



The rights of child-headed households to care and protection : reflections of role players on social service delivery

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DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

Across the world, there are many children who are left behind in child-headed households by their parents due to socio-economic challenges, illness, death, or general neglect. In South Africa, children living in child-headed households not only have to cope with going through life without their caregivers; they are also vulnerable to violence, abuse, crime, and a lack of social services. However, in terms of South African legislation and international treaties, social workers must ensure that child-headed households are cared for and protected.

It was established that, in South Africa, there was no general research or research from a social work perspective on the rights of children in child-headed households to care and protection or about social services delivered to such households. This indicated that there was a possible lack of appropriate social services available to children living in child-headed households, which thus formed the topic of this study. In order to highlight the injustice, inequality, and poverty of child-headed households as well as how they are marginalised or excluded in society, the human rights-based perspective was applied in this study. This approach also served as a guide in the implementation of remedial strategies. To identify the possible services that should be rendered to child-headed households, based on the identified circumstances, the ecological systems perspective was further utilised.

With this study a qualitative research approach was applied as it was an exploratory and a descriptive study within a purposive sample selection of seventeen social workers and five social worker supervisors in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and Eastern Cape and one designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development. The primary research instrument utilised in this study and that was based on themes emerging from literature, was the semi-structured interview schedule. Ten themes were derived from the participant interviews by way of thematic analysis. These themes were then further divided into subthemes and categories.

The study revealed that children living in child-headed households were exposed to emotional difficulties and traumatic situations due to the loss of their parents, sexual abuse, and them having to assume adult responsibilities. It became clear that these children needed emotional support and nurturing households as well as counselling services. It was brought to light that other services, such as appointing adult caregivers and rendering family counselling services were difficult to deliver to these children due to social workers' high caseloads and lack of resources such as vehicles. It was also found that these children received minimal support from extended families and as a result they were socially burdened and would engage in underage drinking and smoking, drop out of school, and in the case of girls, were vulnerable

to early teenage pregnancy. It was revealed that, as these children were exposed to poverty and food deprivation and lived in inadequate shelters they needed sufficient income, sustainable food packages and adequate shelter.

It was further found that child-headed households could not be regarded as a protective measure, as this form of household did not consider the best interests of these children because many of their rights were being infringed upon. This was exacerbated due to social workers who found it increasingly difficult to deliver social services to child-headed households as these social workers were exposed to multiple challenges, such as high caseloads, staff shortages, transportation shortages and limited funding.

It is recommended that sufficient funding be provided to designated child welfare non-profit organisations and that more social workers should be employed to ensure that effective social services are delivered to children living in child-headed households. Finally, due to the grave and difficult circumstances that children of child-headed households are exposed to, there seems to be a need to revise and adapt the current legislation and consider children living in child-headed households to be children in need of care and protection in line with section 150(1) of the Children's Act of South Africa.

OPSOMMING

Dwarsoor die wêreld is daar talle kinders in huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof waar ouers weens sosio-ekonomiese uitdagings, siekte, dood, of algemene verwaarlosing nie meer teenwoordig is nie. In Suid-Afrika moet kinders in huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof, nie net hulle lewens aanpak sonder versorgers nie, hulle moet ook geweld, mishandeling, misdaad, en 'n tekort aan maatskaplike dienste hanteer. Kragtens Suid-Afrikaanse wetgewing en internasionale verdrae, moet maatskaplike werkers verseker dat huishoudings met minderjariges aan die hoof, versorg en beskerm word.

Daar is vasgestel dat, in Suid-Afrika, daar geen algemene navorsing of navorsing vanuit die perspektief van maatskaplike werkers oor die regte van kinders in huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof bestaan nie. Dit het daarop gedui dat daar 'n moontlike tekort is aan die beskikbaarheid van toepaslike maatskaplike dienste vir kinders wat in huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof daarvan woon. Die beskikbaarheid van maatskaplike dienste aan hierdie huishoudings is dus die onderwerp van hierdie studie.

Ten einde die onregverdigheid, ongelykheid, en armoede van huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof, asook tot in watter mate hulle gemarginaliseer of uitgesluit word deur die samelewing, uit te lig, is die menseregte-gebaseerde benadering in hierdie studie toegepas. Hierdie benadering het ook as gids gedien in die toepassing van remediërende strategieë. Gegrond op die omstandighede van huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof is sekere dienste wat gelewer moet word aan die hand van die ekologiese sisteemperspektief geïdentifiseer.

Aangesien die studie verkennend en beskrywend van aard was is 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering toegepas binne 'n doelgerigte steekproef van sewentien maatskaplike werkers en vyf maatskaplike werker toesighouers in Limpopo, Mpumalanga en die Oos-Kaap en een aangewese persoon van die provinsiale Departement van Maatskaplike Ontwikkeling. Die primêre navorsingsinstrument wat in die studie aangewend is, is die semi-gestruktureerde onderhoudsskedule, welke skedule op die temas van die literatuurstudie gegrond is. Tien temas is vanuit die deelnemers se onderhoude afgelei by wyse van 'n tematiese analise. Hierdie temas is verder in subtemas en kategorieë verdeel.

Die studie het aangedui dat kinders wat in huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof gewoon het, blootgestel is aan emosionele probleme en traumatiese situasies weens die verlies van hulle ouers, weens seksuele misbruik, en omdat hulle volwasse verantwoordelikhede moes aanvaar. Daar is voorts vasgestel dat hierdie kinders emosionele

ondersteuning en koesterende huishoudings sowel as beradingsdienste benodig. Dit is uitgelig dat die lewering van dienste aan hierdie kinders deur maatskaplike werkers, soos die aanstel van volwasse versorgers en gesinsberading, bemoeilik is weens maatskaplike werkers se hoë gevalleladings en 'n tekort aan hulpbronne, soos voertuie. Daar is voorts bevind dat hierdie kinders die minimum ondersteuning van hul uitgebreide families ontvang, en dat hulle gevolglik swaar dra aan maatskaplike laste wat tot gevolg het dat hulle hul sou wend tot drank en sigarette, skool sou verlaat, en in die geval van meisies, kwesbaar was vir tienerswangerskappe. Daar is onthul dat, aangesien hierdie kinders aan armoede en voedseltekort blootgestel is en in onvoldoende blyplekke gewoon het, hulle voldoende inkomste en blyplekke en volhoubare kospakkies benodig.

Daar is voorts gevind dat huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof nie beskou kan word as 'n beskermingsmaatreël nie aangesien hierdie tipe huishoudings (met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof) nie die beste belange van die kinders bevorder nie, juis omdat daar op soveel van die kinders se regte inbreuk gemaak word. Hierdie situasie word vererger weens maatskaplike werkers se toenemende onvermoë om maatskaplike dienste aan huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof te lewer omdat maatskaplike werkers verskeie uitdagings moet hanteer, soos hoë gevalleladings, tekort aan personeel, tekort aan voertuie en beperkte fondse.

Dit word aanbeveel dat voldoende befondsing aan aangewese nie-winsnemende kinderwelsyns-organisasies verskaf word en dat meer maatskaplike werkers aangestel moet word om effektiewe maatskaplike dienste aan kinders van huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof te lewer. Ten slotte, weens die ernstige en moeilike omstandighede waaraan kinders van huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof blootgestel word, moet die moontlike hersiening en aanpassing van huidige wetgewing en beleide ernstig oorweeg word, asook dat kinders van huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof as kinders wat versorging en beskerming nodig het kragtens artikel 150(1) van die Kinderwet van Suid-Afrika bestempel moet word.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CHH	Child headed households
CMR	Christelike Maatskaplike Raad
CWSA	Child Welfare South Africa
ECD	Early Childhood Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISDM	Integrated Service Delivery Model
NPAC	National Plan of Action for Children
NPO	Non-profit organisations
NRF	National Research Fund
REC	Research Ethics Committee
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Service Professions
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SLA	Service Level Agreements
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

According to the South African White Paper on Families (2013), child-headed households are defined as households with no adult members, where children live with an older child who takes responsibility of siblings, cousins, nephews and/or nieces because there are no parents or prime-aged adults to take care of them. Child-headed households have become a regular social problem in South Africa due to a variety of reasons, such as parents' migration to cities to look for economic opportunities and the HIV/AIDS pandemic which has caused many children to lose their parents and/or primary caregivers. Even though this study focuses on child-headed households in South Africa, the phenomenon of child-headed households is a universal challenge that requires strengthened responses (Agere & Agere, 2020).

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (2010), millions of children across the world are left behind in child-headed households by parents who leave to find work, continue their studies, or seek a better life. This unfortunate situation perpetuates the vulnerability of these children. A recent view of the United Nations Children's Fund (2019) is that many of the children left behind are not only unable to communicate with their parents; they are also more likely to experience psychological and emotional stress, loneliness, and feelings of being abandoned.

A review of child-headed households in 2006 by Asis (2006) estimated that there were about three to six million children in the Philippines left behind without adult protection and care due to parents who were working overseas, approximately one million such children in Indonesia, and half a million in Thailand. Nobles (2013) further highlights that more than one fifth of all children in Mexico experienced parents' migration by the age of 15 which negatively affected them as they were left to fend for themselves.

In China, child-headed households, also termed "left behind children", are a pressing dilemma where an estimated two million children live alone due to the ramifications of migrant labour (Tong, Yan & Kawachi, 2019). A similar situation is seen in Southeast Europe, especially in Romania where the negative effects of European internal migration are felt by the children who are left behind on their own or with their siblings (Moskal & Tyrrell, 2016). In African countries, such as Uganda and Zambia, orphaned children find themselves living in child-headed households without a parent or guardian to care for them due to the transformation of the family structure by HIV/AIDS (Le Roux-Kemp, 2013).

In 2018 in South Africa, there were about 55 000 children living in a total of 33 000 child-headed households. These children do not only have to contend with not having parents; many of them are vulnerable to violence, abuse, crime, and a lack of social services (Hall, 2018). In South Africa it is often the search for economic opportunities that compels parents to leave their children behind without parental care because with high levels of poverty, many parents cannot afford to miss a season from work or stay at home too long (Seepamore, 2016; Mogotlane, Chauke, Van Rensburg, Human & Kganakga, 2010). Other reasons for child-headed households are the absence of fathers, bereavement of both parents, or children taking care of ill parents (Seepamore, 2016; Mogotlane et al., 2010).

Vulnerable children who are left behind mostly witness the impact of child-headed households as their emotional, material, and/or developmental needs are not met, they are not protected from harm and they are also not provided with a caring and nurturing environment (Chib, Malik, Aricat & Kadir, 2014). Children of child-headed households tend to live in houses characterised by poor conditions, they are exposed to poverty, and they have multiple responsibilities which often result in them leaving school early (Collins, Ellis, Pritchard, Jenkins, Hoeritzauer, Farquhar, Lavery, Murray & Nelson, 2016; Diago, 2020).

Nevertheless, children of child-headed households must also deal with the further unfortunate reality that such households have become normalised in South Africa in that they have been declared and accepted as a separate form of family. Moreover, the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) as well as the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016), do not identify children of child-headed households as a group of children in difficult circumstances, such as street children, or neglected children, despite that some of such children's most basic human rights, such as the right to parental care, are denied which then impairs their growth and development.

This household form is continued to be allowed around the world despite the negative influence it has on the children and heads that reside in them (Lim, 2009; UNICEF, 2010). According to UNICEF (2010) this practice is accepted in society because policies, including child protection policies, often ignore the impact the practice has on children living on their own and on the best interests of such children.

In terms of child protection, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) holds the point that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children and that the child should be protected and provided with the necessary care, while considering the rights and duties of the parents, legal guardians, or individuals legally responsible for the child (Arts, 2010; Sloth-Nielsen, 2004). The UNCRC

further recognises that the child, for the full and harmonious development of their personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. The UNCRC urges states who ratified the Convention, such as South Africa, to provide special protection and assistance to a child temporarily or permanently deprived of their family environment.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) is in line with the (UNCRC) as it also states that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children and as it recognises the child's need for protection as well as the child's unique and privileged place in the African society (ACWRC,1990). The treaty acknowledges that most African children find themselves in critical situations with their rights to parental care, amongst others, heavily infringed due to the socio-economic circumstances on the continent. The ACRWC aims to address the rights of children to care and protection through obliging state parties who have ratified the treaty, such as South Africa, to take reasonable action towards ensuring the care and protection of children (ACWRC, 1990).

In line with the principles of the ratified treaties, South African policy documents, such as the Children's Act (38 of 2005) and the South African Constitution, aim to promote and protect the rights of children (RSA, 1996; RSA, 2005). Rights refer to the minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be afforded to all persons below the age of 18, regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth status or ability (UNCRC, 1989). The South African Constitution states that every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services, to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment, as well as the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation as enshrined in section 28 (1)(b) to (d) of the Constitution (RSA, 1996). The Children's Act attempt to implement the principles enshrined in the treaties, as well as the Constitution and to protect and promote the rights of child-headed households to care and protection in its section 150 (RSA, 2005). According to the Children's Act, care and protection of children refers to providing the child with a suitable place to live, to providing necessary financial support, to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of the child, to protect the child from maltreatment, abuse, neglect, degradation, discrimination, exploitation and any other physical, emotional, or moral harm, and in general to ensure that the best interest of the child is the paramount concern in all matters affecting the child (RSA, 2005).

The implementation of the Children's Act in terms of the care and protection of children is mainly the responsibility of designated child welfare organisations that carry out social service delivery to vulnerable children. Designated social workers are social service providers in the

service of designated child protection organisations, such as the Department of Social Development, or a designated non-governmental child protection organisation (Strydom, 2013; RSA, 2005). In line with the UNCRC and ACRWC, the Children's Act and the Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007 (RSA, 2007) consider the best interests of the child (section 7) to be of paramount importance and obligate social workers to monitor and determine the best interests of children in child-headed households.

With the promulgation of the Children's Act, South Africa took a bold step towards acknowledging the existence of child-headed households. However, practical strategies to support these vulnerable children remain unseen (Kruger, 2014). Procedures for the management of these households are indicated in section 137 of the Children's Amendment Act (RSA, 2007) and section 150(2) of the Children's Act (RSA, 2005). In section 137 the procedure outlined is that child-headed households must be reported to the provincial Department of Social Development. The provincial head of Social Development then has the authority to recognise a household as a child-headed household if the parent, guardian, or adult caregiver of the household is terminally ill, has died, or has abandoned the children in the household, or if no adult family member is available to provide care for the children in the household and it is in the best interests of the children to stay in that household (RSA, 2007). Section 137 of the Children's Amendment Act further states that a child-headed household must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court or an organ of state or a non-governmental organisation determined by the provincial head of Social Development (Diago, 2020; RSA, 2005; RSA, 2007).

A child-headed household that is recognised by the head of Social Development must be referred to a designated social worker who must investigate the child-headed household to establish if the children in the household need care and protection. This is because a child found in the circumstances of a child-headed households may be a child in need of care and protection according to section 150(2) of the Children's Act which further states in section 150(3) that if, after the investigation, the children were found not to be in need of care and protection as stipulated in section 150(1) of the Children's Act, the social worker should, where necessary, provide appropriate support and services without having to remove the child from the existing place of care as indicated in section 150(2) of the Children's Act (RSA, 2005). According to section 150(1) a child is in need of care and protection, if the child has been abandoned or orphaned and is without any visible means of support, lives or works on the streets or begs for a living, lives in or is exposed to circumstances which may seriously harm their physical, mental or social wellbeing, is in a state of mental or physical neglect and is being abused or deliberately neglected by a parent, caregiver or family member.

South African children have a special place in the Constitution as their rights are provided with extensive protection (Hall & Sambu, 2018). However, the same can perhaps not be said about children living in child-headed households as their rights are not provided extensive protection. This is due to the wording of section 150(2) of the Children's Act which read that they "might" be in need of care and protection, even though such children are clearly abandoned and have the characteristics of children in need of care and protection as stated in section 150(1) of the Act. This is because research found that the daily realities and experiences of children in child-headed households are characterised by lack of food, clothing, income, and social services, leaving their rights infringed upon (Diago, 2020). Although the Children's Act states that social workers should render services to child-headed households, research done about the experiences of heads of child-headed households in South Africa's Greater Sekhukhune District in Limpopo province found that social workers did not provide assistance or rendered social services to child-headed households. Children living in child-headed households were left alone with siblings after both parents had died, clearly reflecting their need for immediate support and care (Diago, 2020). It also means that these child-headed households were not reported to the provincial Department of Social Development as prescribed in section 137 of the Children's Amendment Act so that the head of the Department could recognise the child-headed households and could subsequently ensure that social workers provide the necessary support and services.

If social workers do not render social services to child-headed households, they are in violation of section 150(2) of the Children's Act (RSA, 2005). This means that, in terms of the Children's Act, social workers are obliged to investigate a child's circumstances and, if found that the child was not in need of care and protection, where necessary, provide appropriate support and services without removing the child from the existing place of care if it is in the best interest of the child. Absence of service rendering is furthermore in violation of the children's rights to social services as documented in section 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996).

When child-headed households are not reported to the provincial Department as indicated in section 137 of the Children's Amendment Act, they lack recognition as well as social services. If the above situation is considered, it seems as if the procedures stipulated in legislation, namely, to care and protect these children, are not adequately followed. As a result and as confirmed by South African authors such as Kruger (2014) and Diago (2020), the plight of children of child-headed households is not adequately addressed, despite what the policies and legislation guarantee. This reflects the possibility that child-headed households could be left deserted after they were declared as a form of a family.

This “desertion” could be related to the possibility that, due to many challenges in the child protection system, such as a shortage of social workers and heavy workloads, child-headed households are not regarded to be a priority in the caseloads of child protection workers, perhaps because section 150(2) of the Children’s Act states that social workers may remove children in child-headed households who are in need of care and protection, leaving social workers to concentrate on section 150(1) with the list of circumstances where they must remove children.

Research is limited about social service delivery to children living in child-headed households with regard to the protection of their rights to care and protection and how they are supported and cared for in the absence of their parents or adult caregivers. Lee, Majer and Kim (2019) define social service delivery as a set of procedures and systems through which welfare resources and services are delivered from the state/designated welfare organisations to welfare beneficiaries. Already in 2009, Meintjes, Hall, Marera and Boulle (2010) observed that there was a lack of focus on social services for children of child-headed households whose lives were being compromised by poverty. These authors consequently indicated that more academic research about social services for child-headed households was necessary. Social services in this regard refer to numerous publicly or privately provided services intended to aid disadvantaged, distressed, or vulnerable persons or groups (Pinker, 2016).

Most of the studies conducted on children living in child-headed households have focused on the need for children’s participation in early childhood intervention (Pillay, 2016), the legal and ethical implications when children are the primary caregivers (Le Roux-Kemp, 2013), the legal recognition of child-headed households (Kruger, 2014), and the views of heads of child-headed households (Diago, 2020). No existing studies were found on social services delivered to this vulnerable group and their rights to care and protection. In the absence of social work research on this topic, there was an urgent need to gain understanding about the implementation of policy and legislation, as well as the type of social services that should be delivered to this vulnerable group in order to uphold their rights to care and protection. Thus in this study, the reflections of role players, such as social workers, social worker supervisors who are understood as key service providers involved in social service delivery at designated child protection organisations, and a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development, brought a deeper understanding of this research problem.

