowed the researcher to identify issues from the perspectives of the study participants and understand the meanings and interpretations that they gave to behaviour, events or objects (Hennink et al., 2020). The study findings were presented and extensively discussed in the Chapter Five, where the research question was also answered. This chapter also presented a summary of the five themes which emerged during data analysis. The conclusions of this study were based on correlating the aim, objectives, methodology and findings and assessing whether these were reached.

The study had the following objectives:

- To explore the perceptions of absent fathers and adolescents on absent fatherhood.
- To explore the factors that lead fathers to be absent from their children's lives.
- To explore the experiences and challenges faced by adolescent children with absent fathers.

Data were collected from the participants through the use of semi-structured interviews after which they (data) were processed through the thematic data analysis method. Theory and literature were utilised to correlate, corroborate, substantiate and contrast the study findings.

The study was guided by the main research question: *What are the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood?*

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This section provided a brief account of each chapter. The chapters were discussed in detail in the previous sections and here, only the summary of those chapters was provided.

6.2.1 Chapter 1: Introduction of the study

The first chapter discussed the introduction and background of the study. The problem statement which informed this study, the research question, aim, objectives of the study and the methodology utilised were discussed in this chapter.

6.2.2 Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

Chapter Two outlined in detail the theoretical framework that underpinned this study. The study was guided by Bowen family systems theory. Out of the eight concepts of the BFST, only seven concepts (except the sibling position concept) were utilised, as they were relevant to this study.

6.2.3 Chapter 3: Literature review

Chapter Three reviewed the available literature related to this study topic. This chapter included a detailed discussion of the aspects of fatherhood and absent fatherhood. The detailed discussion of the available literature relating to the study topic guided this study to explore the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding the phenomenon of absent fatherhood.

6.2.4 Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter outlined in detail the methodological approach used in this study. A qualitative approach with an explorative and descriptive research design was chosen in relation to the aim

and objectives of the study. Furthermore, this chapter covered the snowball and purposive sampling procedures which were utilised to source absent fathers and adolescent participants. Chapter Four also outlined data analysis steps by Braun and Clarke (2006), Lincoln and Guba's (1999) steps of data verification and trustworthiness and also, the ethical principles.

6.2.5 Chapter 5: Presentation and discussion of the findings

Chapter Five discussed and presented the findings of the study. This chapter provided an understanding of the demographics of the participants and the major themes that were evident in the findings. The findings of this study were presented based on five themes that emerged during data analysis: perceived causes of absent fatherhood, constructions of fatherhood, factors influencing father's absence, adolescents' experiences of absent fatherhood and challenges faced by adolescents with absent fathers. A brief synopsis of the key aspects of the themes was provided below.

6.2.5.1 Theme 1: Perceived causes of absent fatherhood

The findings of this study revealed the importance of fathers having to maintain a good relationship with the children's mothers post-separation to enhance their involvement in the children's lives. This theme was divided into two sub-themes namely: parental separation and father abandonment. In terms of parental separation: the nature of the separation between the child's mother and father affects the father's involvement in the life of the child, as this study found that separation characterised by fights is a contributory factor to absent fatherhood. In terms of father abandonment: the findings of this study revealed that adolescents who grow up without the involvement of their biological fathers perceived the lack of involvement by the fathers as abandonment, although most adolescents were willing to forgive their fathers for abandoning them.

6.2.5.2 Theme 2: Constructions of fatherhood

The findings of this study indicated how the participants still held the traditional perceptions of the role of a father through their emphasis on the provider's role of the father. This theme was explored in four sub-themes. Perceptions of fathers as providers: all the participants prioritised the provider's role of a father as being the most important one. Fathers as disciplinarians and protectors: fathers are still viewed as authority figures within families whose role is to instil discipline in children and to protect them. Fathers as role models: the participants provided their perceptions of the role of a father as a role model from whom the children should receive guidance in terms of how to conduct themselves. Absent fathers' perceptions their absence: the study found that feelings of pain, guilt, failure and regret were shared by most absent fathers in their perceptions about their absence. The findings highlighted how the fathers are not coping well with the issue of not being involved in their children's lives.