As the aforementioned role players had a specific role to protect the rights of child-headed households, their reflections on the subject of delivering social services to child-headed households were important in order to gain an understanding of the scope of services that are available to this vulnerable group. Reflections in this context pertained to points of view,

thoughts, professional opinions, observations, and analyses to provide insight into an identified matter (Chiew, 2016). Since this study was the first study on this topic in the field of social work, the focus was on the role players' professional opinion. Their opinions and views were sought on child-headed households being accepted as a family form, the rights of child-headed households, the needs of child-headed households, and the ways that child-headed households could be protected. Role players were also asked about the obstacles they faced in the effective implementation of policy and legislation. In addition, reflections about appropriate services and viable improvements in service delivery and feasible changes to policy and legislation were explored to uphold the rights of the target group.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is uncertainty about the social service delivery to child-headed households as stipulated in the Children's Act and the Children's Amendment Act. This possible lack of service delivery is in violation of the rights of child-headed households to care and protection as indicated in the Constitution of South Africa. Policy documents such as the White Paper for Social Welfare, are silent about the plight of the children of child-headed households as they are not identified as a group of children in difficult circumstances in this document. A lack of services from social workers to children of child-headed households could impede their growth and development because young children require protection and nurturing to meet their nutritional needs and to safeguard their health. Such a lack of services could also impede young children from having affectionate relationships with stable caregivers who would support them in developing psychological and social capacities, and from having ongoing interaction with encouraging adults which would promote their language and cognitive development (Roelen, Delap, Jones & Chettri, 2017). If social workers are not rendering services as indicated by the various policy directives, children living in child-headed households in South Africa must survive without this care and protection. Hence, for the purposes of this study, closer attention was given to the reflections of role players about social services and support for child-headed households in order to gain a clear understanding about the rights to care and protection that children of child-headed households should have.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aimed to answer the following main research questions:

- What are the main points of departure in policy and legislation on child-headed households?
- How is policy and legislation executed in practice and what are the factors that hinder implementation?
- What are the needs of child-headed households?

- What are the social services rendered to child-headed households?
- What services should be rendered to uphold the rights of child-headed households to care and protection?
- In what ways should policy, legislation and resources be improved to uphold the rights of child-headed households to care and protection?

1.4 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of the reflections of role players on social services rendered to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection. This goal was achieved by means of following the objectives:

- To analyse international, regional, and local child and family welfare policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households, as well as the rights of child-headed households to care and protection from a human rights-based perspective.
- To explore the circumstances of child-headed households within the South African child protection system.
- To dissect social services that should be available to child-headed households utilising the ecological systems perspective.
- To investigate the reflections of role players on the social service delivery to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection.
- To make recommendations regarding the reflections of role players about social service delivery to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection in the South African context.

1.5 THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The study departed from the point that children living in child-headed households should obtain social services and enjoy all their rights as enshrined in the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996). These rights refer to the right to family care, parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when children are removed from their family environment as enshrined in section 28(1)(b) as well as the right to social services as stipulated in section (1)(c) of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996). The point of departure in this study was that children's rights could be compromised in child-headed households. It further maintained that the recommendation and recognition of child-headed households, as a protective measure, should include protective benefits for such households. The study aimed to investigate the reflections of role players on the concept of child-headed households, their needs, the implementation of policy and legislation, the services, the obstacles, and the possible improvement in service delivery to uphold their rights to care and protection. Thus, the study used the human rights-based perspective as a point of departure. The value of the human

rights-based perspective lies in the transformative potential of human rights to highlight and alleviate injustice, inequality, poverty, as well as other forms of vulnerabilities (UNICEF, 2010).

The human rights-based perspective includes principles such as universality and inalienability, indivisibility, inter-dependence and inter-relatedness, equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, empowerment and accountability, and rule of law (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2004). These principles were unpacked in this study as they are supposed to help identify individuals and groups that are or are at risk of being marginalised or excluded, and guide implementation of remedial strategies. According to UNICEF (2010), all human beings are born free and have equal dignity and rights simply by virtue of their humanity. However, the possible lack of social services and parental/adult care for child-headed households could mean that the rights of these children to social services, to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment as enshrined in section 28(1)(b) to (d) of the South African Constitution are violated (RSA, 1996). UNICEF (2016) concurs that children have equal rights under the Constitution, but the harsh reality in the South African context is that the worlds into which they are born and their opportunities in life are unequal, because as one child sets off to school, dressed in a crisp new uniform and polished shoes, another knocks on a car window at a traffic light, asking for money.

The human rights-based perspective aims to promote and protect human rights. It further aims to ensure that child-headed households' rights are protected against possible violation. The human rights-based perspective is expected to utilise its power to challenge underlying structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice and to hold governments accountable as "duty-bearers" under international law to respond effectively to injustices in society. Therefore, the human rights-based perspective ensures an edge for the most vulnerable, which in this case are children in child-headed households, to have access to social services. The perspective also ensures that such children are not discriminated against by virtue of living on their own without caregivers. The human rights-based perspective is seen as highly relevant to the marginalised by its use of advocacy and social mobilisation and aims to advance the realisation of human rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other major human rights instruments (UNICEF, 2016).

Despite the advantages of the human rights-based perspective, it has come under severe criticism. Critiques focus on the application of human rights principles across the world and argue that the international human rights community focus all its attention on one area such as mass atrocities and grave violations of human rights, whilst ignoring other more serious violations and everyday oppressive structures and practices that affect millions more people,

such as poverty and inequality (De Man, 2018). The existing UN structures do not allow the opportunity for powerless individuals to have their say, thus reinforcing the elitist nature of the human rights framework. Some perceive the prevailing human rights agenda as set by westernised international non-profit organisations (NPOs) and academics, with no input from developing countries (Schaaf, 2013). Moreover, the effectiveness of human rights enforcement mechanisms has also been questioned. This is mostly because states, tasked with the fulfilment and protection of rights, are the same actors who decide on accountability of these enforcement mechanisms.

Overall, the human rights-based perspective is relevant to the study because it is based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promote and protect human rights. The framework of the human rights-based perspective is further suitable to the South African context, especially for child-headed households who are not protected from harm and not provided with a caring and nurturing environment even though the concept of child-headed households is viewed as a violation of children's rights to protection, survival, development, and participation (Chib, 2014; Mentjies et al., 2010). The human rights-based perspective has thus been utilised in the study because its principles are in line with the rights-based South African Constitution which was founded on the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

In this section of the study the research approach, research design, sampling, instruments for data collection, and data analysis are briefly discussed. An in-depth description is given in Chapter 5.

1.6.1 Research approach

The research made use of a qualitative research approach. The utilisation of this approach provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on the rights of children in child-headed households to care and protection in order to gain an in-depth understanding from role players who were involved in service delivery to child-headed households. A qualitative research approach was utilised to answer questions about the complex nature of child-headed households, with the purpose of describing and understanding the rights of child-headed households to care and protection, the delivery of social services and the implementation of legislation from the role players' point of view (Fouché, Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). The researcher was interested in a qualitative, in-depth inquiry into the understandings and opinions of research participants in order to provide descriptions of human experience instead of a quantitative analysis of numbers and statistics. Thus, a qualitative research approach was appropriate for the study (Fouché et al., 2021).

1.6.2 Research design

In this study the researcher incorporated explorative and descriptive research designs. Kreuger and Neuman (2006) explain that exploratory and descriptive research designs vary in many aspects. Blaikie (2000) clarifies that exploratory research entails gaining insight into a situation, a phenomenon, a community, or an individual. The study made use of exploratory research design to gain information about social work services rendered to child-headed households. The study also utilised a descriptive research design to intensively examine how the rights of child-headed households to care and protection as well as to social services were upheld. Descriptive research design presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting, or relationship and it was chosen because it could describe the study accurately (Fouché et al., 2021).

1.6.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in this study as the researcher made the decision about which organisations were to be the focus of the study and the individual participants who could most likely contribute to appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Furthermore, Strydom and Delport (2011) explain that in a purposive sampling method, a sample is formatted in such a way that it contains most characteristics or typical attributes of the population that best serve the study. These authors further state that, in a purposive sample, the researcher relies on an existing social or psychological understanding of the problem as a basis for choosing the population elements in the sample.

The researcher purposively selected participants most directly linked to the research area. When this was done, a sample that contained the most characteristics or typical attributes of the population that best served the purpose of the study was formatted (Fouché et al., 2021). In this study the population consisted of a total of seventeen (17) social workers, five (5) social worker supervisors from designated child protection non-profit organisations (NPOs) in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and Eastern Cape and one (1) designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development, also from the Eastern Cape. The study was divided in three phases, which are discussed next.

1.6.3.1 First phase

In the first phase of the study, social workers from child welfare NPOs in the Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan), Limpopo (Capricorn) and Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni) were included. These provinces were selected because child-headed households were most prevalent in these South African provinces (Hall & Mokomane, 2018). In addition, child and family welfare NPOs were the focus because, although the primary responsibility for delivering social services rests with the national, provincial, and local governments, the government has

entered into service level agreements with designated child welfare organisations. Thus, child and welfare NPOs have been designated to implement the principles of the Department of Social Development and render child protection services in accordance with the Children's Act. Thus, social workers had information about the services they rendered to child-headed households, the needs of this group, as well as ideas about policy implementation. Interviews with the selected participants could produce the required data for the researcher to do an in-depth description and analysis of the findings (Green & Thorogood, 2014). In the first phase, social workers from two different designated child welfare NPOs in each province were selected because different organisations could manage child-headed households differently.

The criteria for inclusion were that participants had to be:

- employed as registered social workers at a registered NPO in Limpopo (Capricorn), Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni) or Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan);
- rendering child and family welfare services for at least a year; and
- conversant in English.

1.6.3.2 Second phase

In the second phase of the study, social worker supervisors from the same NPOs and areas mentioned above, were invited to partake in the study and a similar procedure was followed. Due to their managerial positions in the NPOs, social worker supervisors had a holistic view about the extent of child-headed households registered at their particular organisations, about policy implementation, as well as about the challenges that organisations were experiencing in service delivery to these households. A total of six (6) social worker supervisors were invited to partake in the study, two in each province, however only five (5) social worker supervisors came forward and participated in the interviews. Thus there were one (1) social worker supervisor from Limpopo, two (2) social worker supervisors from Mpumalanga as well as two (2) social worker supervisors from the Eastern Cape province. Participants were not coerced to take part in the study. The researcher only informed participants about the study and requested them to call or email the researcher if they were interested in participating. In the case of one (1) social worker supervisor who did not come forward or get in contact with the researcher, it was determined that they were not interested in taking part in the study for unknown reasons.

The criteria for inclusion were that participants had to be:

- employed as a registered social worker supervisor at a registered NPO in Limpopo (Capricorn), Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni) or Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan);
- rendering supervision for at least a year and child and family welfare services for at least two years; and

- conversant in English.

1.6.3.3 Third phase

In the third phase of the study, the head/deputy head or designated person from the provincial Department of Social Development was included because they were responsible for children and families, specifically child-headed households and had a holistic view about social service delivery and the implementation of policy and legislation with regards to child-headed households, such as the appointment of adult caregivers and obstacles experienced in social service delivery

The criteria for inclusion were that participants had to be:

- employed as a head/deputy head or designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development in Limpopo, Mpumalanga or Eastern Cape province for at least a year; and
- conversant in English.

The three provincial Departments of Social Development had letters written to them asking for ethical clearance and to include the head/deputy head or a designated person in the study. However only one Department was willing to partake in the study.

Approval was obtained (Appendix L) and the participant's details were shared with the researcher for contact. The researcher contacted the participant and scheduled an appointment for a meeting. During the meeting, the participant was informed of the subject matter of the study, as well as the content of the consent forms (Appendix A). The participant was asked to complete, sign and email back a consent form to the researcher prior to the interview. Following the meeting, an appointment was made for an online/virtual interview with the designated person at the provincial Department of Social Development.

1.7 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection procedures consider that boundaries for the study through sampling, collection of data through interviews and establishing protocol for recording interviews be set (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the following section the procedure followed in the study's data collection is presented. An in-depth description is given in Chapter 5.

1.7.1 Pilot study

A pilot study is a small-scale version of the study and was applied to this study to assess and test the procedures and materials to be used in the main study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A pilot study was conducted with two social workers from one of the organisations and who met the inclusion criteria. Piloting the study provided the researcher with an opportunity to practice

how the study will be carried out before the actual interviews so that possible mistakes in the data collection process could be identified and eliminated (Kumar, 2019). Furthermore, Sampson (2004) states that pre-testing is useful not only to refine the research instruments, but also to highlight significant issues, such as research validity, ethics, and representation. A pilot study also reveals whether the interview questions need to be refined, modified, or rephrased for clarity. It helps the researcher foresee and eliminate possible challenges that might be encountered in the actual study (Dikko, 2016). A pilot study thus affords the researcher the opportunity to make modifications to conduct quality interviews during the main investigation. In this study, a semi-structured interview was conducted with two social workers to test if the interview schedule would be feasible for collecting data. In the current study, a few minor tweaks were made to some of the interview questions following the pilot interview, such as ensuring that questions about the necessity and availability of social services currently available to children were tailored to the different levels of the ecological systems perspective. The study incorporated the two pilot interviews into its findings.

1.7.2 Methods for data collection

According to Fouché et al. (2021), the successful execution of a study design and data gathering is usually determined by the accessibility of the research setting and the researcher's ability to build and maintain relationships and agreements with gatekeepers and participants because the collection of data begins with gaining access to the participants. In this study, the researcher made use of semi-structured interviews as a method to collect data. The following section presents the method that was used in the study.

1.7.2.1 Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix B: First phase, Appendix C: Second phase and Appendix D: Third phase) was applied as a research instrument during online/virtual interviews with participants. Online/virtual interviews through Microsoft Team meetings were conducted with participants instead of face-to-face interviews because conducting face-to-face interviews in different parts of South Africa would have taken substantial time and would have been more expensive as the researcher would have had to travel to the participants (Oltmann, 2016). Telephone interviews were also used as an alternative, especially when participants did not have data to be online or when there was loadshedding in their area. This type of interview still allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection as well as the social services rendered to them by social service providers. Although telephonic interviews have been criticised for their inability to assess non-verbal responses and loss of the relational component often cultivated in a face-to-face interview (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017), telephonic interviews were convenient

for both the researcher and the participants because they took place when the participants were available and, in an environment where the participants felt most comfortable. An additional advantage of telephonic interviews was that they did not have any financial cost to the participants because the researcher was the one who called them.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used as a guide to the interview which was also recorded. Consent to record the interview was obtained from the participants through the consent form. The researcher further ensured that a fine balance was kept during interviews by allowing flexibility to explore the topic holistically and by obtaining answers to predetermined questions instead of allowing to be disturbed by trivial information that did not contribute to answering the research questions. Using a semi-structured interview schedule allowed for rich descriptions to be collected and participants to be actively involved in providing direction in the interviews (Fouché et al., 2021). Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, thus there was enough time to gather all the necessary information for the study.

1.7.3 Data analysis

Data analysis entails making sense of the data that was collected and involves arranging the data in a particular and logical manner (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Processing, analysing and interpreting results are required once data had been collected and at this point the researcher only had raw data which contained vast amounts of information in the form of digital recordings of interviews, transcriptions and field notes, which could not all be used in the qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). It is for this reason that unpacking collected data from participants and giving it meaning and structure is essential as a form of data analysis (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Atlas.ti software was used for the data analysis. This software made it simple to analyse the gathered data and then reorganise and classify it according to themes, categories, and regions of interest, which led to consistent data handling. Additionally, because several study materials could be examined simultaneously and because the analysis process was uniform and visible, thanks to the Atlas.ti software, less time was spent on the data and were there less opportunities to make mistakes.

1.7.3.1 Method of data verification

To ensure that the quality of the data can be verified, the criteria for a research study must be established (Fouché et al., 2021). The criteria should refer to the reliability and validity of the research study. According to Bless et al. (2013), reliability is concerned with the extent to which the observable (empirical) measures that represent theoretical concepts are accurate and stable over repeated observations, while validity is concerned with just how accurately the observable measures represent the concept in question, or whether in fact, they represent something else. Therefore, different criteria must be used to evaluate the quality of the data

collected and analysed in terms of the two approaches, either quality of quantitative research or quality of qualitative research (Bless et al., 2013). Since the study is a qualitative study, the researcher improved the trustworthiness of the study by applying the following principles, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. These principles are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Credibility

Bless et al. (2013) state that credibility corresponds to the concept of internal validity, since it seeks to convince that findings depict the truth of the reality under the study, in other words that they make sense. In this research study, the credibility was achieved through collecting rich data that offered the potential of inclusive data analysis rather than low quality data that offered little potential for analysis to ensure credibility of the study. Furthermore, credibility was achieved by providing clear parameters of the population, namely, the population referred to social workers and social worker supervisors both directly and indirectly (Delpont & Roestenburg, 2013). Moreover, asking participants to share what they knew and what they have been exposed to in terms of child-headed households as professionals, helped ensure that honest information was shared by participants which further added to the credibility of the study. Credibility was further ensured by utilising the service of an independent coder who was a registered social worker with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), had experience as a social worker in child and family welfare and was in possession of a postgraduate degree in Social Work. The independent coder read through the researcher's transcriptions, confirmed the themes, subthemes, and categories, and concluded the data process. (Appendix G: Letter from Independent Coder).

Transferability

According to Bless et al. (2013), transferability can be compared to external validity since it refers to the extent to which results apply to other. Furthermore, Fouché et al. (2021) explain that transferability refers to whether the results from empirical findings could be transferred to other settings. In this research study, transferability was achieved through ensuring that the study had a thick description by providing enough details about the participants, namely the social workers and social worker supervisors employed at child and family welfare organisations and the designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development as well as the setting in which the study took place, namely the Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan), Limpopo (Capricorn) and Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni). Transferability was also achieved through good research design, critical data analysis, rigorous planning, action, and critical reflection.

Dependability

According to Padgett (2008) and Bless et al. (2013), dependability means reliability, which suggests that the same thing would reoccur under similar circumstances which means that the findings must be consistent if the study was replicated with the same participants. Schurink et al. (2021b) contend that the concept of replication is problematic in qualitative research because the social world is continuously changing, therefore dependability should seek to establish whether the research process was logical, well-documented, and audited. In the research study, the researcher achieved dependability of the research by ensuring that the collected data was presented in a logical, organised, and systematic manner. The researcher ensured that findings from the empirical investigation were well-documented. Furthermore, both international and national research articles were utilised in the study to allow for a dependable research study. Dependability of the study was further ensured by comprehensively discussing the phases of the research process followed from problem formulation to finalising the research report presented in this chapter.

Conformability

Confirmability aims to safeguard that the research findings were based on the true data and the process of data analysis was properly applied (Padgett, 2008). The conformability of a research study requires that other researchers or observers should be able to obtain similar findings by following a similar research process in a similar context (Bless et al., 2013). To add to the conformability of the research study, the researcher utilised the participants' narratives with minimal changes from the study to conform to previous studies on related topics. Schurink et al. (2021b) observe that the researcher should provide evidence for each claim or interpretation from at least two sources to support the data and the researcher's analysis of the findings. Direct quotes from the collected data were used when the findings were presented, and conclusions were drawn from the empirical study and the existing global body of knowledge on child-headed households in Chapter 6.

Reflection of the researcher on self-awareness, influence on the participants, and the research process

The researcher is a registered social worker and has experience in child and family welfare from undergraduate work and as a student social worker who worked in numerous child and family welfare organisations. The researcher was originally from one of the provinces and knows the areas well. During the study, the researcher examined and managed his own feelings regarding the study by discussing these feelings with the researcher's supervisor. The researcher did not know any of the participants that participated in the study and did not have any relationship with them. The researcher was of the informed opinion that minimal attention

had been given to the social problem of child-headed households. As a result, an enquiry into the social problem which affects the most vulnerable in society was important to protect and promote their rights to care and protection, to respond to their needs through effective and efficient delivery of social services, and to raise awareness about their plight.

1.8 PROVISIONAL CHAPTER LAYOUT

This section presents a layout of the chapters contained in this research study.