6.2.5.3 Theme 3: Factors influencing fathers' absence

In many factors which contribute to fathers being absent from their children's lives, this study found maternal gatekeeping, fathers' choice not to be involved in their children's lives and unemployment as factors that led fathers to be absent from their children's lives. Therefore, this theme was described in three sub-themes namely: maternal alienation/gatekeeping, fathers' choice not to be involved in their children's lives and unemployment. Maternal alienation/gatekeeping: the findings of this study indicated that most fathers were prevented by the children's mothers and some members of the maternal families from being involved in the lives of their children. This study concluded that maternal gatekeeping is exacerbated by men's lack of knowledge about their rights and responsibilities in terms of legislation which promotes their involvement in the lives of the children. Fathers' choice not to be involved in their children's lives: whereas most absent fathers yearn to be involved in their children's lives, the finding of this study showed that some fathers made choices not to be involved in their

children's lives. These fathers had thus given up pursuing their involvement in their children's lives, and some of them hoped that in the future, their children would come and look for them. Unemployment: the findings of this study revealed that for most absent father participants, unemployment and their inability to provide financially for their children resulted in them being absent from their children's lives.

6.2.5.4 Theme 4: Adolescents' experiences of absent fatherhood

This theme was presented through the following subthemes: Desire for a father's presence: the study found that the adolescents who grew up in absent-father homes yearned for their biological fathers' presence in their lives and to experience his love, as all adolescent participants indicated that they wished their fathers were involved in their lives so that they could provide for their basic needs. Adolescents' experiences of social fatherhood: although most of the adolescents grew up in the absence of their biological fathers experienced social fatherhood from their maternal uncles, step-fathers and other father figures in their communities, the findings of this study indicated that the adolescent participants desired for the presence of their biological fathers in their lives. The resilience of adolescents with absent fathers: the phenomenon of absent fatherhood has negative consequences, and for some adolescent participants who took part in this study, the findings indicated that they resorted to resilience as their coping strategy for having an absent father.

6.2.5.5 Theme 5: Challenges faced by adolescents with absent fathers

The last theme aimed to explore the challenges faced by adolescents with absent fathers, and it was presented in three sub-themes, which were: the painful experience of having an absent father, the psychological impact of absent fathers on adolescents and financial deprivation. The painful experience of having an absent father: the adolescent participants described their feeling of pain as a result of having an absent father and how they admired their peers who had

involved fathers. The psychological impact of absent fathers on adolescents: absent fatherhood was found to have negative psychological effects on adolescents, as the findings indicated that some of them experienced stigma from their peers and other members of their communities for not knowing their biological fathers. Also, the findings indicated that the adolescents with absent fathers were characterised by feelings of inferiority when they compared themselves with their peers who had involved fathers, thus affecting their self-esteem. Financial deprivation: this study found that most adolescents had listed financial deprivation as one of the challenges of growing up in absent-father families, as they had previously associated the role of a father to be the provider. The adolescents believed that they were not going to experience financial deprivation if their fathers were involved in their lives, as they were going to financially contribute towards their basic needs.

6.2.6 Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

Chapter Six provided the conclusions based on the study findings and also made several recommendations.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations comprised of three categories: practitioners, government and future research that can provide interventions to absent fathers, adolescent children and their families.

6.3.1 Recommendations to practitioners working with absent fathers, adolescents and their families

- The practitioners should raise more awareness that promotes the rights and responsibilities of fathers, as this study highlighted that most absent fathers were not knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities in terms of the Children's Act. This will enable fathers to be aware and have access to father-involvement interventions, such as applying for parenting plan agreements.

- Render parenting skills programmes that actively involve fathers and assign them tasks that they have to fulfil.
- Discourage gatekeeping practices by those having custody of the child, as it is not in the best interests of the children for the fathers to be prevented from having contact with them.
- Render unbiased services guided by the best interests of the child, especially when dealing with cases involving custody battles between the parents.
- Practitioners should provide behavioral programmes targeting adolescents with absent fathers to equip them with life skills that will enable them to be resilient to social problems associated with not having an involved father.
- Practitioners should engage absent fathers on how to be involved fathers in their children's lives.

6.3.2 Recommendations to Government and policymakers

- The government should support community intervention programmes that are aimed at promoting fatherhood and the involvement of fathers in their children's lives, especially by providing funding to NGOs that are providing such interventions.
- Intensify the awareness to familiarise the people with legislative interventions which promote father involvement, such as the parenting plan agreements.
- Provide the services of the Family Advocate at a local level, as most of these offices are currently based at a provincial level, which makes it difficult for people in villages and townships to attend hearings at such offices.
- Develop a standardised paternity leave policy for at least 30 days which will be implemented in all employment sectors to encourage fathers to be involved in their children's lives from the early days and beyond.

- Develop interventions that will encourage the involvement of fathers in their children's lives at school and in the healthcare facilities.
- Promote care and contact of the children concurrently with the enforcement of child maintenance. This will ensure that fathers who contribute towards the maintenance of their children financially are also encouraged to exercise their parental rights and responsibilities.

6.3.3 Recommendations for future research

- Future research should focus on developing guidelines for father-involvement interventions.
- Research should evaluate the existing fatherhood intervention strategies which promote father involvement and the effectiveness of such interventions.
- Future research should develop intervention strategies to mitigate maternal gatekeeping.
- Research should engage fathers and promote their other fatherhood roles other than being providers. This will enable fathers to take seriously their other roles than being solely material providers to children.

6.4 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study guided the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding the absent fatherhood phenomenon. The overall findings of this study highlighted that the experience of absent fatherhood is characterised by painful feelings for both the absent fathers and the adolescents. This chapter outlined the synopsis and conclusions of the previous chapters. The study concluded by making recommendations to practitioners working with absent fathers, adolescent children and government and policy developers, as well as recommendations to be considered by future research. The study

achieved its aim and objectives by sufficiently exploring the research question through the use of a qualitative methodological approach.

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APPENDIX A



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INFORMATION SHEET (ABSENT FATHERS)

Project Title: The phenomenon of absent fatherhood: perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children.

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Witness Moila at the University of the Western Cape. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you have expertise and experience in the field. The purpose of this research project is to explore the perceptions, experiences, and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to fill in the agreement form for the interview and use of audiotape prior to conducting the interview. You will be asked to respond to the interview questions in the way you understand them. The interview will take about 30 to 60 minutes. A venue in the community where you are residing will be used as a site for the study. The questions for the interview are what are the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood?

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researcher undertakes to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, thus your name will not be included for any purpose in this research project. A code will be used to differentiate different transcriptions of participants. Only the researcher will be able to link your identity and will have access to the identification key, especially for the information verification. To ensure your confidentiality, the interviews will be copied to a computer immediately afterwards and deleted from the audiotape. The interviews will be kept in the password-protected folder which will be known to the researcher only. The transcriptions will be identified with codes and stored in the lockable filing cabinet, personal to the researcher. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the highest.

What are the risks of this research?

There may be some risks to participating in this research study. The risks may include psychological, social, emotional, and legal risks. There might also be risks that are currently unforeseeable as all human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless minimize such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this

study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of the absent fatherhood phenomenon.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

All possible precautions will be taken to protect you from experiencing any harm from the research process. If however, you are or feel that you are being negatively affected by this research suitable assistance will be sought for you at the University of the Western Cape.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Witness Moila in the Social Work Department at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Witness Moila at 0793407166 or 4114028@myuwc.ac.za. Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Head of Department: Prof S Savahl The Centre of Interdisciplinary Studies of Children, Families and Society ssavahl@uwc.ac.za 021 9593674	Dean: Faculty of Community and Health Sciences: Prof Anthea Rhoda University of the Western Cape Private Bag X17 Bellville 7535 chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za	UWC Research Office research-ethics@uwc.ac.za 021 959 2988
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APPENDIX B



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INFORMATION SHEET (MOTHERS/GUARDIANS)

Project Title: The phenomenon of absent fatherhood: perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children.