- Chapter 1 depicts the preliminary study and the rationale of the study, the problem statement, theoretical framework, goal and objectives, research method, ethical obligations, and the impact of the study.
- Chapter 2 analyses international, regional, and local child and family welfare policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households, as well as the rights of child-headed households to care and protection from a human rights-based perspective.
- Chapter 3 explores the circumstances of child-headed households within the South African child protection system.
- Chapter 4 dissects social service delivery to child-headed households within the ecological systems perspective.
- Chapter 5 describes the research methodology of the study.
- Chapter 6 investigates the reflections of role players about social service delivery to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection
- Chapter 7 presents conclusions based on the collected data and provides recommendations regarding social services rendered to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection in the South African context.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research was a low-risk study as the participants were required to reflect on the phenomenon of child-headed households, on services that were rendered, and on the implementation of legislation; thus, not about their personal experiences. Therefore, ethically, the study was low risk as the focus was on professional reflections. De Vos et al. (2011) explain that in social science research, people become the objects of the study; therefore, delicate care must be taken to protect participants from any harm. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Department of Social Work Ethical Screening Committee (DESC) of the University of Stellenbosch and the Research Ethics Committee (REC) (Appendix E) prior to the initiation of this study (Fouché et al., 2021). Furthermore, permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the director or deputy director of the different NPOs in the Capricorn district of Limpopo, the Ehlazeni district of Mpumalanga and the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality of the Eastern Cape, as well as the provincial Department of Social Development

in one of the three provinces respectively, before the study was executed. As a qualified and registered social worker, the researcher is bound by the Ethical Code of the South African Council for Social Service Professions (1986). Such ethical procedures include the following:

- **Non-maleficence:** The researcher was aware that, even though the research could be classified as a low-risk study that focused on the participants' professional reflections about child-headed households in South Africa, policy and legislation, and service delivery, and not on personal experiences that could trigger emotions, research with humans could still elicit emotional reactions. Therefore, out of respect of the participants' emotional reactions (if any), participants were offered short breaks during the study to allow them to recollect their thoughts.
- **Beneficence:** Beneficence refers to actions which help others and promotes the betterment of others for altruistic reasons (Faden & Shabaya, 2010). The implementation of beneficence requires the researcher to take action by helping others. Acting beneficently in human research thus requires some assessment of the intended benefits of the research and of the risks to which participants might be exposed to. These assessments are sometimes referred to as balancing the risks and benefits or finding a favourable risk–benefit ratio (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013). In this study, the researcher focused on improving the awareness of the participants. Furthermore, the researcher was also aware of the benefit that the study findings could have for the population, i.e., that the findings could be used to understand role players' viewpoints about the rights of child-headed households to social services and ultimately address their plight as role players are expected to provide support to such households. According to Pieper and Thomson (2016), for human research to be ethically defensible there must be a positive justification of the project. Thus, the new knowledge obtained through this study could assist the organisations and the Department of Social Development in developing strategies that could focus on responding to the needs of child-headed households, thereby ensuring that the rights of such children to care and protection, are protected.
- **Voluntary participation:** According to Rubin and Babbie (2017), ethical research requires voluntary, unforced decision-making about participation and its consequences. The researcher upheld this principle of voluntary participation by ensuring that no participants were coerced into partaking in the study. The researcher asked interested potential participants to email the researcher after they attended a meeting where the study was explained. The researcher also stipulated in the informed consent form that was signed by all participants before the interviews commenced, that

participation was voluntary and that participants had the freedom to choose to partake or not, and to withdraw from the study at any time.

- Informed consent: The researcher developed an informed consent form which was discussed with the participants prior to their interviews. In this form a clear outline of this study and its goals and objectives were provided to the participants for them to make informed decisions about their participation. Besides being informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point, participants were also informed that the interviews were to be audio recorded. The interviews were conducted in English and participants participated voluntarily, with no one being coerced to form part of the study.
- Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality: The researcher handled all the data and information of the participants privately. In the context of this study, only the researcher was aware of the identity of the participants. Confidentiality was maintained, and the identities of the participants were not used in any compromising manner or to the disadvantage of the participants. The names of organisations were also not mentioned in the final report. The participants were all informed about the privacy and confidentiality of the study. Participants were thus referred to in the study as participant 1, 2, etc. The researcher conducted all the interviews online from a private room with minimal interruptions to enable participants to partake confidently without worrying about any confidential information leaking (Leary, 2012). The researcher asked participants to ensure that they were also in a place where they felt comfortable to talk. The researcher further explained that any information that was obtained in connection with the study would remain confidential and would only be disclosed with the participants' permission or as required by law.
- Debriefing: In this study, the empirical data that was collected focused on the reflection about a specific phenomenon and not on personal experiences that could trigger emotions; the research could thus be regarded as low risk. However, uncertainties on any of the aspects of the interview schedule which participants might have experienced during the interview could be discussed and clarified at any time.
- Actions and competence of the researcher: The researcher is a registered social worker and has experience in child and family welfare service delivery. The researcher further completed a successful research study focusing on the experiences of heads of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of Limpopo and has knowledge about the difficulties that children in child-headed households are experiencing.

- Dissemination and publication of findings: The final step of the exploration process is to disseminate the research results by writing an exploration report. According to Fouché et al. (2021), findings must be presented to the reading public in written form to ensure that they are scientifically recognised as formal research. Schurink et al. (2021b) believe that researchers have a responsibility to disseminate their results as widely as possible. Strydom and Roestenberg (2021) agree that publishing research is in the best interest of the scientific community and society. Therefore, the study will only be published for academic or professional purposes. In addition to this research report, part of the work will be disseminated through conference presentations, book chapters or peer-reviewed articles.

CHAPTER 2: INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL CHILD AND FAMILY WELFARE POLICY AND LEGISLATION PERTAINING TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The South African Children's Act (38 of 2005) legally recognises child-headed households as a protective measure and an independent family form, should such an arrangement be in the best interests of all children living in the household (Kruger, 2014). This means that, as an accepted family form described in the South African Children's Act, the government should develop concrete measures to support, care and protect children in such households (RSA, 2005). However, Blaauw, Viljoen and Schenck (2011) indicated more than 10 years ago that child-headed households were vulnerable and needed intervention on many levels, foremost of which is in terms of policy and legislation to address their predicament and ensure that their rights to care and protection were upheld. More recently, Hall (2018) demonstrated that child-headed households in South Africa have become an unfortunate social phenomenon and that children who lived in these households tended to be extremely poor, to be living in inadequate dwellings, and to be having little access to income. These harsh circumstances, furthermore, affected the livelihoods of children from child-headed households, especially when they were not provided with support and social services in the absence of their parents. Under the above-mentioned circumstances, child-headed households may not be considered as a protective measure because the best interests of the children of such households may not have been considered. Therefore, South African policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households, as well as international and regional treaties must consider the care and protection of child-headed households to ensure that services are rendered to support these households, because unsupported child-headed households potentially violate these children's constitutional rights to care and protection (Diago, 2020).

To reach the first objective of the study, this chapter aims to examine the background to the legalisation pertaining to child-headed households in the South African context to provide some understanding and context about the circumstances which led to this legalisation. Furthermore, the state's response to child-headed households through local child and family welfare policy and legislation such as the Constitution of South Africa (RSA, 1996) and the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) are discussed to analyse how the South African government responded to child-headed households. In addition, international frameworks ratified by the South African state, including, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

(ACRWC) (1990) are examined to highlight how they are implemented in line with South African policy and legislation to care for and protect child-headed households. In conclusion, the chapter aims to explore the rights of child-headed households to care and protection from a human rights-based perspective.

2.2 LEGALISATION OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa was the first country in Africa to legally recognise child-headed households as a protective measure, meaning that children living in child-headed households could continue to live together in the absence of their parents if this arrangement could continue under the care and protection of an adult caregiver recognised by the state (Kruger, 2014). According to South African authors, such as Mturi (2012), Lim (2009) and Kruger (2014), the legalisation of child-headed households in the country occurred because the capacity of traditional family structures was overwhelmed as they had to cope with the AIDS epidemic and other socio-economic issues, such as the migrant labour system, which left an increasing number of children orphaned or abandoned. Furthermore, as these extended family structures were overwhelmed, children, who lost their parents due to death or other challenges, were no longer incorporated into existing family units under the guardianship of adult relatives. This situation forced children to live alone without parental or adult care and to become part of child-headed households.

After the 2002 review of the Child Care Act (74 of 1983), the South African Law Reform Commission recommended that child-headed households should be given a legal recognition as a placement option. The Commission also indicated that child-headed households would become a familiar phenomenon due to the increasing number of adult caregivers dying of AIDS-related illnesses at the time (Lim, 2009). Couzens and Zaal (2009) confirmed that the alarming projections of the number of children who were expected to be orphaned because of the AIDS epidemic at the time, played a huge role in the legalisation of child-headed households. Thus, because children were ending up without parents or caregivers due to the AIDS epidemic and other social issues, and because the capacity of traditional family structures who could care for such children were overwhelmed, legally recognising child-headed households became a valid child protection motive.

Kruger (2014), Couzens and Zaal (2009) add that providing legal recognition to child-headed households in South Africa was appropriate, given the rapidly increasing numbers of orphans and insufficiency of alternative placement options. Lim (2009) indicates that the legal recognition of child-headed households protects children who have no option but to conform and remain in child-headed households, either temporarily or permanently, and highlights this as an important reason in the recognition of child-headed households. Moreover, Lim (2009)

continued, the idea to legally recognise child-headed households highlighted challenges faced by children in these circumstances and opened discussions on how best to support them.

However, this bold step taken by South Africa to legally recognise child-headed households was severely criticised as it challenged deep-rooted views about acceptable family forms, with authors such as Sloth-Nielsen (2004), arguing that children in child-headed households could potentially lose their childhood because of their exposure to adult responsibilities. Despite the severe criticism against the legal recognition of child-headed households, Kruger (2014), Couzens and Zaal (2009) state that the recognition is a bold step to strengthen the protection and assistance given to children in child-headed households in the absence of their caregivers. The authors further maintain that necessary protection and assistance measures must be effectively put in place because the best interests of these children must always be considered.

2.3 CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AS AN INTERNATIONAL ISSUE

Internationally there are numerous households which are headed by a child or children under the age of eighteen (Agere & Agere, 2020). As far back as 2002, 14 million children under the age of 18 had globally been orphaned because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Many of these children were forced by their unfortunate circumstances, to become heads of households and to look after themselves and their siblings (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2008). The issue of child-headed households is thus not limited to South Africa. Millions of children across the world are left behind in child-headed households because their parents would try to find work in other places, continue their studies, or seek a better life in other countries or urban cities away from their homes. This is confirmed by Nobles (2013) and Asis (2006) who report that countries, such as the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, and Mexico have left-behind children (child-headed households) who go through life without being protected or cared for by adults or parents who are migrant workers. In Romania, children under the age of eighteen are left alone with their siblings and are often deprived of basic care, protection, and support due to the negative effects of poverty-driven labour migration of their parents or caregivers (United Nations Children's Fund, 2010).

Humanium (2016) highlights that the issue of child-headed households can also be found in countries such as India, where children living on their own, were forced to fend for themselves on the streets as they struggled to survive. Moreover, countries such as Zambia and Uganda are also exposed to the phenomenon whereby children were unable to grow up in a stable and well-adjusted family setup and had to live without a parent or guardian to care for them, resulting in them being exposed to multiple social issues, including poverty, violence, and ill health (Humanium, 2016; Kipp, Satzinger, Alibhai & Rubaale, 2010). In addition, Lu, Lin,

Nicholson and Chung-Huang (2015) indicate that a vast number of Chinese children under the age of 18, were left behind in child-headed households in rural villages as their migrant worker parents had to leave their children behind to go and work.

Nxumalo (2015) is not necessarily in favour of child-headed households and indicates that the long-term damage child-headed households has on the development and growth of the affected children must be acknowledged. Moreover, Lwandiso (2020) argues that the protection of the wellbeing of millions of rural children left behind by their parents must be prioritised because these children have remained invisible in public discourse and policy making, especially as an isolated group whose rights were constantly violated. Likewise, it is clear that the concept of child-headed households is a global issue that continues to affect children the most. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on whether children from child-headed households are awarded legal recognition in other countries. However, it is known that, in the absence of parents or caregivers, the rights of these children to care and protection might not be responded to if there is a lack of state support and subsequently a lack of social services.

2.4 SOUTH AFRICAN STATE RESPONSE TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

The state's response to child-headed households has been more theoretical as per the provisions in policy frameworks that the state established, such as section 150(2) and (3) of the Children's Act to address the rights of child-headed households to care and protection (Le Roux-Kemp, 2013). Section 150(2) and (3) the South African Children's Act endorses and formally recognises child-headed households as an independent family form if it is in the best interests of all the children living in the household. Furthermore, regarding the recognition of child-headed households, the Act provides that the provincial head of the Department of Social Development may recognise a household as a child-headed household (RSA, 2005;2007). The Children's Act and the Amendment Act (41 of 2007) further provide that child-headed households should be provided, where necessary, with appropriate support and services from a social worker, or if necessary, should be referred to other professionals for support.

Despite these policy and legislative directives, South African authors voiced their concern about child-headed households. Kruger (2014) pointed out that children of child-headed households would often find themselves living in poor conditions and extreme situations. Furthermore, Nziyane and Alpaslan (2012) revealed that the children's situation was far from ideal as not only did they live without an adult resident; they also had low levels of access to social grants. Moreover, Diago (2020) found that the state's response to child-headed households in South Africa had been minimal as the experiences of heads of child-headed households were characterised by lack of social services and lack of parental care in the form

of adult assistance. Pillay (2016) further pointed out that the South African state had to provide a swift and adequate response to child-headed households to eradicate their psychological and social challenges. Finally, Agere and Agere (2020) concurred that child-headed households required strengthened responses as they were a pervasive challenge in South Africa. Matadi and Iyert (2019) argued that the fulfilment of children's rights required a broad strategy involving the promulgation of relevant laws, the design and implementation of suitable programmes and policies, and the provision of social services. Overall, the measures put in place by the South African government to protect the rights of children in child-headed households to ensure that they were not infringed upon, may not have been successful, especially without consistent practical implementation of the established policies and legislation.

2.5 LEGISLATION TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996), the Children's Act and the Children's Amendment Act are progressive South African legislation that address the needs of children and provide more than satisfactory guarantees to their rights (Lim, 2009). In the following section the relevant sections of the above-mentioned legislation are analysed to provide an understanding of the roles they play with reference to child-headed households.

2.5.1 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996)

The South African Constitution is the supreme law of the land, no other law or government can supersede the provisions of the Constitution. It was adopted to create a democratic system for all South Africans and to dismantle the apartheid system characterised by massive inequality structured along racial lines and the entrenchment of racist policies (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Patel, 2015). This piece of legislation thus aims to heal the divisions of the past, to establish a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights, to improve the quality of life of all citizens and to free the potential of each person. It further aims to lay the foundation for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and in which every citizen is equally protected by law (RSA, 1996; Swart & Yates, 2006). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was approved by the Constitutional Court in December 1996 and took effect on 4 February 1997 (RSA, 1996).

South African children have a special place in the South African Constitution as their rights are extensively protected, with section 28 specifically devoted to children's rights. Furthermore, children's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning them and the Constitution insists that their rights should always be protected as they are vulnerable by virtue of being children (Kruger, 2014). Section 28(1)(b) to (c) of the South

African Constitution clearly states that every child has the right to education, family or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment as well as the right to social services (RSA, 1996). The Constitution also stipulates that the best interest of the child principle is paramount in all decisions pertaining to children.

However, South African literature indicates that children in child-headed households have difficult circumstances because they are deprived of parental or adult care (Muyomi, 2012). They are, therefore, unable to experience life like other children who grow up with the care, love, and support of their parents or adult caregivers (Nyaradzo, 2013). Moreover, Diago (2020) found that children living in child-headed households were not only struggling with the challenge of not having extended family assistance; the challenges of these households were exacerbated because they were unsuccessful in their attempts to acquire social services from social workers, despite them being vulnerable children. This means that their right to social services being delivered by social workers, according to section 28 of the Constitution, was infringed upon. The social services that should be delivered to child-headed households are indicated in the Children's Act.

2.5.2 Children's Act (38 of 2005)

The Children's Act was approved on 8 June 2005 with the aim to improve aspects of childcare and protection in South Africa (Nomdo, 2020). The Children's Act consists of 22 chapters and was developed to bring into effect the constitutional rights of children in South Africa and the country's commitments to global treaties about children's rights. The Act aims to provide equal social services to all children to protect them from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation and places a strong focus on the protection and development of the family as first line of service delivery (RSA, 2005).

In section 7 of the Children's Act, it is stipulated that the best interests of children are of principal importance and that they must be the first to consider and think about when making decisions that will affect the child. This process of considering the best interests of the child in any situation is in line with Article 3(1) of the UNCRC (1989) and Article 4 of the ACRWC which indicate that all actions concerning children that are undertaken by any person or authority, must always be in the best interests of the child. To apply the best interests of the child principle the Children's Act requires that certain factors be considered, namely:

- the nature of the personal relationship between the child and a parent or a caregiver;
- the attitude of the parents and the exercise of parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child;
- the capacity of the parents or any other specific parent to provide for the needs of the child, including emotional and intellectual needs;

- the practical difficulty and expense of a child having contact with their parents or caregivers; and
- the need for a child to be brought up within a stable environment.

In line with the best interests of the child, the Children's Act also considers that any major changes in the child's life could potentially affect the child and commands that the best interest of the child must always be a priority (RSA, 2005). In addition, Proudlock, Dutschke, Jamieson, Monson and Smith (2008) highlight that the Children's Act provides for the full range of social services required to support vulnerable children and their families.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, section 150(1)(a) to (l) of the Children's Act identifies how to classify if children needed care and protection. The section indicates that a child is in need of care and protection if the child had been abandoned or orphaned and was without any visible means of support, displayed behaviour which could not be controlled by the parent or caregiver, lived or worked on the streets or begged for a living, had been exploited or lived in circumstances that exposed the child to exploitation, or was deliberately neglected or degraded by a parent or a caregiver who had parental responsibilities (RSA, 2005).

Moreover, section 150(2)(b) addresses child-headed households and states that a child found in circumstances such as those in child-headed households may be a child in need of care and protection and should be referred for investigation by a social worker. This means that, firstly the social worker as the main professional implementing the act, should visit and investigate children living in child-headed households to determine their need for care and protection. Section 150(3) of the Children's Act further states that, in the second instance, and after the social worker investigated whether the children required care and protection and found that they were not in need of care and protection, it was still expected of the social worker to assist and support the children in the child-headed households where necessary and take measures to render social services such as counselling, mediation, prevention and early intervention services, family reconstruction and rehabilitation, as well as behaviour modification (RSA, 2005).

Although the Children's Act makes provision for social work service delivery to these households as also indicated in section 28(1)(c) of the Constitution, a recent research study about the experiences of heads of child-headed households in South Africa's Limpopo province found that child-headed households were not assisted or provided with social services by social workers. Furthermore, heads of child-headed households indicated on several occasions, that available social workers would not assist them, leaving them frustrated in their vulnerable state. This means that the necessary investigations were not conducted to

assess the needs of the children in child-headed households and as a result, social services, such as counselling, early intervention services and problem-solving were not rendered (RSA, 2005; Diago, 2020). Therefore, there is a possibility that the stipulations put in place by the Children's Act to protect and support child-headed households might not always be executed, meaning that child-headed households might not be protected in the same way as other children who were not residing in a child-headed households and had their rights to parental care and social services satisfied.

2.5.3 Children's Amendment Act (41 of 2007)

The Children's Amendment's Act (41 of 2007) was adopted in 2007 and builds on to the existing Children's Act. The Amendment Act aims to promote the constitutional rights of children and the principles relating to their care and protection (Ndonga, 2016). In terms of child-headed households the Amendment Act requires the provincial head of the Department of Social Development to recognise a household as a child-headed household under specific circumstances. These circumstances are that:

- the parent, guardian, or caregiver of the household should be terminally ill, should have died, or should have abandoned the children in the household;
- no adult family member should be available to provide care for the children in the household;
- a child over the age of 16 years should have assumed the role of a caregiver in respect of the children in the household; or
- it should be in the best interest of the children in the household, meaning that the best interest of the child is a priority in the recognition of a household as a child-headed household and should always be considered by the provincial head of the Department of Social Development.