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Witness Moila at the University of the Western Cape. I am inviting your child to participate in this research project because he/she has expertise and experience in the field. The purpose of this research project is to explore the perceptions, experiences, and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood.

What will my child be asked to do if I agree for him/her to participate?

You will be asked to fill in the agreement form for your child to form part in the interview and use of audiotape prior to conducting the interview. Your child will be asked to respond to the interview questions in the way he/she understands them. The interview will take about 30 to 60 minutes. A Drop-In Center where your child receives services will be used as a site for the study. The questions for the interview are what are the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood?

Would my child's participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researcher undertakes to protect your child's identity and the nature of his/her contribution. To ensure your child's anonymity, thus your child's name will not be included for any purpose in this research project. A code will be used to differentiate different transcriptions of participants. Only the researcher will be able to link your child's identity and will have access to the identification key, especially for the information verification. To ensure your child's confidentiality, the interviews will be copied to a computer immediately afterwards and deleted from the audiotape. The interviews will be kept in the password-protected folder which will be known to the researcher only. The transcriptions will be identified with codes and stored in the lockable filing cabinet, personal to the researcher. If we write a report or article about this research project, your child's identity will be protected to the highest.

What are the risks of this research?

There may be some risks to participating in this research study. The risks may include psychological, social, emotional, and legal risks. There might also be risks that are currently unforeseeable as all human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless minimize such risks and act promptly to assist your child if he/she experiences any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of his/her participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help your child personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of the absent fatherhood phenomenon.

Does my child have to be in this research and may he/she stop participating at any time?

Your child’s participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose that your child should not take part at all. If you decide that your child should participate in this research, your child may stop participating at any time. If you decide that your child should not participate in this study or if he/she stops participating at any time, your child will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which he/she otherwise qualifies.

Is any assistance available if my child is negatively affected by participating in this study?

All possible precautions will be taken to protect your child from experiencing any harm from the research process. If however, your child is or feels that he/she is being negatively affected by this research, suitable assistance will be sought for your child at the University of the Western Cape.

What if I have questions?

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APPENDIX C



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INFORMATION SHEET (ADOLESCENTS)

Project Title: The phenomenon of absent fatherhood: perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children.

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Witness Moila at the University of the Western Cape. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you have expertise and experience in the field. The purpose of this research project is to explore the perceptions, experiences, and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to fill in the assent form for the interview and use of audiotape prior to conducting the interview. You will be asked to respond to the interview questions in the way you understand them. The interview will take about 30 to 60 minutes. A Drop-In Center where you receive services will be used as a site for the study. The questions for the interview are what are the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood?

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researcher undertakes to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, thus your name will not be included for any purpose in this research project. A code will be used to differentiate different transcriptions of participants. Only the researcher will be able to link your identity and will have access to the identification key, especially for the information verification. To ensure your confidentiality, the interviews will be copied to a computer immediately afterwards and deleted from the audiotape. The interviews will be kept in the password-protected folder which will be known to the researcher only. The transcriptions will be identified with codes and stored in the lockable filing cabinet, personal to the researcher. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the highest.

What are the risks of this research?

There may be some risks to participating in this research study. The risks may include psychological, social, emotional, and legal risks. There might also be risks that are currently unforeseeable as all human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless minimize such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this

study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of the absent fatherhood phenomenon.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

All possible precautions will be taken to protect you from experiencing any harm from the research process. If however, you are or feel that you are being negatively affected by this research suitable assistance will be sought for you at the University of the Western Cape.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Witness Moila in the Social Work Department at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Witness Moila at 0793407166 or 4114028@myuwc.ac.za. Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

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APPENDIX D



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CONSENT FORM (ABSENT FATHERS)

Title of Research Project: The phenomenon of absent fatherhood: Perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children

The study has been described to me in a language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

_____ I agree to be audio-taped during my participation in the study.

_____ I do not agree to be audio-taped during my participation in this study.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Date.....