In addition, social workers are seen as significant role players in the care and protection of vulnerable children and are expected to investigate child-headed households and assess their situation to determine their needs and ensure that their best interests were considered. Immediately after the assessment, social workers must report to the provincial head of the Department of Social Development and render necessary social services to these children to support them (RSA, 2005; 2007).

The Act in its section 137(2)(a) to (b) further requires that a child-headed household must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court, an organ of state, or a non-governmental organisation determined by the provincial head of the Department of Social Development. The designated adult supervisor is expected to be fit and proper to be allowed to supervise a child-headed household (RSA, 2007; Lim, 2009). The

supporting role of the supervisor is oriented to enhancing the capacity of the children living in the child-headed household to function as a family. Therefore, the supervisor is required to perform the role that is much like a foster parent but with much more limited decision-making power. Section 137(6) specifically prohibits a supervisor appointed by a children's court, or an organ of state, or a non-governmental organisation determined by the provincial head of the Department of Social Development, from taking any decisions concerning a household without consulting a child-head of the household and other children in the household given the maturity and age of the children. Section 137(7) further stipulates that the child heading the household may take all day-to-day decisions concerning the household and the members of the household (RSA, 2007).

In addition, the Children's Amendment Act in its section 137(9) indicates that a child-headed household may not be excluded from any grant, subsidy, aid, relief, or other assistance or programmes provided by an organ of state in the national, provincial, or local sphere of government. In section 137(3) to (5), the Children's Amendment Act requires that the supervising adult should perform the duties as prescribed in relation to the household and may collect and administer on the child-headed household's behalf, any social security grant or other grant in terms of the Social Assistance Act (13 of 2004) or other assistance to which the household is entitled. Also, the supervising adult that collects and administers money for a child-headed household is accountable in the prescribed manner to the organ of state or the NPO that designated them to supervise the child-headed household (RSA, 2007).

However, more than a decade ago, Muyomi (2012) questioned how this Amendment Act as well as section 28 of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) were being implemented in practice because in Muyomi's view, child-headed households continued to live without adult care and with minimal support and social services being rendered to them. This view was confirmed by Diago (2020) who, in 2020 found that the child-headed households of Diago's study did not have any adult caregiver recognised by the head of the provincial Department of Social Development. Moreover, that the child-headed households that took part in the study, did not have access to any social grants and that heads of such households were forced to leave school and find employment to care for and support their siblings. This means that although the Children's Amendment Act requires that child-headed households should have an adult caregiver to fulfil a parental role and that child-headed households may not be excluded from any grant, subsidy, aid, relief, or other assistance or programmes provided by an organ of state, the reality was that these requirements were not consistently implemented in practice, and that not one of the legal requirements, including that an adult caregiver must

be appointed to fulfil a parental role and that child-headed households must obtain any grant, were implemented in the households of Diago's study.

2.6 SOUTH AFRICAN WELFARE POLICIES TO PROTECT CHILDREN

Due to the vulnerable state in which many children in South Africa live, various bodies of welfare legislation have been enacted to ensure their care and protection. In the following section, South African welfare policies designed to protect child-headed households are analysed.

2.6.1 White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997)

The 1997 White Paper for Social Welfare is the primary policy document that was designed to take the country into a new and inclusive direction by facilitating the provision of appropriate developmental social welfare services to all South Africans, especially those living in poverty, those who are vulnerable, and those who have special needs. Prior to 1994, the welfare service in South Africa was racially biased, which resulted in welfare services being mostly unavailable to many of the African citizens of the country. That is why it was necessary to adopt the developmental approach to social welfare with the White Paper for Social Welfare in 1997, as this created a just and equitable system within which the needs of all South African citizens could be met, especially the most vulnerable (RSA, 1997). Since the adoption of this developmental approach, the South African government made a commitment that they would transform social welfare services within the context of the broader transformation agenda of the South African society (Patel, 2015). The White Paper for Social Welfare was one of the earliest policies after apartheid to focus on this transformation of the welfare system.

Section 1 of the White Paper for Social Welfare analyses the situation of children and clearly highlights children in difficult circumstances as those children who were denied their most basic human rights and whose growth and development were consequently impaired. These would include preschool children from birth to 36 months old, out-of-home care children, children with mental, physical, and sensory disabilities, children with chronic diseases, children who were abused and neglected, street children, children who were involved in child labour, children who abuse substances/drugs/inhalants, children of divorcing parents, as well as children who were nutritionally vulnerable (RSA, 1997). At the time that the White Paper for Social Welfare was drafted, South African children living in child-headed households were not considered to be children living in difficult circumstances. This could be because the issue of child-headed households only emerged in sub-Saharan Africa during the eighties, consequently there is a possibility that at the time the White Paper for Social Welfare was developed, the issue of child-headed households was not widely known.

However, in 2016, with the publishing of the Comprehensive Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, the same groups that were listed in the White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997 were identified as in need of special attention, i.e., no mention was made of child-headed households. The Comprehensive Report further emphasised that children suffering from chronic diseases, abused and neglected children, street children, and children involved in child labour were in need of special attention (Department of Social Development, 2016).

Thus, the Comprehensive Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare still did not regard child-headed households as children who required special attention and who were living in difficult circumstances. This was despite authors such as Muyomi (2012) who mentioned that the development of children in child-headed households was concerning in terms of coping in the absence of parental guidance and socialisation, and Geldenhuys (2016) who indicated that children living in child-headed households were living in extremely vulnerable circumstances and needed protection and support. According to Strydom, Schiller and Orme (2020) childhood violence and neglect are issues of critical concern that are frequently overlooked because, unfortunately, the realities of life for vulnerable children have become far too commonplace in the South African context. The same can be said about child-headed households, namely that this growing phenomenon is overlooked in many African countries, including South Africa, especially when the children living in these households are experiencing numerous social issues, such as poverty and a lack of income that are not adequately addressed and that continue to affect their lives (Mturi, 2012).

2.6.2 Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) (RSA, 2006) and Framework for Service Delivery (RSA, 2013)

The Department of Social Development formulated the Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) in 2006 as a framework to implement developmental social services to reduce the burden on social security through its levels of intervention, namely prevention, early intervention, statutory intervention, reunification, and aftercare services (RSA, 2006). The ISDM was based on the principles of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) and the international and constitutional obligations that inform the mandate of the Department of Social Development in the provision of services. The main aim of the ISDM is to implement a comprehensive, efficient, effective, and quality service delivery system, which should contribute to a self-reliant society. The ISDM was further developed to improve the neglected social welfare service delivery which was abandoned due to the historical focus on social security (RSA, 2006).

The ISDM intends to respond to children in families and highlights that children who are poor are among the target groups. The emphasis is on delivering childcare and protection services aimed at improving the wellbeing of children. There is a strong accentuation on the implementation of a developmental approach to promote the growth and development of individuals, groups, or communities (RSA, 2006).

To give effect to the developmental approach adopted by the White Paper for Social Welfare, the Department developed the Framework for Social Welfare Services within the ISDM to facilitate or guide the implementation of a comprehensive, integrated, human rights-based, well-resourced, and quality developmental social welfare services, such as the ISDM (RSA, 2013).

Therefore, social workers who are, in terms of the Children's Act expected to provide support and services to child-headed households to ensure that they are protected and cared for, should provide such social work services through the Framework for Social Welfare Service within the ISDM's levels of intervention, namely, prevention, early intervention, statutory intervention, reunification, and aftercare. Furthermore, to implement the ISDM, role players such as social workers, should uphold these children's rights to social services as enshrined in section 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution by investigating child-headed households and delivering support and social services to them after investigation. However, persistent challenges in social welfare service delivery, such as poorly developed childcare and protection services, inadequate number of social service practitioners to deal with high caseloads, and deepening poverty, continue to affect the most vulnerable, such as children living in child-headed households (Skhosana, 2020; Strydom, Spolander, Engelbrecht & Martin, 2017; Mokoele & Weyers, 2021).

2.6.3 National Plan of Action for Children in South Africa (NPAC) (RSA, 2012)

The National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC) is a comprehensive overarching plan that brings together the South African government's obligations in the realisation of the rights of children in South Africa (RSA, 2012). The aim of the NPAC is to serve as a holistic framework for the integration of policies and plans by government departments and civil society (NPOs and CBOs) to promote the wellbeing of all children (RSA, 2012). In addition, the NPAC indicates that the state is required to improve the standard of living of children through investigating and assessing children who are poor, where they live, and the access they have to basic social services (RSA, 2012).

The NPAC was developed with the improvement of the rights of all children in South Africa at its core. The NPAC aims to ensure that children are safe, healthy, happy, educated and

developed, that they can participate in matters affecting them and that they have an adequate standard of living (UNICEF, 2019). However, the reality is that children in South Africa, especially children living in child-headed households, are not treated equally. This observation was made because a study about the experiences of heads of child-headed households in the Limpopo province of South Africa found that the children living in child-headed households inter alia, had an unsatisfied need for food as their experiences included having to spend several nights without food or going to bed hungry (Diago, 2020). This Limpopo study further indicated that the affected children had a need for shelter because their living conditions were inappropriate, unsafe, and dilapidated, exposing the children to all kinds of danger. The study therefore found that the children's rights had not been realised and their needs had not been satisfied. Thus, eleven years after the NPAC was developed, it was still not as effective and widely applied as it should have been. Thus, the rights of children living in child-headed households can only be realised and attained if all the children in the country were viewed through an equity lens whereby all children were treated equally, and all their needs were responded to.

2.7 INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

South Africa is a signatory to two international policy documents, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1990). By ratifying these treaties, the South African government committed itself to promote and protect the rights of children in line with the expectations and standards set out in these policy documents.

2.7.1 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted in 1989 and came into operation in 1990. It is the cornerstone of children's rights globally and was developed in response to poor progress and inadequate services in the West to effectively acknowledge the needs of children. The UNCRC aims to ensure that the welfare and rights of children are protected worldwide (UN, 1989; Ndonga, 2016). The realisation of children's rights relies on the UNCRC's main principles, which include non-discrimination, best interests of the child, right to life, and development and active participation (UNICEF, 2010).

Article 2 of the UNCRC (UN, 1989) highlights the **principle of non-discrimination** and points out that state parties "shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present UNCRC to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind" (UNICEF, 2010:92-94). However, literature argues that children living in child-headed households are forced into adulthood, that they are denied their sense of childhood, and that they are discriminated

against when, in the absence of their parents or adult caregivers, they must assume roles which are reserved for adults (Muyomi, 2012; Lwandiso, 2020).

The UNCRC (UN, 1989) further indicates that child protection and care should be available to promote children's wellbeing and ensure that their best interests are always considered. The **best interests of the child principle** require state parties to ensure that children are protected and cared for to promote children's wellbeing. Therefore, decision makers as well as law and policy makers are expected to always consider whether any decision made regarding a child will have an impact on that child's life and if that impact will be in the best interest of the child. According to Hall and Mokomane (2018), children living in child-headed households tend to be extremely poor and have little access to income. Therefore, considering the circumstances of these children, it is possible to conclude that their best interests are not considered, and their wellbeing is not promoted by taking the decision to leave them in a child-headed household, because South African research found that poverty directly undermines the fulfilment of their basic material needs, such as food and clothing (Diago, 2020). Unless social services comply with the stipulations as indicated in the Children's Act and the Children's Amendment Act namely, that an adult supervisor must be appointed and that the household must have access to social services, as well as social security, if necessary, it cannot be accepted that it would be in the best interest of a child to be left in a child-headed household.

Another principle of the UNCRC is the **principle of survival and development**. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2016) indicates that it is the duty of the state to ensure the survival and development of every child as well as provide every child who can form their view, with the opportunity to express those views freely in all matters affecting them. The international framework requires the child's survival and development to be guaranteed and the right to actively engage and express their views to be promoted. However, the development and survival of children living in child-headed households might be in jeopardy because they are unrepresented since they live by themselves and might not have the opportunity to express their views about their challenges. Furthermore, they are struggling to access services, such as social work and social security services, to ensure their survival and development without the support of their parents or caregivers (Van Dijk & Van Driel, 2009; Diago, 2020).

Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN, 1989) also identifies the principle of **active participation** and mentions that children who can form their own views must be given the opportunity to express those views freely in all matters affecting them (UNICEF, 2016). This means that children living in child-headed households have a right to actively engage and express their views and should

be provided with the opportunity to be heard. However, Diago (2020) found that children living in child-headed households were not aware of their right to express their views regarding their challenges and as a result they accepted their unfortunate situation without seeking assistance. It is clear that the South African government is struggling to implement the above-mentioned principles of the UNCRC (1989) in terms of children living in child-headed households.

2.7.2 The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990)

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was adopted in 1990 after the adoption of the UNCRC (1989), but with the idea of representing an Africanised concept of children's rights. The Charter was drawn up in response to the feeling of many African states that Africa had been marginalised in the ten-year drafting of the UNCRC (ACRWC, 1990). There was also a feeling that African values were not sufficiently reflected in the UNCRC and as a result the ACRWC (1990) aims to represent an African concept of children's rights and to reflect virtues of the African cultural heritage, of the historical background, and the values of the African civilisation. However, despite the ACRWC, the lives of many African children continue to be characterised by misery and squalor, with children in countries such as Uganda, Zambia and South Africa going through life without their parents (Nonyana-Mokabana, 2012).

In line with the UNCRC, the ACRWC contains four important general principles that are meant to assist with the interpretation and application of all other articles (ACRWC, 1990). The **best interest of the child principle** is emphasised in Article 4 of the ACRWC and requires that in "all actions concerning children undertaken by any person or authority, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (ACRWC, 1990:3). According to literature, the family environment that should serve as a safety net for child-headed households had been eroded causing these children to be subjected to numerous challenges because they were living without parental care (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2008). Therefore, it is possible that their best interests were not considered under these circumstances, despite the requirements of the ACRWC (1990).

Furthermore, in Article 3 of the ACRWC, the **principle of non-discrimination** requires states parties to "take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination" (ACRWC, 1990:3). This means that the government should prioritise the protection and care of children of child-headed households since they were not cared for and protected by parents. However, the development of these children was also impaired because the older children must often leave school to look after their siblings (Phillips, 2011; South African Human Rights Commission, 2011; Diago, 2020). These findings clearly indicate that

the principles of the charter were not always adhered to leading to extended vulnerability for child-headed households.

According to Article 4(2) of the ACRWC, **the principle of participation** requires state parties to “assure to the child who can form his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child” (ACRWC, 1990:5). However, Diago (2020) highlights that children from child-headed households lived by themselves, that adult caregivers were not appointed and that they had no opportunities to express their views about being left on their own.

The right to **survival and development principle** is emphasised in Article 5 of the ACRWC which requires governments to take all necessary measures to ensure the survival, protection, and development of the child (Newell, 2005). However, in child-headed households the head who is a child under the age of 18 is responsible for the welfare and survival of the rest of the household. Therefore, the South African government needs to evaluate its implementation of the ACRWC and the UNCRC to ensure that stipulations concerning the care and protection of children in child-headed households were adhered to so that such children could have the same opportunities as other cared-for and protected children had.

2.8 HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED PERSPECTIVE AND CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2021) the human rights-based perspective is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. The human rights-based perspective seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and to redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development (UNICEF, 2010). The study moves from the point that the rights of children residing in child-headed households were usually compromised, considering their experiences and circumstances which include being forced into adulthood, amongst other challenges (Mturi, 2012; Maila & Mabasa, 2023). Therefore, the human rights-based perspective would be used to analyse the rights of child-headed households to care and protection. The principles of the human rights-based perspective, namely universality, indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, participation, empowerment, and accountability will be discussed and applied to child-headed households in the following section.

2.8.1 Universality and inalienability

UNICEF (2016) emphasises that human rights are universal and inalienable and that everyone, everywhere in the world is entitled to them. Furthermore, Article 2 of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status (UNICEF, 2016). The South African Constitution, in line with the UDHR, gives all children's rights extensive protection as they have a special place in the Constitution.

Moreover, section 28 of the Constitution is specifically devoted to children and because the realisation of section 28 has not been made subject to the availability of resources, the state is obligated to protect the rights of children and to ensure that their best interests are considered in any matter. In the South African context, children living in child-headed households are entitled to family care, parental care, basic nutrition, shelter, and social services as stipulated in section 28 of the South African Constitution and section 150 (3) of the Children's Act (RSA, 1996 2005). However, South African research indicates that the daily reality of children living in child-headed households was often characterised by a lack of parental or family care, food insecurity, inadequate clothing, as well as a lack of social security (Muyomi, 2012; Ngconjana, Kwizera & Umejesi, 2017; Blaauw et al., 2011). Therefore, the rights that children living in child-headed households were entitled to, may not be responded to adequately, leaving such children in a vulnerable state where their rights are infringed upon.

2.8.2 Indivisibility

According to UNICEF (2016), human rights are indivisible as they cannot be separated from humans. Thus, human rights are inherent to the dignity of every human person whether civil, political, economic, social, or cultural in nature. Furthermore, all human rights have equal status and cannot be ranked in any hierarchy (UNICEF, 2010). In the case of child-headed households, the principle of indivisibility alludes to fulfilling all the rights of the children with regards to their psychological, social, material, developmental, physical, and spiritual needs. Therefore, in the South African context, all the rights of children stipulated in section 28 of the Constitution (such as the right to basic nutrition and shelter, basic healthcare and social services, the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation, the right to basic education, the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment) must be satisfied because they were all connected and because satisfying one right instead of another would ultimately create an imbalance and result in a dissatisfaction of needs (RSA, 1996).

Research results indicate that the rights of children were not always acknowledged. A study executed in the Rakai District in Uganda concluded that the rights of children as stipulated in the ACRWC, were not responded to as children living in child-headed households would temporarily or permanently abandon school to care for ill relatives or to manage the running

of the household (Collins et al., 2016). Furthermore, in South Africa, the Constitutional rights of children may also not have been satisfied as was found by Diago (2020) in a study about the experiences of heads of child-headed households in the Limpopo province of South Africa, namely that children living in child-headed households had difficulty finishing school due to the pressure of failing their grades, as well as the responsibility of having to care for their siblings. The impact on the education of children in child-headed households was also recorded in an earlier South African study. Nziyane and Alpaslan (2012) found that the lives of orphaned children living in child-headed households, were affected by the parental duties they were expected to execute, and that these parental duties would ultimately interfere with their schooling, thus contributing to them dropping out of school. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that the rights that children living in child-headed households are entitled to, such as the right to education and the right to parental care, are effectively satisfied because such children have equal status to other children and because responding to one right instead of another has the potential to jeopardise the daily reality of children of child-headed households as well as that of their future.

2.8.3 Interdependence and interrelatedness

According to UNICEF (2019), rights are interdependent meaning that the realisation of one right often depends, wholly or in part, on the realisation of others. UNICEF (2010) further highlights that the non-attainment of one right may affect the realisation of the others as rights are intricately connected. With more focus on section 28(1)(b) to (d) of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996), it is possible to notice how interrelated the right to family or parental care is to the right to be protected from maltreatment and neglect. It is consequently important to understand that failure to respond to the right to family or parental care, jeopardises other rights because they are all interconnected.

In South Africa, heads of child-headed households indicated that, after being left without parents, they had to remain in their households and care for their siblings as their siblings did not have any alternative care. These participants furthermore explained that being in child-headed households exposed them to multiple challenges, including, having to look for part-time employment to support themselves and their siblings (Diago, 2020). Therefore, the rights of these children to care and protection were not satisfied after they were left alone without parents or adult caregivers. It is imperative that all the rights of children from child-headed households were adequately responded to. To do so was the responsibility of role players, such as the head or deputy head of the provincial Department of Social Development, social workers, and social worker supervisors who had to ensure that all the rights of children living in child-headed households to care and protection, were attained to improve their lives.

2.8.4 Equality and non-discrimination

UNICEF (2010) explains that equality and non-discrimination are the cornerstones of a process whereby all individuals are treated equally as human beings, and by virtue of the inherent dignity of each person, are entitled to their rights without discrimination of any kind. This means that race, colour, sex, ethnicity, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, birth, or other status should not be used to discriminate against children and deny them their rights (UNICEF, 2010). Furthermore, Article 2 of the UNCRC (1989) and Article 1 of the ACRWC highlight that state parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the Convention to each child. The South African Constitution in its section 28 stipulates that every child has the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment, as well as the right to social services (RSA, 1996). The right to alternative care in South Africa refers to the removal of children who have been found in need of care and protection according to section 167(a) and (b) of the Children's Act to be placed in kinship foster care, non-kinship foster care, or in a child and youth care centre. If a child is placed in foster care, a foster care grant of R1120 per child is paid each month to enable foster carers to take care of the child.

However, children living in child-headed households do not have easy access to social services, especially social grants. Diago (2020) found that heads of child-headed households who applied for social grants in Limpopo were not provided with feedback on the outcome of their applications after a prolonged application process and that the social workers they visited, were not helpful. To have to apply for grants and request help from social workers who were unwilling to assist, is a huge challenge for children of child-headed households who did not have any other income. It is particularly difficult to grasp when considering that social grants are an important source of income for millions of other people in South Africa (Hall, 2018). It can be concluded that children living in child-headed households are not always treated equally and that they are discriminated against, as they are not consistently provided with the support they need to access social grants, such as children who have adult caregivers and who are benefiting from social grants.

2.8.5 Participation and inclusion

According to Mohammad and Farjana (2018), participation means a right in terms whereof one can exercise their function in society and express their view or behaviour toward the political system and governance. Furthermore, the principle of participation rests upon the view that every person and everyone are entitled to active, free, and meaningful participation to contribute to, and enjoy, civil, economic, social, cultural, and political development, through which human rights and fundamental freedoms can be enjoyed (UNICEF, 2016). Article 12 of

the UNCRC (1989) further points out that state parties shall assure to the child who can form his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child. In line with the UNCRC, the South African Children's Amendment Act (41 of 2007) in section 137(6)(a) and (b) requires the appointed supervisor to consult with the child heading the household and other children, given their age, maturity, and stage of development before making any decisions concerning the household.

The Amendment Act in section 137(7) and (8) states that the child heading the household may take all day-to-day decisions relating to the household. If the child or children were not satisfied with the way the supervising adult performed their duties, they may report the supervising adult to the organ of state or NPO, (RSA, 2007). It is therefore important that the principle of participation and inclusion as seen in the Amendment Act, is fully implemented. However, as Muyomi (2012) pointed out, due to various reasons such as parents who passed away, many child-headed households were still living without adult caregivers and with no supervision. Diago (2020) further found that many child-headed households were living without adult caregivers or supervisors and that the members of those households had to immediately assume adult roles to ensure that they could provide support and care to their siblings. This is clearly a serious deviation from the stipulations of the Amendment Act and the intention of the rights-based approach.

2.8.6 Empowerment

UNICEF (2010) explains that empowerment is the process by which people's capabilities to demand and use their human rights, grows. This principle of the rights-based perspective focuses on growth in people's abilities to demand and use their rights. The process entails empowering the marginalised to claim their rights instead of having to wait for someone to provide services. The UNCRC (1989), in its Article 19, expects the state to empower children through appropriate legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures, including through effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who are caring for the child. In line with the UNCRC (1989) section 150(3) of the South African Children's Act (RSA, 2005) obligates social workers to provide, where necessary, appropriate support and services, such as counselling, mediation, prevention and early intervention services, family reconstruction and rehabilitation as well as behaviour modification to child-headed households (RSA, 2005).

According to Diago (2020), most heads of child-headed households did not know about any services that should have been rendered to them or about their rights to social services. These heads further indicated that they had not encountered social workers who provided any assistance since they became heads of the households. Furthermore, those who did contact

social workers and visited their offices in search of social services were not assisted. Therefore, it is possible that child-headed households are not empowered because they do not have information about the social support and services they were entitled to. These issues are very serious, especially if it is considered that the UNCRC (1989) obligates the state to empower children, including those of child-headed households, and the Children's Act requires that social workers, who have a significant supporting role to play, should render services. Children from child-headed households are voiceless and marginalised when they do not have access to social services as part of their constitutional rights.

2.8.7 Accountability and respect for the rule of law

According to UNICEF (2016), accountability refers to the obligation of people in a position of authority to take responsibility for their actions and to answer to those affected. This principle highlights that the state and other duty-bearers must comply with the legal norms and standards enshrined in human rights instruments. The principle further sets out that, if people and organisations fail to comply with certain norms and duties, aggrieved rights-holders were entitled to institute proceedings for appropriate redress before a competent court or other adjudicator, in accordance with the rules and procedures provided by law (UNICEF, 2010). As mentioned earlier, Diago (2020) found that children living in child-headed households were not aware of their rights as heads of child-headed households, thus they accepted their roles and circumstances because of a lack of knowledge. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the state and other duty bearers to implement section 28 of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) as well as section 150(3) of the Children's Act to respond to the rights of child-headed households to care and protection.

In addition, when social workers do not deliver intervention services to assist child-headed households, it is highly likely that they are in violation of section 150(3) of the Children's Act (which states that social workers should deliver such services to assist child-headed households). It is also possible that social workers could not be adhering to section 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution, which states that every child has the right to social services and that responsible duty bearers must be accountable according to the rule of law (RSA, 1996; 2005). It is clear from the above discussion that the rights of these households might be violated as the children of child-headed households are not aware of their rights and as the necessary social services are not always delivered to them, causing them to be extremely vulnerable because the structures that should protect them seem to fail to do so.

2.9 THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED PERSPECTIVE AND CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

The human rights-based perspective can be applied by using international human rights norms and treaties to hold governments accountable for the fulfilment of their obligations (UNICEF, 2016). According to Agere and Agere (2020), poverty is a denial of human rights and human dignity because it means people do not have access to education, adequate shelter, or security. Being poor also leads to people becoming or feeling powerless, being exposed to violence and discrimination, and feeling that they do not have a voice to influence decision-making.

Unfortunately, children living in child-headed households find themselves in a similar situation, where they are mostly poor and feel vulnerable due to the absence of their parents or adult caregivers. This vulnerability is then worsened if they do not receive any visible support from extended family members and/or social workers (Diago, 2020). In addition, Le Roux-Kemp (2013) indicated that, even though they were rights-holders, children living in child-headed households, would be subjected to human rights violations, such as food insecurity, lack of shelter and social services. According to Geldenhuys (2016), the human rights-based perspective views the situation of poor people, such as those in child-headed households, not only in terms of welfare outcomes, but also in terms of having an obligation to prevent and respond to human rights violations with the aim to empower families and communities to secure assistance.

The human rights-based perspective is particularly suitable for ensuring that the weakest citizens have access to essential services such as social services, adequate shelter, and education. The human rights-based perspective also links with children living in child-headed households who tend to be marginalised and whose rights to parental care and education, amongst other rights, are often ignored (Diago, 2020). Therefore, to apply the human rights-based perspective and to ensure that the rights of child-headed households are protected and promoted, duty-bearers, such as social workers, social worker supervisors, the Department of Social Development and the head/deputy head or designated person from the provincial Department of Social Development, are expected to contribute and engage with rights-holders, which in this case are children living in child-headed households, so as to redress any possible violations. In addition, the state has the obligation to eliminate difficult conditions which violate the rights of children of child-headed households and to implement the South African Constitution to uphold their rights.

2.9.1 Advantages of applying the human rights-based perspective to child-headed households

One of the main advantages of a human rights-based perspective is that it can create a far-reaching consequence that could bring about a fundamental change in laws and policies (UNICEF, 2010). For instance, using a human rights-based perspective, vulnerable groups such as child-headed households, can challenge executive actions undertaken in terms of or in violation of the law, thereby bringing about change in the law. This is based on the principle of accountability, whereby aggrieved rights-holders are entitled to institute proceedings for appropriate redress before a competent court or other adjudicator in accordance with the appropriate legal rules and procedures (UNCRC, 1989). With its focus on the law, but the root cause in poverty, the human rights-based perspective releases a new transformative potential for development as this perspective has the potential to bring people, whose rights are denied by poverty, to the centre of development analyses and implementation. This perspective is relevant to children of child-headed households because they are exposed to poverty and live in difficult conditions and as a result, their rights must be upheld and their needs must be satisfied and brought to the centre of development (Human & Van Rensburg, 2011; Hall & Richter, 2018). In general, the human rights-based perspective makes seriously struggling people in developing countries aware of their rights and that those rights can be enforced. This is particularly important for marginalised groups such as children of child-headed households.

The perspective further stresses the accountability of duty-bearers, which in the case of South Africa, are designated child protection organisations and heads/deputy heads of the provincial Department(s) of Social Development. The accountability of duty bearers could have a positive impact on the lives of children of child-headed households as it may change the way in which the relevant NPOs and provincial departments of Social Development approach and act when dealing with the rights of children living in child-headed households. Accountability further offers legitimacy through an internationally recognised development framework which assists states in fulfilling international obligations and building accountable relations between state structures, social groups, and the individual. This framework has the potential to achieve positive change in people's lives by focusing on injustice, inequality, discrimination, and exploitation. As guided by the UNCRC (1989), the human rights-based perspective promotes a holistic view of children and child protection that engages the full range of actors involved in protecting children's rights. With child-headed households under a predicament, it is possible to see how relevant the rights-based perspective is for this phenomenon as well as the perspective's possible positive impact through promoting and protecting the rights of child-

headed households to social services as well as considering their best interests (Meintjes, Hall & Sambu, 2015; Diago, 2020).

2.9.2 Disadvantages of applying the human rights-based perspective to child-headed households

According to Boesen and Martin (2007), the human rights-based perspective is not without challenges. It is argued that the human rights-based perspective is inevitably contextualised within a western and modernist framework. De Man (2018) postulates that very few southern or eastern countries were included when the content of the perspective was decided upon and as a result, it does not accurately reflect either African or Asian values. It is further argued that the human rights agenda is inherently discriminatory in its application of human rights principles across the world because the international human rights community focuses its attention on one area, whilst ignoring other more serious violations (De Man, 2018). Moreover, Schaaf (2013) argues that the international human rights community usually prefers to focus on mass atrocities and grave violations of human rights and not on everyday oppressive structures and practices that affect millions more people. The effectiveness of human rights enforcement mechanisms has also been questioned. This is mostly because states, tasked with the fulfilment and protection of rights, are the same actors who decide on accountability and enforcement mechanisms and will be reluctant to allocate sufficient resources and attention to a well-functioning system that will only work to scrutinise their actions. Yet, despite its disadvantages, the human rights-based perspective is seen as extremely significant to marginalised groups, such as child-headed households, as the perspective provides a point of departure to analyse the fulfilment of rights of vulnerable groups and as it aims to advance the realisation of the rights of vulnerable groups, such as child-headed households to care and protection.

2.10 CONCLUSION

The South African government's explicit legislative commitments, such as the South African Constitution, Children's Act, and the ratification of the UNCRC, the ACRWC as well as other relevant domestic policies enacted in response to children's rights, are commendable. However, there is a possibility that the rights of children living in child-headed households to social services as stipulated in the Constitution, could sometimes be violated. There is also a possibility that children of child-headed households do not always have an adult caregiver who cares for them despite their right to such a caregiver which is enshrined in the Amendment Act. As a result, having legalised child-headed households in South Africa, even though it was meant as a protective measure, continues to be at odds with the principles of children's rights,

especially with the conventional idea that children should be taken care of by an adult caregiver.

It is safe to conclude that government response towards the rights of child-headed households to care and protection has been more in theory than in practice, especially since it seems that there is a lack of care and protection for children of child-headed households. It can thus be derived that the best interests of children of child-headed households are not always considered, which means that international frameworks ratified by the South African state, such as the UNCRC (1989) and the ACRWC (1990) are not abided to. This is also the case with the South African Constitution, which, even though it provides for the extensive protection of children's rights, with section 28 specifically devoted thereto, it does not seem to be applied to children living in child-headed households. As it is possible that the rights of children from child-headed households to care and protection might not be responded to, the application of the rights-based approach is significant to ensure that the rights of child-headed households to care and protection are upheld, because this approach uses international human rights norms and treaties to hold governments accountable for their obligation and it is directed to promoting and protecting human rights.

In the following chapter, the circumstances of child-headed households are discussed.

CHAPTER 3: CIRCUMSTANCES OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Social issues, such as poverty, child neglect and abuse are rife in South Africa with children who are mostly the victims thereof (Louw & Louw, 2014; Save the Children, 2020). These social issues are often worse in child-headed households where children find themselves alone without a parent or adult guardian to care for them (Diago, 2020). According to Pillay (2016), children living in child-headed households, especially heads of child-headed households must prematurely shoulder the burdens of adulthood since they were forced to adopt the adult role of supporting their family and of frequently being responsible to supply their own food. Hall and Richter (2018) add that these children are vulnerable in multiple ways and have many unsatisfied needs, including food and adequate shelter. As mentioned in Chapter 2, according to the South African Children's Act (RSA, 2005) a designated child protection social worker should render social services and provide necessary support to children living in child-headed households. Therefore, it is important to unpack the circumstances of these children and how this affects their everyday lives so that social workers have a clear understanding of the needs of such children to plan and develop efficient services.

To reach the second objective of the study, the circumstances of child-headed households are explored in this chapter to provide an understanding of the everyday reality of child-headed households within the South African context. This entails recording and analysing how children of child-headed households experienced life differently to children in households who, for instance, grew up with the care and support of adult caregivers. Furthermore, the outcomes of the circumstances of these children will be identified to provide an understanding of their immediate needs for care and protection. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the role of NGOs in rendering child welfare services to care for and protect children within the South African context. The realities of the South African child protection system are also dissected to analyse their capacity for service rendering to child-headed households.

3.2 Circumstances and outcomes of child-headed households

South African children living in child-headed households are among the most poor and vulnerable in society (Alpaslan & Nziyane, 2011; Hall, 2018). To provide a clear understanding of the unfortunate reality of these households which reality possibly infringes their rights to care and protection, a detailed discussion of their circumstances and outcomes are provided next.

3.2.1 Experience emotional difficulties

Emotional difficulties are understood to be emotional concerns caused by grief or similar challenges which impact a person's learning, interpersonal relationships, and/or personal functioning (Agere & Tanga, 2017). When children experience loss from death, divorce, parental incarceration, and other situations, and if they are not provided with appropriate support, they are at risk of developing emotional difficulties that can manifest into psychiatric disorders (See Beh, 2014). Many children struggle with difficulties that could negatively impact their school and interpersonal lives (Pillay, 2011).

In the case of child-headed households, children experience multiple losses in their young lives, especially with the death of parents as they may have watched for months or years how the health of their parents deteriorated and how they eventually died (Nyaradzo, 2013). Other situations, such as parental migration, could also be experienced as a loss. Whatever the reason, when parents leave or die, the children left behind without an adult caregiver to respond to their emotional needs such as love, belonging and warmth (Agere & Tanga, 2017) must deal with emotional difficulties. These circumstances are overwhelming and traumatising for children because they are deprived of being nurtured (Payne, 2012; Lwandiso, 2020). American literature indicates that the loss of one or both parents can be associated with a higher vulnerability for affected children, both from a short- and long-term perspective. Affected children also have an increased risk of developing mental health problems and threats to their emotional wellbeing, such as anxiety, depression, and a perceived lack of control over what happens in their life (Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017).

After the death of a parent or a divorce or separation, some children live with the remaining parent, while in other cases children may live with another caregiver, for example a stepmother, stepfather, grandparent, or other relatives (Alpaslan & Nziyane, 2011). However, according to the Children's Act and research done in South Africa, when there is no remaining caregiver, the oldest child would become responsible to take on the parental role of their parents, thus forming a child-headed household. Research indicated that this is a highly stressful role for the heads, not only because they must look after their siblings, but also because they are forced to overlook their own emotional needs in the process (Diago, 2020). Their situation is worse when they are not provided with adult caregiver support and social services such as bereavement counselling to address their loss, as this could lead to unresolved grief which could affect them negatively (Pillay, 2016).

Section 28(1)(b) of the South African Constitution provides for the right to family care, parental care, or appropriate alternative care to a child who is removed from their family. This provision prioritises the nurturing and development of children in families. However, for children living in

child-headed households, their rights to parental or family care is infringed upon, leaving them in a predicament which could most probably harm their development and nurturing. Therefore, Louw and Louw (2014) concur that a lack of parental and emotional care has negative outcomes for children in terms of their mental health and exposes them to different mental health challenges such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

3.2.1.1 Post-traumatic stress disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a mental disorder that may develop in some children and adolescents after they have been exposed to a traumatic event. This may include incidents that involve serious harm to the individual or others such as accidents, sexual or physical trauma, parental death, neglect, or violence (Seedat, Van Nood, Vythilingum, Stein & Kamlner, 2000). Post-traumatic stress disorder is characterised by symptoms such as intrusive thoughts about the traumatic event, sleep disturbances, fear of the dark and nightmares. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a relatively common disorder, and it affects many people negatively, especially children who depend on adults for their care and safety and have limited ability to influence the events and surroundings in which they live (Tsujiuchi, Yamaguchi, Masuda, Tsuchida, Inomata, Kumano & Mollica, 2016). Thus, when children suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder are given limited support, the disorder may leave them distressed and could typically interrupt their daily functioning. Some children may even lose confidence in their future, especially if they have developed fears associated with specific aspects of their experience and avoid situations which they associate with the traumatic event (Dutton, Rojas, Badour, Wanklyn & Feldner, 2016). American authors (Dutton et al., 2016) further state that the affected individuals are also often at risk of secondary complications such as substance abuse, the risk of suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour.

Diago's (2020) study about the experiences of heads of child-headed households in Limpopo province found that the circumstances that led to children living alone could be due to the death of one or both of their parents, or to them being absent or due to the parents who had to migrate elsewhere for work. These circumstances are often overwhelming and traumatising for the stay-behind children because they witness one or both of their parents die or suddenly leaving their home to work as migrants in urban areas. High rates of traumatisation and post-traumatic stress disorder is noted among South African children. Seedat et al. (2000) in their study on exposure to trauma and post-traumatic stress symptoms in a cohort of 2 041 boys and girls in urban African schools, found that the most common traumas were witnessing violence, being robbed, or mugged, and witnessing a family member being hurt or killed. A similar study by Peltzer (1999) about rural children in South Africa, found that 67% of those children had directly or vicariously experienced a traumatic event, while 8% fulfilled the criteria

for post-traumatic stress disorder. These rates could be attributed to, inter alia, children being exposed to extreme traumatic events, such as parental death, poverty, violence, and/or child sexual abuse (Seepamore, 2016; Hall, 2018).

When it comes to children living in child-headed households it could be argued that they were exposed to most of these traumatic events. Literature further concluded that the conditions associated with being a child in a child-headed household could leave children lonely and distressed because they would not receive any mental or emotional security from their caregivers (Agere & Agere, 2020). Muyomi (2012) concur that when children are continuously being exposed to such traumatic conditions, they could become depressed.

3.2.1.2 Onset of depression

Depression is a medical condition in which a person feels sad, hopeless, and unimportant, causing the sufferer often not to be able to live normally (Williams, Debattista, Duchemin, Schatzberg & Nemeroff, 2016). When suffering from depression during childhood, it becomes a significant mental health concern as it impacts cognitive, affective, social, behavioural, and physical domains. Children who experience depressive symptoms are at an increased risk of developing physical and mental health, social, and behavioural problems lasting throughout their adulthood (Tong et al., 2019). Children who are marginalised due to their socioeconomic status and their racial and ethnic identities are at an increased risk of experiencing depression (Makuyana, Mbulayi & Kangethe, 2020).