HSSREC: 021 9592988 / research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

APPENDIX E



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CONSENT FORM (MOTHERS/GUARDIANS)

Title of Research Project: The phenomenon of absent fatherhood: Perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children

The study has been described to me in a language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my child's participation will involve and I agree to participate of my choice and free will that my child should participate in the study. I understand that my child's identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that my child may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

_____ I agree for my child to be audio-taped during his/her participation in the study.

_____ I do not agree for my child to be audio-taped during his/her participation in this study.

Parent/Guardian's name.....

Parent/Guardian's signature.....

Date.....

HSSREC: 021 9592988 / research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

APPENDIX F



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ASSENT FORM (ADOLESCENTS)

Title of Research Project: The phenomenon of absent fatherhood: Perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers, and adolescent children

The study has been described to me in a language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

_____ I agree to be audio-taped during my participation in the study.

_____ I do not agree to be audio-taped during my participation in this study.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Date.....

HSSREC: 021 9592988 / research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW GUIDE (ABSENT FATHERS)

Biographic information of participants

- Gender
- Age
- Language
- Location
- Employment status
- Duration of separation from the child

Major research questions	Probes
1. What are the perceptions of absent fathers regarding absent fatherhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you understand about the phenomenon of absent fatherhood? • Do you feel like absent fatherhood applies to your situation? • What does fatherhood mean to you? • What role should a father play within the family? • What role has your father played in your upbringing? • Who should be responsible for assisting the child with daily activities? • What is your knowledge of the parental rights and responsibilities of fathers? • What are the causes of absent fatherhood? • How can the problem of absent fatherhood be prevented?
2. What are the experiences of absent fathers regarding absent fatherhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your reasons for being an absent father? • Why have you become an absent father? • How are you feeling about being absent from your child's life? • How has your relationship with your father influenced you as a father? • What is the influence of your financial status on you being an absent father? • What attempts have you made to be involved in your child's life? • How are you coping with being an absent father? • What do you think your child(ren) experienced with you not being present?
3. What are the challenges of absent fathers regarding absent fatherhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has being absent from your child's life affected you? • How do you think your absence has influenced the development and well-being of your child(ren)? • What are the barriers preventing you from being involved in your child's life?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your knowledge of legislation which fosters the involvement of fathers in their children's lives?
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APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW GUIDE (ADOLESCENTS)

Biographic information of participants

- Gender
- Age
- Language
- Name of Drop-In Centre
- School grade
- Duration of separation from the father

Major research questions	Probes
1. What are the perceptions of adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your definition of an absent father? • What is your understanding of fatherhood? • What is your knowledge of a father's role towards his children? • What are your feelings towards your father? • What are the causes of absent fatherhood? • How can the problem of absent fatherhood be prevented?
2. What are the experiences of adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the experience of growing up without the involvement of your father? • How has your father's absence affected your family's financial situation? • Who plays a father figure role in your life, and how is he/she helpful to you? • Describe the moment in your life when you felt that you needed the presence of your biological father. • How do you think the absence of your father has influenced your development and well-being? • What is your coping strategy to deal with the problem of absent fatherhood? • What other experience can you tell me about?
3. What are the challenges of adolescent children regarding absent fatherhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the absence of your father affected the functioning of your family? • What is the impact of your father's absenteeism on your academic performance? • How has your father absence affected your self-esteem? • What other challenges do you experience as a result of your father not being present?

APPENDIX I



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE



27 August 2021

Mr W Moila
Social Work
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

HSSREC Reference Number: HS21/6/18

Project Title: The phenomenon of absent fatherhood: Perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children

Approval Period: 27 August 2021 – 27 August 2024

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit a progress report by 30 November each year for the duration of the project.

The permission to conduct the study must be submitted to HSSREC for record keeping purposes.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse events and/or termination of the study.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Josias'.

*Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape*

NHREC Registration Number: HSSREC-130416-049

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FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

APPENDIX J
PERMISSION LETTER (MAPHOSA DIC)

MAPHOSA DROP IN CENTRE



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TAX REF NO: 9276237220
PBO REF NO: 930073705**

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MOLEMOLE MUNICIPALITY
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WEB: www.maphosadropincentrenpo.co.za

THE VISION OF OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE IS IN OUR HANDS

To: Mr W Moila
Student (UWC)
Date 06 September 2021

Approval Letter for data collection

Dear Mr Moila.

This serves as our approval to your request to conduct a study with the children at our institution. You are kindly requested to make further arrangements in terms of dates and times which will be convenient for you to conduct the interviews with the children.

Hope this approval letter find you well.

Regards.

Mailula S.J
Manager: Maphosa D.I.C
Cell: 0763272916
Email: smailula05@gmail.com

MAPHOSA DROP IN CENTRE
CELL: 076 327 2916 / 076 123 4369
REGISTRATION No. 174-704
DATE: 06-09-2021

APPENDIX K
PERMISSION LETTER (HOPE DIC)

HOPE DROPPING CENTRE

From: Matsie Mabusha

Position: Administrator

Stand no: 88

Matseke Section

Botlokwa

0812

To: Mr W Moila

University of the Western Cape

APPROVAL LETTER FOR DATA COLLECTION

Dear Mr Moila.

I have reviewed your request that you made on 10th September 2021 for the data collection in our organization. Your request is granted.

I went through your question which are full of information, one will be able to gain knowledge from your data collection. I can assure you that proper information will be given from our side. I will be pleased if our data will help you in your research work.

I will like to schedule a date and time 10 September 2021 for you. But you have to maintain some stipulation such as e.g results must be shared with us, all information provided from our side will be treated as confidentially and pure for academic purposes and so forth. Hope you will comply with our rules and regulations and will not misuse our data. If you have any queries regarding this approval letter you can contact me.

Active co-operation is highly solicited.

Matsie Mabusha

Signature : M.P. Mabusha

HOPE DROP IN CENTRE
P.O. BOX 989
DWARS RIVER 0812

APPENDIX L
PERMISSION LETTER (BAKGALAKA DIC)

BAKGALAKA DROP IN CENTRE

P.O BOX 760
DWARSRIVER
0812
WARD 7
CAPRICORN DISTRICT

LIMPOPO PROVINCE
691 RAMATJOWE VILLAGE
BOTLOKWA (MATOKS)
MOLEMOLE MUNICIPALITY
NPO REG NO: 057-670

To: MR W MOILA
Student (UWC)
Date: 2021/09/21

Approval Letter for data collection

Dear Mr Moila

I would like to welcome you in our institution to continue with your research project, as we made agreement with their parents for their children to take part in your project. You are kindly requested to make further arrangements in terms of dates and times which will be convenient for you to conduct the interviews with the children.

Regards

Rapakwana N

Maneger: Raphadu M.T

Call: 0728052279

BAKGALAKA DROP IN CENTRE
P.O. BOX 760
DWARSRIVIER, 0812
TEL: 072 805 2279 / 063 019 7216
RAMATJOWE VILLAGE 691

APPENDIX M
EDITORIAL LETTER

Registered with the South African Translators' Institute (SATI)

Reference number 1000686

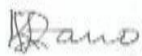
SACE REGISTERED

28 May 2023

***THE PHENOMENON OF ABSENT FATHERHOOD: PERCEPTIONS, EXPERIENCES AND
CHALLENGES OF ABSENT FATHERS AND ADOLESCENT CHILDREN***

This serves to confirm that I edited substantively the above document including a Reference list. The document was returned to the author with various tracked changes intended to correct errors and to clarify meaning. It was the author's responsibility to attend to these changes.

Yours faithfully



Dr. K. Zano

Ph.D. in English

kufazano@gmail.com/kufazano@yahoo.com

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