Depression is the most common mental health condition in the general population, it is characterised by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt, low self-worth, and poor concentration and, like post-traumatic stress disorder, it could lead to suicide (Large, Kaneson, Myles, Myles, Gunaratne & Ryan, 2016). Prolonged bereavement results in several negative outcomes, including depression and suicidal ideation. Furthermore, inadequate psycho-social care and support after bereavement may develop into depression for children (Large et al., 2016).

Depression has become a public health concern in South Africa due to its early onset and strong impact on children and their families. Several adverse childhood challenges, such as emotional burdens that children carry due to child neglect and orphanhood, are known to be associated with depression (Visagie, 2019). Such exposure to emotional difficulties and traumatic events can pose a severe threat to a child's wellbeing and are related to increased chances of children developing depression (Williams et al., 2016). Children find it difficult to verbalise these troubles as they lack the language skills to put their feelings into words and are emotionally still maturing (Visagie, 2019).

South African children in general, are exposed to high rates of poverty, informal housing, orphanhood, and material neglect, amongst other challenges, and could be at a higher risk of developing depression (Makuyana et al., 2020). However, in South Africa, there remains a dearth of nationally representative rural-urban and spatial studies of the prevalence and factors of depression among the population (Onuh, Mbah, Ajaero, Orjiakor, Igboeli & Ayogu, 2021). The limited research about the prevalence of depression in children could be attributed thereto that mental health is understudied in South Africa, which is largely due to a lack of national representative data and epidemiological research on major depressive disorders. Furthermore, the impact of depression on children and adolescents has traditionally been understated, due to the erroneous belief that children could not become depressed (Makuyana et al., 2020).

Chidziva and Heeralal (2016) explain that children living in child-headed households are vulnerable to developing depression and other psychological issues such as anxiety due to stress. Research in China found that suicidal temptation is higher for children left behind in child-headed households because their emotional needs are not responded to. This is mostly because children's emotional development relies on supportive relationships with adult caregivers, particularly their parents who are normally loving and supportive. It was also found that children exposed to orphanhood, abuse, neglect, and informal housing are known to be at a greater risk of depression (Cheng & Sun, 2015). In Romania, children left behind in child-headed households are more likely to be depressed and more often suffer from health problems especially in rural areas (Botezat, & Pfeiffer, 2014). Available South African research regarding the development of depression for child-headed households states that these children would live in socially depressive environments because of the death, labour migration, or general neglect from their caregivers or parents (Makuyana et al., 2020; Ngconjana et al., 2017).

3.2.2 Assuming adult responsibility

Adult responsibility is a process whereby adult caregivers support children and enable them to cope with the strain of childhood needs. Adult responsibility includes taking care of children, providing them with psychological support, and managing the household (Louw & Louw, 2014). To meet the psychological, social, and material needs of young children, it is best for an adult to assume responsibility as they can be dedicated, pay attention to children's wellbeing, observe them to carefully note their needs and interests, and support them to develop and learn so as to reach their greatest potential (Nxumalo, 2015). In the case of child-headed households there is an absence of adult responsibility, and the expectation is that the head of that household, who are themselves a child under the age of 18, should assume this

responsibility (Kwon Woo, 2012). Performing the role of an adult caregiver is burdensome, difficult, challenging, stressful, and frustrating and as a result, the children living in child-headed households, especially the head of a child-headed household, could easily succumb to pressure from having to deal with these extraordinary and demanding activities because they are emotionally unprepared for the task (Nziyane & Alpaslan, 2012).

Furthermore, in the absence of adult care that could add to family stability and children feeling safe, heads of child-headed households face unnecessary stress that can become toxic, especially when this stress is ongoing over a prolonged period without proper mitigation or support (Yang, 2016; Lu, 2012). This is because the family unit comprises of adult care and support that is the most important institution for a child's development, meaning that children without an adequate family unit and parental care are often vulnerable to all types of abuse and exploitation because the family environment that served as a safety net, has become eroded (Phillips, 2011; Lwandiso, 2020).

The outcome of assuming adult responsibility and a lack of parenting skills for heads of child-headed households can result in the outcome as indicated in a Chinese study, whereby children left behind in child-headed households were more likely to report a higher level of bullying victimisation compared to children living with both parents, because those from child-headed households cannot count on the responsiveness and sensitive care from parents since their care and protection is provide by a child who is not equipped to be a caregiver and who probably needs care and protection themselves (Yang, 2016). When the heads of child-headed households assume adult responsibility, they must often deal with siblings becoming problematic and exhibiting deviant behaviour, such as indulging in alcohol, because they were not cared for by an adult caregiver who could provide guidance and discipline but by a child who lacked proper parenting skills. In addition, when, for instance, rural parents migrate to cities in search of economic opportunities and better living conditions for their family the healthy growth and socialisation of children living in child-headed households are also negatively affected because of lack of parental care and nurturing (Lu & Treiman, 2011).

The same challenges must be dealt with in South Africa where, due to a lack of adult care and parenting skills for heads of child-headed households, children living in child-headed households are left without proper guidance and discipline. They tend to show terrible conduct in school since they did not benefit from discipline that would regularly be administered at home (Nxumalo, 2015). Furthermore, in the South African context, the outcome of the circumstances of child-headed households includes feeling unsafe, which in turn can manifest in the children having behavioural problems, such as staying away from school (Geldenhuis, 2016; Pillay, 2016; Hall, 2018). Children living in child-headed households further experience

not having enough food to eat or clothes to wear, not having safe hygiene routines, not having healthcare, and having insufficient or non-existent housing and education due to a lack of adult care and parenting skills from their caregivers, who are also children (Lwandiso, 2020).

Therefore, children living in child-headed households continue to resemble being neglected because they do not have a stable family environment that is caring and supportive and because the heads who assume adult responsibility, are themselves children under the age of 18 years who are in most cases not fit to act as responsible adults (Diago, 2020). It can be concluded that literature and research indicate that the outcomes of assuming adult responsibility and going through life without parents are challenging especially for the heads of child-headed households in South Africa because they are immediately forced into adulthood where they are assigned roles and responsibilities that are normally executed by adults resulting in them losing out on their childhood. Instead of socialising with their friends and engaging in activities that children partake in, they spend time managing households and worrying about their siblings' wellbeing, thus putting their physical and mental health in jeopardy (Geldenhuys, 2016; Louw & Louw, 2014)

3.2.2.1 Lose out on childhood

Losing out on childhood is a process whereby a child is unable to develop, function, and act as a child during that phase of life. This could be due to family challenges, such as parental death, migration of parents, or being abandoned by their parents (Louw & Louw, 2014). Children living in child-headed households, especially heads of child-headed households, are deprived of their childhood when they are forced to perform roles meant for adults, such as caring for their siblings and providing them with emotional support and care while dealing with the challenge and emotional strain of living alone and not having parental care (Goronga & Mampane, 2021).

According to South African literature, because heads of child-headed households are young and mostly not fit to be responsible parents, they face difficulties in coping with problems that adult caregivers should be addressing. These include guiding their siblings and helping them with their school homework (Makuyana et al., 2020), grooming their siblings and cleaning their clothes. Sometimes the heads of child-headed households cannot cope, resulting in their siblings looking poorly groomed and wearing dirty clothes. This is all because the household is under the care of a child who is struggling to manoeuvre between being a child and being a caregiver to the household due to the absence of parents (Goronga & Mampane, 2021). Under the best circumstances, children need to be supervised and motivated by parents to attend school and commit to their responsibilities, such as regularly doing homework and completing school assignments (Evans, 2011). Expecting heads of child-headed households who are

children, to assume adult responsibilities, is morally reprehensible since they themselves are children in need of care and support (Itayi & Wonder, 2018).

Thus, although, every child in South Africa has the right to family or parental care, as indicated in section 28(1)(b) of the South African Constitution, children living in child-headed households' rights to parental care provided by biological parents, and family care provided by extended family are infringed upon if adult supervision is not implemented (Diago, 2020). The appointment of an adult supervisor/caregiver will ensure that the responsibility of the household is not put on the eldest child, thus ensuring that the eldest child would not lose out on their childhood and that their rights to care and protection amongst other rights, are upheld.

3.2.3 Exposure to poverty-stricken environment

UNICEF (2019) defines poverty and living in a poverty-stricken environment as a measure, not only of children's suffering but also of their disempowerment. It entails more than a lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods; its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination, and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. Poverty is still one of the biggest problems in the world and children experience poverty as an environment that is damaging to their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual development (United Nations, 2019). Poverty is a global problem that affects the socio-economic and political aspects of the lives of about 700 billion people across the globe (Marrero & Servén, 2022) and about 1 billion children lack necessities as basic as nutrition and clean water. Children who grow up impoverished often lack food, sanitation, shelter, healthcare, and education they need to survive and thrive (UNICEF, 2019).

Child poverty significantly endangers a child's ability to survive, develop, and thrive because at their most basic level, children cannot survive for very long without food, water, and somewhere warm to live (Louw & Louw, 2014). Article 27 of the UNCRC ensures that child development considerations include both physical and emotional factors and posits that all children have a right to a standard of living that allows for such development (Nxumalo, 2015). However, in New Zealand, for instance, approximately 270 000 children live in impoverished conditions and nearly 11 million children are living in poverty in America (Ballantyne & Henaghan, 2015). For millions of children across Europe, the exposure to poverty is real, and the cost of inequality is extremely high, leaving many children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Save the Children, 2020).

The situation in sub-Saharan Africa is much worse where 300 million children live in extreme poverty without their most basic needs accounted for. The situation is dire with African children

who cannot begin to imagine a path out of poverty (Francis & Webster, 2019). It is the same in South Africa where the country's children are not exempt from poverty and where over 11 million of the 18 million children are living below the poverty line. According to Galal (2022), the poverty line is the minimum level of income deemed adequate in a particular country and as of 2022, an individual living in South Africa with less than R945 (\$52.28) per month was considered poor and individuals having R663 (\$36.68) per month available for food were living below the poverty line according to national standards.

Poverty in child-headed households is worse. In China, for example, children left behind in child-headed households are more prone to nutritional and health risks, clearly reflecting the adverse health consequences of exposure to poverty (Tong et al., 2019). In Uganda, children living in child-headed households are exposed to extreme poverty. They are not only deprived of their childhood but are overwhelmed by social and economic challenges (Collins et al., 2016). Many children living in child-headed households in Zimbabwe also suffer severely from extensive and deeply rooted poverty (Gorongu & Mampane, 2021).

A large number of the child-headed households in South African provinces, such as Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and Eastern Cape, fall into this category of families living below the poverty line because they are unable to effectively sustain their households, putting them in an extremely vulnerable position, particularly given the increased cost of living in South Africa (Blaauw et al., 2011; Hall, 2018). Furthermore, Diago's (2020) study about the experiences of heads of child-headed households during the COVID-19 lockdown found that children living in child-headed households were living in severe poverty, often without any financial means to buy food. This finding has been confirmed by other South African authors (Lwandiso, 2020) who indicated that the COVID-19 lockdown measures exposed the dire circumstances of children living in child-headed households, especially poverty. Being poor robs children living in child-headed households of their dreams, hopes and rights, and could dramatically change their chances in life (Save the Children, 2020). Being poor further violates these children's rights to having access to food and basic nutrition as set out in sections 27(1)(b) and 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996).

3.2.3.1 Food insecurity

Food insecurity is the lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to ensure that person lives an active and healthy life (Onyutha, 2019). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2020), the number of undernourished people in the world increased to an estimated 815 million in 2020 from 777 million in 2015, with food insecurity being especially prevalent on the African continent. Around 282 million people in Africa suffer from extreme hunger, this is one-fifth of Africa's total population. Current trends indicate that

this figure will rise to 310 million by 2030 (UNICEF, 2019). The most affected by this challenge are children since childhood malnutrition is an important risk factor for child mortality caused by food insecurity and underlies close to 50% of child deaths worldwide (Vogel, 2012).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of malnourished people increased from 5 to 30 million in the last decade resulting in the death of over 3 million children (John-Joy Owolade, Abdullateef, Adesola & Olaloye, 2022). Child-headed households suffer the worst outcome of exposure to poverty. For children of child-headed households it is not unusual to have insufficient food resulting in undernourishment which consequently leads thereto that children become susceptible to disease (Muyomi, 2012). Food insecurity is one of the major problems experienced by children living in child-headed households; consequently, hunger plays a substantial role in their lives (Chidziva & Heeralal, 2016). They are repeatedly subjected to hunger at home and sometimes must go to bed hungry (Diago, 2020), resulting in a situation where they are always hungry due to a shortage of food (Roser et al., 2019). Because child-headed households regularly suffer from food insecurity, they often limit their daily food intake, i.e., skip meals, to ensure that they have something to eat in the morning and in the evening, thereby having nothing to eat during the day (Geldenhuys, 2016).

Food insecurity was thus found to be a major issue that preoccupied the minds of child-headed households, especially the heads of child-headed households, who were responsible for their siblings and who worried about how they would get through the day/week/month without food at their disposal (Diago, 2020; Goronga & Mampane, 2021). Furthermore, it was found that food insecurity placed them at risk of mental distress because hunger was a source of pain and sadness (Diago, 2020). Under these circumstances, heads of child-headed households experienced a sense of desperation and prolonged stress and anxiety which could negatively impact their health (Kotze, 2011). Therefore, South African authors concur that for South African children of child-headed households, food insecurity is one of the multiple material challenges they are exposed to, and that their situation was drastic because they would not have enough resources to survive (Hall, 2018; Lwandiso, 2020).

3.2.4 Inadequate income

Inadequate income is understood as not having enough money to acquire necessary basic items, such as clothes and food, to effectively sustain a household (Geldenhuys, 2016; International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2017). Inadequate income is increasing in many countries making it challenging for people to reach and maintain a decent standard of living (Penne & Goedeme, 2021, UNICEF, 2019). This is worse in low-income countries such as South Africa, where the inequality is higher than in emerging and advanced countries (Penne & Goedeme, 2021; IMF, 2017). South Africa has been ranked 114 out of 189 countries in 2022 due to its

declining standards of living and worsening income inequality (Wamalwa, 2022). Approximately half of the children (51%) in South Africa are monetary poor, that means they are living in households where their consumption was below the poverty line of R663 (\$36.68) per person per month (Galal, 2022). This situation is made worse by a substantial income gap between the rich and the poor and high unemployment statistics (Agere & Agere, 2020).

As was discussed in the previous section, poverty is rampant in child-headed households, which is largely due to child-headed households not having adequate income because the children have no or very limited means of generating an income (Muyomi, 2012; Lwandiso, 2020). In China, children living in child-headed households without adequate income, are in a disadvantaged situation and require assistance from the local government and community to improve their lives. Otherwise, they are forced by their circumstances to search for an income; a process which exposes them to exploitation and dangerous conditions (Yang, 2016). According to Lu et al. (2015), few left-behind children in China benefitted from the remittances sent to them by their migrant parents. This means that children remain trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty, even if they received remittances from their migrant parents. In India, children left behind in child-headed households live in desperate situations, relying on handouts. They often have no choice but to resort to the streets to beg, or to engage in child labour in restaurants in search of money (Wang & Xu, 2021). Some of these vulnerable children are forced to work in fields or in factories, whilst others undertake domestic work where their lives are threatened by exploitation, especially without adult protection (Wu & Guo, 2020).

Zimbabwean authors (Madziva & Zontini, 2012) add that inadequate income is worse for children living in child-headed households because they are faced with a lack of essentials, since employment is not immediately available for their parents who migrate to foreign countries and remittances are not guaranteed for their children left behind. The endemic poverty in Zimbabwe not only exert a greater economic and social strain on a country that is struggling economically, but also worsens the plight of children living in child-headed households (Madziva & Zontini, 2012). Instead, these children do not remain passive but use their agency by doing everything they can to survive, this normally means that they engage in innovative and unorthodox ways of making up for what they are missing, even though it means being exploited (Chademana & Van Wyk, 2021).

In South Africa, children living in child-headed households also experience inadequate income as they are mostly dependent on their parents or extended families for money. Any form of financial support sent by their parents or extended family members tends to be irregular, causing the children not to be able to plan or budget for the household in terms of basic items they need. These children would then try and acquire unstable incomes from part-time jobs

they engage in, such as cleaning other people's yards (Diago, 2020). Child-headed households in South Africa are entitled to social grants which aim to assist them and contribute to the eradication of the cycle of poverty and vulnerability (Blaauw et al., 2011). However, Phillips (2011) argues that children living in child-headed households have no access to social grants because, according to the South African Constitution, they are seen as minors, therefore making them ineligible to apply for social grants on their own. In the study of Diago (2020), it was found that not one of the children in child-headed households were receiving social grants, in fact, most of the participants were not aware of their right to apply for such grants.

If children from child-headed households continued to be exposed to lack of income in terms of social grants, their poor living conditions will not improve, and the difficulties that they are exposed to will continue (Phillips, 2011; Diago, 2020). The Children's Amendment Act (RSA, 2007) indicates that children living in child-headed households may not be excluded from any grant, subsidy, aid, relief, or other assistance or programmes provided by an organ of state in the national, provincial, or local sphere of government. The Amendment Act continues that, if an adult caregiver has been appointed, that adult caregiver may collect and administer any social security grant, or other grants, or other assistance to which the household is entitled for the child-headed household (RSA, 2007). However, as mentioned in the previous paragraph in Diago's (2020) study, this was not the case for children living in child-headed households, i.e., those child-headed households did not receive any grants or assistance of any kind. If the circumstances of inadequate income for child-headed households continued without proper mitigation, such as appointing an adult caregiver who can obtain grants on behalf of these children, then their right of access to social security and social assistance, which is crucial for the realisation of their other human rights, could further be violated. Thus, according to literature (Louw & Louw, 2014), their physical, social, behavioural, and emotional development could be affected due to their potential exposure to child labour and sexual abuse because of their dire circumstances.

3.2.4.1 Child labour

Child labour is classified as an intolerable and exploitative form of labour carried out by minors under the age of 18. It includes exposing children to undue physical, social, or psychological stress. It undermines children's dignity and self-esteem and it is detrimental to their full social and psychological development (Kontakos, 2020; Spinelli et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2020). It is mentally, physically, spiritually, socially, and morally dangerous and harmful to children (Spinelli, Lionetti, Pastore & Fasolo, 2020). It is furthermore a major source of concern because it frequently interferes with children's ability to attend and perform well in school

(Dash, 2018), as it hampers access to education (Kontakos, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). Child labour is a serious violation of children's fundamental rights as it deprives children of their childhood (Budelli, 2012). Even though it is a fundamental violation of children's rights, children who live in poverty with food insecurity and inadequate income, often engage in child labour.

Although child labour poses a serious challenge to children's wellbeing, it remains a critical issue worldwide (UNICEF, 2021). Despite significant policies to eliminate child labour, it is still prevalent in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean (UNICEF, 2021). Around 26.3 million children within the age group of 5 and 17 years are working in Central and Southern Asia, representing 16.4% of the global number (UNICEF, 2021). India represents the highest number of child labour in the South Asian countries (5.8 million), followed by Bangladesh (5.0 million), Pakistan (3.4 million) and Nepal (2.0 million) (Khan & Lyon, 2015). In many rural areas in India, children work for their survival. Very often parents also depend on their children to provide labour to help the family afford food, clothing, and shelter.

The unfortunate circumstances of children of child-headed households are that, when they receive little to no support, when they have no resources and are at a risk of starvation and malnutrition, their situation would force them to work and provide for themselves, therefore contributing greatly to the prevalence of child labour (Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, 2020). According to Zhao (2013), Eastern European countries, such as Romania, have the highest incidence of child labour in Europe. This dilemma is also present in Russia and Bulgaria where children would leave school to start working at a young age to support their families who are often suffering due to economic difficulties and little to no access to welfare benefits (Hazari & Mohan, 2021).

In sub-Saharan Africa the situation is dire. In 2020, around one in four children in sub-Saharan Africa were involved in child labour, of which 81.5% were working in the agricultural sector, with children often having to work without compensation on family farms (UNICEF, 2021; Fumagalli & Martin, 2022). Child labour is about time and wage exploitation because child labourers are more obedient, less demanding, and less likely to complain about working conditions and how they are treated (Hazari & Mohan, 2021). Therefore, children working as labourers are frequently subjected to abuse and exploitation (Surya Das, 2022).

In Zimbabwe, heads of child-headed households are involved in child labour as a means of sourcing money for the household's subsistence (Chinyoka, 2014). The same happens in South Africa, where heads of child-headed households engage in child labour to survive. Van Dijk and Van Driel (2012) observed that most of the heads of child-headed families earned a livelihood through daily labour and doing petty jobs, which include many girl-heads of child-

headed households engaging in domestic employment, mainly as maids. Metsing (2020) explains that the loss of a parent or both parents expose these children to dangerous working conditions owing to the unanticipated and immediate parental roles which they must assume. Ryan (2020) adds that child labour often results in children to remain into adulthood in unskilled, poorly paid jobs, thus preventing them from breaking the cycle of poverty.

In the above-mentioned cases, the rights of children living in child-headed households to be protected from economic exploitation and from child labour that is dangerous to their health and that hampers their development, is violated. According to section 150(2) of the Children's Act a child exposed to child labour may be a child in need of care and protection and must be referred for investigation by a designated social worker who must take measures, where necessary, to assist the child, including providing counselling services amongst other social services and support (RSA, 2005). Thus, social workers are not only expected to investigate children exposed to child labour; they are also expected to provide necessary social work services and support to these children to ensure that they are protected and cared for.

3.2.4.2 *Child sexual abuse and exploitation*

Child sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities. Such activities do not necessarily have to involve a high level of violence and the child does not even have to be aware of what is happening (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2006). The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts, such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing (Rugwiji, 2017; Han, 2009). Child sexual abuse occurs mainly because of the increasing isolation of individuals and families from a sense of community which could be because of people's increased mobility and the disintegration of neighbourhoods, communities, and kin networks (Zhang, 2016). Child sexual abuse is recognised as a traumatic experience that can have several adverse effects and that leaves children with significant problems in diverse areas of functioning, including behaviour, cognition, and interpersonal relationships (Pretorius & Pfeifer, 2010).

The sexual abuse of children has become a worldwide cause for concern. South Africa is no different and child sexual abuse is rife with the number of victims of child sexual abuse that continues to increase daily. The growing number of perpetrators are either vindicated by the societies in which they reside, or their identities remain concealed due to family ties, which in the latter case, provides abusers with the opportunity to continue their sadistic behaviour, leaving their victims stigmatised for life (Thobejane & Muruge, 2022).

As has been mentioned, child sexual abuse affects children globally. This is, however, especially true of vulnerable children living in child-headed households. In China, according to Wang, Tang and Liu (2020), children in child-headed households are at a high risk of sexual abuse because they live alone and are exposed to a variety of circumstances. The separation of rural families in China has resulted in many “left behind” children, who are thus frequently subjected to sexual abuse. According to Zhang (2016) and Wang et al. (2020), rural society in China is based on interpersonal relationships and rural residents avoid exposing sexual abuse of children publicly, instead, they seek to settle these issues privately. Thus, despite the nature of these challenges, many cases of sexual abuse among left-behind children remain unreported and hidden. It also seems as if the issue of sexual assault against left-behind children remains underexplored in academic circles.

Spurrier and Alpaslan (2017) explain that dysfunction within the family, poor circumstances at home, and the disintegration of the family, expose South African children in child-headed households to sexual abuse. Mturi et al. (2012) highlight that children in child-headed households suffer from emotional and psychological abuse due to being exposed to the risk of sexual abuse, becoming pregnant and ending up with children of their own. In the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, it was found that vulnerable children in child-headed households were exposed to various illicit activities such as sexual exploitation, where some young girls would exchange sexual favours for money to generate an income to make ends meet (Ngconjana et al., 2017).

Children who are left alone become much more vulnerable to sexual abuse because child-headed households are easy targets for predators since they usually utilise the absence of adults to sexually abuse minors. The problem is exacerbated due to sexual abuse tending to be a hidden offense, where neither the victim nor the perpetrator would talk about it (Van Breda, 2010). The effect of child sexual abuse on children is vast and in many cases the damage is permanent because children lose their childhood and dignity. In addition, sexual abuse of children compromises their health as they are exposed to sexually transmitted infections and incurable diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Mulaudzi & Rankakane, 2018). Therefore, the rights of children living in child-headed households to survive in society, to have equal opportunities and be protected against any form of sexual abuse as stipulated in Article 34 of the UNCRC and section 28 of the South African Constitution are violated against if they are sexually abused.

3.2.5 Poor school attendance and performance

If learners do not attend school as they should, they most often perform poorly. This could result in children having challenges with one or all their subjects which would ultimately affect

their grades (Pillay, 2016; Neff & Dahm, 2015; Antia, Berner, Rodored & Winkler, 2022). Attending school regularly helps a child reach their academic potential, develop life skills, and provides an opportunity for social interaction with other children (Lewin et al., 2014). According to Save the Children (2014), poor school attendance is a global challenge with 13% of children in Europe who leave school after they have completed their lower secondary levels (age 11 to 15 years). This means that these children do not then engage in any further education or training programmes. This practice of poor school attendance and poor performance is prevalent amongst children living in child-headed households because having various chores, such as looking after siblings, doing all the housework, and earning an income, while being socially isolated, do not foster academic performance and seriously diminish their chances of attending and doing well at school (Pillay, 2016; Diago, 2020).

According to Mpofo and Chimhenga (2016), children living in child-headed households are exposed to harsh circumstances which force them to engage in multiple household responsibilities causing them to be late for school or stay at home because of fear of being punished if they arrived at school late. In China, children living in child-headed households are more likely to discontinue their education after middle school because they would enter the labour force to support their families, or in many cases, they would follow in their parents' footsteps and become migrant workers (Lu, 2012). Similar circumstances are seen in Uganda where the education of children living in child-headed households is affected by their need to run their households and take care of their siblings, tasks which take precedence over their schoolwork that result in them not performing in their academic activities causing them to drop out of school (Collins et al., 2016). Many children from child-headed families in Kenya do not attend school because of lack of funds and those who remain in school, perform terrible because of little class attendance, lack of school resources such as books, and having too many household responsibilities to attend to (Goronga & Mampane, 2021). This is an unfortunate situation, considering that children without a proper education can often be forced to work as unskilled labourers; vulnerable to injury and exploitation by their employers (Ryan, 2020).

In South Africa the education of children in child-headed households is often interrupted because they need to take over parental duties. This challenge specifically affects the heads of child-headed households as their parental duties would interfere with their schooling, sometimes contributing to them dropping out of school (Nziyane & Alpaslan, 2012). This view was confirmed in another South African study that found the heads of child-headed households had difficulty finishing school as they had to assume the responsibility of caring for their siblings and subsequently failing their grades (Diago, 2020). Relatively similar

situations are reported in other countries, such as the heads of child-headed households in Zimbabwe who stay at home to clean and cook (Gomba, 2018).

Overall, it is clear that the consequences of the unfortunate circumstances of these children could affect their educational success as well as their future employment prospects because access to education is regarded as the real opportunity that enables young people to live a life that they choose. Furthermore, children's rights to education in child-headed households tend to be violated through household tasks which are prioritised over schooling (Mguzulwa & Gxubane, 2019; Diago, 2020). It is therefore clear that, despite that South African children living in child-headed households have a right to education, many of them simply cannot fulfil that right as they tend to drop out of school because of inadequate income and poverty and in the case of heads, because of assuming adult responsibility.

3.2.5.1 School dropout

School dropout refers to those students that leave school without the school's consent or permission, either to another school or to stay at home before the final year of the educational cycle in which they were enrolled (Mawere, 2012). According to Chinyoka (2014) unstable homes which are characterised by child neglect and negative role models from an early age, contribute not only to poor academic performance but also to learners dropping out of school because those learners from unstable families could be emotionally disturbed which could influence their academic performance negatively. Most children from child-headed families are unable to maintain a balance between assuming adult roles and being a schoolchild, causing numerous problems in their upbringing and influencing their decision to stay in school or drop out (Mulaudzi & Rankakane, 2018).

In China, children left behind in child-headed households have more educational problems, such as high rates of skipping class and dropping out of school, all factors that compromise their academic success (Chang, Dong & MacPhail, 2011). In South Africa, heads of child-headed households are forced to stay at home to care for younger siblings and sometimes to look after old grandparents or very ill adults; thus not attending school (Ntuli, Mokgatle & Madiba, 2020). These children then do not have time for schoolwork. It is often argued that education is a way out of poverty, but exactly because of poverty, children and particularly the heads of child-headed households, cannot attend school as their time is taken up by trying to look after their families and to survive, forcing them to drop out of school (Diago, 2020).

From the above discussion it can be concluded that the circumstances of child-headed households may have certain outcomes. These circumstances and outcomes are set out in Table 3.3 below:

Table 3.1: Circumstances and outcomes of child-headed households

Circumstances of child-headed households	Outcomes of child-headed households
Experience emotional difficulties	Post-traumatic stress disorder Onset of depression
Assuming adult responsibility	Lose out on childhood
Exposure to poverty-stricken environment	Food insecurity
Inadequate income	Child labour Child sexual abuse and exploitation
Poor school attendance and performance	School dropout

The circumstances that child-headed households are living in, could have serious outcomes. The experience of emotional difficulties could result in post-traumatic stress disorder and the onset of depression. Children have to assume adult responsibilities, where the outcome is that they are losing out on childhood. Due to their exposure to living in a poverty-stricken environment with an inadequate income, food insecurity becomes a daily reality, which often force these children into child labour and to be sexually exploited and abused. Finally, especially the heads of child-headed households show poor school attendance, which impacts on their performance and then result in them dropping out of school. Given these outcomes, it is a question whether it is in the best interest of the child to grow up in a child-headed household without adult caregivers. If so, it is clear that coordinated social services must be available to ensure their care and protection.

3.3 THE ROLE OF NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

In South Africa most social services are delivered by non-profit organisations (NPOs). South African non-profit child welfare organisations are legal entities that have been organised to operate for a collective or social benefit and provide the bulk of prevention and early intervention services to children and families in the country (Skhosana, 2020). It is also expected of these non-profit child welfare organisations to deliver statutory services and to concentrate on the alleviation and eradication of poverty. For South African organisations to receive public funding for their activities, they must be registered, services must be provided by professionals with an employment contract, and they must meet the established requirements of the state-based agenda (Engelbrecht, 2015). The Department of Social Development outsources most of its direct care for vulnerable children, as well as its Early Childhood Development (ECD) functions to NPOs. The Department’s role in the process is to financially support these crucial services. To achieve this, the Department must negotiate and sign Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with all the enlisted NPOs before the start of the

government's new financial year (Vorster, 2018). A partnership between the South African state and local NPOs was thus fostered in terms whereof the provision of most social services has been delegated on a contractual basis to the NPOs in exchange for public funding (Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015).

The financing of social work services is largely focused on the purchasing of services, where a strong focus on outcomes, achieving targets and the monitoring of services are retained. NPOs that are financed must thus deliver specific programmes in accordance with predetermined priorities and norms and standards of the Department of Social Development. Within this context, child and family welfare service funding is no longer grants-based but requires that the NPOs offer service plans to the state to receive funds (Department of Social Development, 2015; Schmid, 2010). These service plans are performance-managed by the state; this effectively means that the NPOs must comply with the requirements of the state (Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015).

The use of a contracting culture has resulted in a range of intended as well as unintended changes in the structure and management of welfare. However, some authors, such as Strydom et al. (2017), expressed concern that the focus of social workers in children's services is on outputs, measured in numbers, rather than on the process and quality of service provision to clients. Van Niekerk and Matthias (2019) agree that the NPOs, as a result, are focused on numerical targets rather than delivering quality service and add that excessive time would be spent on collecting different data sets for different funders, instead of spending that time delivering social services. Despite the shift to fund welfare services through service plans, the NPOs are under additional pressure due to the state's expectation that child and family welfare social workers will be able to focus more on preventative and supportive services, in line with the national social developmental welfare policy (Ndonga, 2016; Strydom, 2010; Van Huysteen & Strydom, 2015). However, the NPOS are finding it difficult to successfully deliver such services because more and more functions are delegated to them, while they do not have the capacity or resources to manage such functions (Skhosana, 2020; Strydom et al., 2020).

South African child welfare organisations are also exposed to and affected by challenges such as inadequate funding and resources. As the NPOs continue to receive insufficient funding from the state, it negatively affects their service rendering to the most vulnerable groups, such as child-headed households (Skhosana, 2020). These challenges are exacerbated because there is also a negative relationship between child welfare organisations and the Department of Social Development whereby the government imposes its views in a top-down approach resulting in poor strategic planning from the organisations and the Department of Social

Development, another factor that ultimately undermines efficient service delivery (Van Niekerk & Matthias, 2019). These challenges are not recent events, as Schmid (2010) identified several trends in the South African child protection system between 2000 and 2010 that were indicative of an overburdened child welfare system. However, these organisations remain to be central to the delivery of child welfare services in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2011) and are known to be champions in rendering social welfare services to children, implementing the Children's Act whilst relying on government funding (Skhosana, Schenck & Botha, 2014). As these organisations have the infrastructure, knowledge, and manpower and as they have been involved in the delivery of child and family welfare services, it is of the utmost importance that they be supplied with appropriate resources to enable them to continue delivering critical services which government departments alone are unable to deliver (Department of Social Development, 2015).

3.4 REALITIES OF THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM THAT HAMPER THE CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA

The South African child protection system is characterised by multiple threats, such as a lack of human, infrastructural, and financial resources which hamper the delivery of social services for the care and protection of vulnerable children in the country. In the next section an analysis of the realities of the child protection system is provided.

3.4.1 High unemployment of social workers

The South African child protection system is finding it hard to deliver services, due to a lack of human resources. However, there are many qualified social workers who are unemployed. According to Maqhina (2021), an unemployed social worker refers to a social worker who is actively searching for employment but who is unable to be employed and is thus also unable to deliver efficient social services. Opperman (2022) states that in 2022, over 9 000 social workers were unemployed in South Africa. South African authors argue that the unemployment of social workers is a major issue in the country (Skhosana et al., 2014) and has serious implications for the effective implementation of the Children's Act (Kangethe, 2014). According to Opperman (2022), South Africa requires 70 000 social workers to deal with the current high workloads of the employed social workers and the demand for social services. However, the country currently only has 17 500 employed social workers who are rendering social services, this means that there is a shortage of 52 500 social workers. Even if the 9000 unemployed social workers were to be deployed, there are not nearly enough human resources to render social services, which is to the detriment of millions of vulnerable people that are being deprived of essential services, which in turn, escalates social ills (Opperman, 2022).

The Department of Social Development (2021) acknowledges that due to the shortage of employed social workers there is a lack in capacity to implement policies and programmes that deal with social issues, such as chronic poverty, food insecurity, and other related social conditions (Department of Social Development, 2021). The demand for new psychosocial services has increased over the past decade, but the number of social workers employed to address the demand has never increased, which resulted in high caseloads of social workers and the under-implementation of the state's welfare services (Skhosana, 2020). According to Opperman (2022) and Maqhina (2021) the reason behind the shortage of staff is that the Department of Social Development does not have sufficient funds or capacity to employ more social workers.

3.4.2 High workloads and their impact on social workers

A high workload is when the number of tasks given to someone exceeds what that person can do in a provided position. Due to the high workload of social workers and them being stretched beyond their capacity, many employed social workers have come to a point where they have become desensitised and detached from societal ills with diminished self-worth and little confidence (Hope & Van Wyk, 2018). High workloads are stressful to social workers and drastically affect their overall job satisfaction and general wellbeing (Sibanda & Lombard, 2015). High unemployment of social workers exacerbates the workload problem, as the employed social workers are called upon to assume the duties that would-be co-workers (i.e., those that have not been employed) could have done. As a result, their performance may also decline due to low morale, causing more stress and incidences of burnout (Skhosana, 2020).

In the United Kingdom (UK), a heavy caseload is regarded to be a major source of stress for social workers which would affect their ability to consistently provide high levels of care and support to vulnerable groups (Wadsworth, 2020). In South Africa, the ratio of social workers to the South African population is estimated at 1:5000, meaning that there is one social worker to render social services to 5000 people (Ngwenya & Botha, 2012; Skhosana, 2020). Literature highlights that social work practitioners find the number of cases they must attend to, coupled with the diversity of expectations in the child protection system, as totally overwhelming (Mokoele & Weyers, 2021). This in turn has a negative effect on the delivery of quality services to vulnerable groups (Skhosana, 2020; Hope & Van Wyk, 2018).

Having to cope with excessively high workloads negatively affects social service delivery. Several South African social work academics have been speculating about excessive workloads and the subsequent failure of social workers to respond to people's development needs because they were overwhelmed about exactly what they were meant to do in the delivery of developmental welfare services (Makofane & Gray, 2014). Truter and Fouché

(2019) concur that some social workers are unable to manage their cases appropriately as they are under pressure from high caseloads. Calitz, Roux and Strydom (2014) explain that South African social workers do not have sufficient time to complete their day-to-day work tasks as they experience heavy workloads and must deal with challenging and/or difficult clients, while they have very little resources, must work long hours, are unclear about their job expectations and experience work-related stress. Skhosana (2020) adds that even though social workers provide services to families while struggling to cope with the demands arising from an unmanageable case workload, they could be charged with unprofessional conduct by those families, adding to the stress of social workers.

Under these less-than-optimal working conditions, social workers are overworked and find it difficult to meet their job requirements. Over time this could result in burnout, impaired performance, poor mental health, impaired cognitive functioning, decreased concentration, and health-related problems for social workers, which could then lead to the mismanagement of cases (Sibanda & Lombard, 2015).

3.4.3 A lack of supervision

A lack of supervision refers to an inadequate or a negative form of supervision which constitutes a major threat to workforce stability, capacity, competence, and morale (Ingram, 2013; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). Supervision is a process of directing and guiding individuals to reach individual and organisational goals and it is a potentially effective tool for empowering social workers to perform their duties to their optimal abilities (Engelbrecht, 2012; Mokoale & Weyers, 2021). It is also understood as the relationship between supervisor and supervisee in which the responsibility and accountability for the development of competence and ethical practice takes place (Sewell, 2018). The effectiveness of supervision in social work practice has often been questioned because many social workers report that they do not receive supervision, either because their supervisors are too busy, or because their supervisors are not able to give them good supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). Swedish authors, Bradley and Höjer (2009) indicate that a lack of training and preparation of social work supervisors has been identified as one of the contributory factors to ineffective supervision and serves as a major challenge in supervision.

In South Africa, lack of effective supervision in social work is a major problem. Various South African studies (Calitz et al., 2014; Engelbrecht, 2012; Mokoka, 2016) found that there is a lack of effective and structured supervision in social work practice, especially in the public sector. South African authors, Ngwenya and Botha (2012) furthermore highlighted, more than a decade ago, that a lack of supervision has been identified as one of the main problems in the delivery of quality social services to children because enough social worker supervisors

were not available to effectively monitor and supervise social workers to ensure that they provided the necessary support to vulnerable groups.

Thus, it is possible that a lack and inadequate supervision of social workers could negatively influence social workers in the South African childcare and protection system which could consequently also affect their diversity of social services (Wynne, 2020). Social workers who experience a lack of supervision could feel left in the dark and uncertain regarding the steps that they should take during the service rendering process towards vulnerable groups (Calitz et al., 2014). Furthermore, Chibaya (2018) and Wynne (2020) emphasise that supervision is significant in social work practice because supervisors continue training new social workers and provide them with ongoing professional guidance. When proper support and supervision is provided to social workers, it creates a positive work environment where social workers might thrive because their supervisors are key role players in acting as buffers against stress and trauma, thereby enhancing self-preservation and preventing burnout (Chibaya, 2018). Therefore, a well-developed supervision system must be in place to provide administrative supervision, give appropriate advice and guidance, make supervisees comfortable about discussing work-related matters, and prepare them to deliver effective services (Mokoele & Weyers, 2021).

3.4.4 A lack of funding for non-profit child welfare organisations

Lack of funding is understood as having to deal with reduced or inadequate funding from local and state funding agencies leading to child welfare organisations experiencing delays in payment of grants and contract fees (Skhosana, 2020). The 2016 Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare found that the funding of child welfare organisations had become increasingly inadequate and did not keep up with inflation or the running costs of such organisations. Furthermore, all the South African provinces raised the inadequate funding of services delivered by NPOs with the 2016 review process of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) (RSA, 2016). However, funding was not increased. In addition, the Review found that donor funding had become more difficult to access (Department of Social Development, 2016). Despite the provincial Departments of Social Development allocating substantial funds for services covered by the Children's Act to non-profit organisations, most child protection services remain underfunded and resources that were available were not used optimally because of a lack of joint planning and budgeting, as well as mismanagement (Department of Social Development, 2016). Government fund transfers to organisations for delivery of services to vulnerable groups, including children, account for just over 50% of the provincial Departments' social welfare budgets (Budlender & Proudlock, 2010; Skhosana, 2013).

This means that, although child welfare organisations deliver services mandated by the Children's Act and the Amendment Act, the funds provided to those NPOs do not cover the full cost of providing their services. Instead, such NPOs must find donors to make up for the shortfall. However, even if the funds from government and donors were combined it would still not be enough to fund all the services that should be rendered in terms of legislation or enable social services to reach all the children who are in need of such social services (Schmid, 2010; Department of Social Development, 2016).

According to Gebreselassie-Hagos and Smit (2013) the funding challenges of the South African child welfare NPOs originated due to the withdrawal of foreign funding as international donors diverted their funds in the belief that South African non-profit organisations no longer required their support due to the country having a democratically elected government. Thus, due to inadequate funding, the child welfare NPOs are facing increased difficulties in sustaining their service output (Skhosana, 2020). This lack of funding has been an ongoing issue in South Africa as noted by Barberton (2006), 17 years ago in 2006 and has been confirmed by Budlender and Proudlock in 2010, namely that the government's budget allocations for the delivery of social welfare services in terms of the Children's Act were totally insufficient. Furthermore, De Sas Kropiwnicki (2010) also cautioned that the financial situation, at the time, meant that the organisations, which were known to be champions in rendering social welfare services to children, were underfunded.

Child welfare organisations collaborate with the government to provide statutory services around the country. As the South African government acknowledges that child welfare NPOs have the skills, expertise, infrastructure, and other resources that could contribute to the reconstruction, development, and provision of social welfare services, it is an undisputed fact that those NPOs are supposed to receive financial support through subsidisation from the South African government (Skhosana et al., 2014). However, these child welfare NPOs are under-funded, under-resourced and overwhelmed because of a high prevalence of social issues, such as child abuse and neglect in the country (Van Niekerk & Matthias, 2019).

The child welfare NPOs are therefore disadvantaged in that they cannot deliver social welfare services which has become a serious stumbling block weighing down social workers in rendering child protection services (Strydom et al., 2020; Skhosana et al., 2014; Sibanda & Lombard, 2015). Furthermore, literature highlights that more funding should be allocated to NPOs for them to be able to implement prevention and early intervention services (Skhosana, 2020; Strydom, 2010). If there is no proper funding for child welfare NPOs, the dire circumstances and outcomes of vulnerable groups would not be mitigated and would thus not improve due to a shortage of rendering of effective social services from social workers, which

would mean that the care and protection, as guaranteed by the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) and the Children's Act (RSA, 2005) could not be delivered or ensured.

3.4.5 A lack of policy implementation

A lack of policy implementation refers to the minimal execution of a plan or practice aimed at the delivery of social services and to achieve goals and purposes which ultimately helps solve societal challenges (Hill & Varone, 2017). According to Skhosana (2013), child and family welfare services lack a clear overarching structure of implementation and integration between different directorates within the Department of Social Development, various levels of government, and sectors such as child welfare NPOs. More than 10 years ago, Schmid (2010) indicated that the Department of Social Development should amend policies so that they are more family friendly because the South African government demonstrated policy-level commitment to enhance the wellbeing of children and protect them from harm, however, despite the government's commitment, the implementation of such policies remained insufficient. The issues around the lack of policy implementation were made worse by the staggering statistics of violence against children and the lack of urgent responses from the government, child welfare NPOs and, specifically, the child protection system (Van Bruwaene, Mustafa, Cloete, Goga & Green, 2020). This predicament means that South Africa is strong on policy formulation, but feeble on policy implementation, because, despite the legislation intended to protect children in the country, accountability to champion children's rights to care and protection is unfounded (Atmore, 2012).

The child protection system is failing South African children and not addressing the multiple social issues, such as child neglect, despite the progress in policy formulation (Ngwenya & Botha 2012). Therefore, South African authors argue that the child protection sector is in a crisis because of its inability to respond to the needs of vulnerable children whom it is expected to care for and protect (Sibanda & Lombard, 2015). The crisis in the system originated in the devastating impact of the pernicious legacy of apartheid policies and chronic violence against black families and children in South Africa (Lang, 2008; Schmid, 2010). As a result, the needs of black people have been neglected for many years as a broad range of services were not delivered. Stressors that specifically affected the lives of black families, were not addressed (Patel, 2015). In the early post-apartheid 2000s, September (2005) indicated that the system, which was meant to protect children, was not functioning optimally and that many children were falling through the cracks. Years later, literature stated that the child protection system was in a crisis which resulted in children's rights not being safeguarded as enshrined in the South African Constitution (Ngwenya & Botha 2012; Munongi & Pillay, 2018). This is evidenced by the number of children living in poverty and those whose rights are violated in

various ways daily. Furthermore, limited resources and a weak social welfare infrastructure contribute to the ineffective provision of services to neglected children and their families, leaving them at risk of continued abuse (Van Huyssteen & Strydom, 2016; Strydom et al., 2020).

In South Africa, the child protection system is failing children as large numbers of children remain at risk due to limited prevention and early intervention programmes that are being implemented to only a few families, and due to most children not being able to access appropriate therapies (Jamieson, Sambu & Mathews, 2017). Recently, Strydom et al. (2020) also pointed out that the South African child protection system was still failing to protect children in practice because few children and families have access to therapeutic care and support to combat complex trauma.

The current types of challenges within the South African child protection system are not unique to those of the past and it is unfortunate that the service delivery response is not yet aligned with the systemic challenges of the country as there are still not enough services being rendered to protect children, further leaving them in a vulnerable position (Nxumalo & Philander, 2017). The White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) proposed a developmental social welfare approach to social welfare in South Africa to embrace a welfare system that is more just, equitable, participatory, and appropriate in meeting the needs of all South Africans (Patel, 2005). The developmental social welfare is entrenched in the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996), which enshrines the rights of all people in the country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality, and freedom (Lang, 2008). However, the adoption of the social development approach in South African social service organisations continues to challenge and stretch organisations in many directions.

Furthermore, Strydom et al. (2017) highlighted that there are major implementation challenges with the developmental approach because the implementation of developmental welfare programmes in child and family services have deteriorated to a planning approach in community work, where there is a focus on once-off projects and not on projects where community resources are harnessed to offer continual support to children and families. The authors explain that service delivery could currently be driven by accountability to the Department and reaching certain targets, instead of the needs of families and children living in communities characterised by huge structural inequalities. September (2010) and Schmid (2010) caution that a selective focus on the achievement of targets could also have implications for the implementation of the developmental approach in South Africa. Overall, Strydom et al. (2020) conclude that the developmental social welfare approach still seems to

be an approach that was adopted in 'theory' and that the implementation thereof is hampered because of a lack of funding and of a coordinated and integrated service delivery plan.

3.5 CONCLUSION

Over time, the circumstances and outcomes of child-headed households in South Africa have been overlooked, leaving these vulnerable children in a stressful predicament where they must function without proper care or protection. Children living in child-headed households are exposed to circumstances characterised by emotional difficulties, assuming adult responsibilities, poverty, and poor school attendance which potentially expose them to negative effects such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, losing out on childhood, child labour, child sexual abuse and dropping out of school. These circumstances and outcomes violate the rights of children living in child-headed households to care and protection as well as other rights, such as their right to education, parental care, and shelter.

It is necessary to be aware of the circumstances of children living in child-headed households to develop appropriate services that could be delivered to them. Appropriate services must furthermore also be developed in consideration of the realities of the South African child protection system because there are major challenges affecting service delivery, such as high unemployment of social workers, high caseloads, lack of supervision of social workers, lack of funding as well as the lack of policy implementation. If these realities in the South African child protection system are not properly mitigated, they could influence the ability of social workers to render effective early intervention, prevention, and social welfare services to alleviate and eradicate the circumstances and outcomes of child-headed households.

Social services that should be delivered to child-headed households have been identified and are described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the previous chapters, South African children living in child-headed households face many challenges, such as having to live in a non-caring and non-nurturing environment that is not conducive to their growth and development and that leaves their emotional, material, and developmental needs unsatisfied. It was also pointed out that their predicament was being extended by the challenge of them not always receiving adequate social services from social service providers (Chib et al., 2014; Agere & Agere, 2020; Hall, 2018; Diago, 2020). In South Africa, these challenges occur despite section 28(1)(b) to (d) of the South African Constitution indicating that all children in the country have the right to social services, family care, or parental care as well as to be protected from maltreatment and neglect (RSA, 1996). In line with the South African Constitution, section 150(3) of the Children's Act (RSA, 2005) states that social workers should deliver the necessary social services to children living in child-headed households. This also means that the principle of the UNCRC (1989) which indicates that child protection and care should be available to promote children's wellbeing and to ensure that their best interests are always considered, might not be abided by.

In this chapter, the social services that should be delivered to child-headed households from an ecological systems perspective, will be dissected to reach the third objective of the study. This perspective will be utilised as it enables social workers to intervene respectively at the different levels of the micro-, meso- and macrosystems to address the circumstances and needs of child-headed households within their family, school, community, and broader society. The perspective is furthermore utilised to render services holistically on the micro-, meso- and macro-level to modify the functioning and quality of life for vulnerable groups such as child-headed households.

4.2 SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY AND CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In Chapter 1, social service delivery was defined as a set of procedures and systems through which welfare resources and services are delivered from the state or designated welfare organisations to welfare beneficiaries (Lee et al., 2019). In line with this definition and according to the Government Department of Social Development (2016), social services in the South African context refer to social welfare programmes that are provided to address social needs and to create opportunities for people to realise their potential. Social services

include a basket of services, such as prevention services, social assistance, social relief, child protection, social support, and therapeutic services (Department of Social Development, 2016).

Blaauw et al. (2014) state that children living in child-headed households are extremely vulnerable and require social workers, policy makers and the designated personnel in the Department of Social Development to deliver effective intervention services in response to these children's emotional needs and their physical needs for food, shelter, clothing, and protection as confirmed in the previous chapter. Thus, social service delivery will refer to the social services, as well as the resources and services available from the state to deliver effective services to child-headed households within existing policy and legislation. Given the circumstances of children living in child-headed households as analysed in the previous chapter, it is necessary to identify the social services that should be available to them. The South African Constitution, in its section 28(1)(c), states that every child has the right to social services (RSA, 1996). This is because children are vulnerable by virtue of being children and because the delivery of social services could potentially improve the social functioning and growth of children (Roelen et al., 2017).

As mentioned previously, section 150(3) of the Children's Act stipulates that social workers are tasked to engage with children living in child-headed households and to provide them with social services and support, i.e., counselling, mediation, prevention and early intervention services, family reconstruction and rehabilitation, behaviour modification, problem-solving and, where necessary, and referral to another suitably qualified person or organisation (RSA, 2005). Thus, for child-headed households, the social work profession is extremely important, not only in terms of the provision of necessary support and social services, but also because social workers are the identified service providers who must, in terms of the Children's Act, provide children living in child-headed households with social services that will address their daily challenges. However, no recent literature on social services to child-headed households exist within the South African context.

South Africa legally recognised child-headed households and included these households in the Children's Act as amended by the Children's Amendment Act (RSA, 2007). Giving legal recognition to child-headed households as a protective measure, this was a first in Africa (Kruger, 2014). However, it is not enough to legally recognise these households, delivering the social services as indicated in the Children's Act is crucial, as the legalisation of child-headed households was based on their protection through social service delivery. More than a decade ago, Lim (2009) argued that it would seriously violate children's rights and be morally

reprehensible if child-headed households were legally recognised yet were not provided with adequate protection and assistance.

The ecological perspective will be utilised to identify the social services that should be available to child-headed households. The applicability of this perspective to social service delivery is discussed in the next section.

4.3 SOCIAL WORK AND THE ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Coined by Bronfenbrenner (1979), the ecological perspective looks at the individual and how they relate with their environment. Initially the ecological perspective was developed to utilise in the education system, specifically to explain how social environments affected children's development (Teater, 2014). Social work adopted the ecological perspective in the early- to mid-twentieth century and expanded this perspective to explain that an individual is always creating, restructuring, and adapting to the environment as the environment affects them (Teater, 2014). According to Liang, Tsui, Yan, and Lam (2017) the application of the ecological perspective to human beings in social work practice settings comprises a viewpoint that individuals interact with their physical, social, and cultural habitat. The perspective entails numerous interlinked levels within the environment, including the micro-, meso- and macro-level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecological perspective is applicable to child-headed households because it recognises that the individual (child-headed household) does not exist in isolation, but forms part of a field made up of several different parts or systems (family, community, school, religious, political, and government) which are all influencing and interacting with one another (Liang et al., 2017).

The perspective further emphasises that social workers cannot only consider the individual client; they should consider the client in interaction with, connected to, and influenced by, family, community, society, social agencies, government and policies (Hope & Van Wyk, 2018). The application of the ecological perspective in social work practice would involve seeing the relationship and connection between the individual, family, group and/or community and how each influence and shapes one another (Besthorn, 2013). As a result, the social worker can get a holistic understanding of individuals and how systems and their interactions, or lack of interactions, could influence an individual's behaviour (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried & Larsen, 2017; Ungar, 2012). Moreover, as the perspective focuses on a person in their environment, it could allow the social worker to identify the possible needs of the individual on the different levels (Carelse & Green, 2019). This perspective will therefore be utilised to identify the possible services that should be rendered to child-headed households, based on the identified needs in the previous chapter.

The micro-level is the first level of Bronfenbrenner's perspective and includes systems that have direct contact with the child in their immediate environment, such as parents, siblings, teachers, and school peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Miley, O'Melia & DuBois, 2016). The micro-level also includes intrapersonal factors, such as an individual's self-esteem, as well as emotional coping processes that influence adjustment and aims to facilitate change in individual behaviour or relationships (Hepworth et al., 2017). The mesosystem encompasses the interactions between the child's microsystems, such as the interactions between the child's parents and teachers or between school peers and siblings. The meso-level falls between the micro- and macro-level and describes how the different parts of a child's micro-level work together for the sake of the child (Miley et al., 2016). The exo-level is where an individual is not directly involved in the systems which are external to their experience but that nonetheless affect them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The exo-level is directly connected to the macro-level and includes aspects that are part of the broader society, such as employment opportunities, social service providers and mass media. Some of these aspects applicable to child-headed household will be included in the discussion of the macro-level. The macro-level is broader, it involves interventions and advocacy on a large scale and is concerned with the blueprint of society and how society is perceived. This level focuses on how cultural elements affect a child's development, such as socioeconomic status, wealth, poverty, and ethnicity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2013).

4.4 SOCIAL SERVICES THAT SHOULD BE DELIVERED TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS FROM AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the case of child-headed households, the Children's Act determines that it is the task of designated child welfare organisations that are responsible for child protection services to protect and render social services. Therefore, the identification of social services that should be rendered to child-headed households from a social work point of departure will be discussed utilising the ecological perspective as this perspective puts human behaviour into context and social functioning in an environment whereby personal, family, and environmental factors interact (Teater, 2014; Zastrow, 2017). Where possible the resources and services needed from the government, as well as community-based organisations to support social service delivery have been identified.

4.4.1 Social services at micro-level

The micro-level of the ecological perspective focuses on the individual's most immediate environment, namely the effects of personality characteristics on other family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Children living in child-headed households have been found to experience emotional difficulties because they were left behind without an adult caregiver to

respond to their emotional needs, such as love, belonging and warmth (Agere & Tanga, 2017). Additionally, children living in child-headed households have been found to experience post-traumatic stress disorder because of exposure to multiple traumatic events, such as parental death, poverty, violence, and child sexual abuse (Agere & Agere, 2020). Furthermore, children in child-headed households could be more likely to suffer from depression because they lived in a socially depressive environment due to the death or labour migration of their parents or caregivers or because they have been neglected by them (Makuyana et al., 2020).

According to Strydom, social workers at child and family welfare organisations should, in accordance with policy documents and legislation, seriously concentrate on the preservation of families as indicated in policy documents, such as the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) by focusing on early intervention services. Thus, early intervention services should be rendered to keep children safe in their families by empowering their families to allow for the optimal development of children and to prevent them from being removed from their families (Strydom, 2010, 2012). The Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) defines early intervention services as interventions that are designed to facilitate change in individual, environmental, and societal factors that could negatively impact wellness. Furthermore, early intervention services aim to limit the impact of risks and to prevent the development or progression of social problems (RSA, 2006). In the delivery of child and family welfare services, early intervention services are aimed at child protection services so as to prevent the removal of children. These services are thus rendered to keep families together, hence social workers at this level should work with families with the aim and hope of preserving the family unit (Strydom, 2010, 2012). In addition, social workers should always prioritise the best interest of the child by identifying and providing effective early support to children who are at risk of poor outcomes (RSA, 2006). Children living in child-headed households have been found to be exposed to circumstances that are overwhelming and traumatising because they have been deprived of the nurturing they were used to (Payne, 2012; Lwandiso, 2020). Therefore, according to section 150(2) of the Children's Act, early intervention services are one of the types of services that should be delivered to support child-headed households. The early intervention services that should be rendered to keep child-headed households together and that allow for the optimal development of the children, are counselling services.

4.4.1.1 Counselling

Counselling is a process where the counsellor provides help to the person in need. It is professional guidance to help a person cope with emotional and other personal problems in that the counsellor uses techniques such as advice, discussion, administration, and interpretation (Strydom & Humpel, 2009). Counselling is also understood as a process that

relies on a healthy relationship between the person providing counselling (counsellor) and the person receiving counselling (counselee), where the counsellor will use different skills to help and facilitate the counselee to explore and understand their own problems and needs in a friendly manner until they feel mentally stable and can find solutions, adapt and modify their behaviours to enable them to manage their own lives (Kingsada, 2022).

Counsellors in the context of this study can be regarded as social workers who counsel children living in child-headed households, so that they could understand and cope with their emotional difficulties, develop strategies to address their difficult circumstances and make informed decisions about their challenges. Children living in child-headed households lack parental and emotional care and these circumstances cause them to be more likely to suffer from mental health challenges, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007). Because counselling is a form of psychological, emotional, and social assistance that aims to solve problems, rendering such service to children living in child-headed households, could assist them in coping with different mental health challenges. The different counselling services that should be rendered to children living in child-headed households will be discussed in the next section.

4.4.1.1.1 Individual counselling

Individual counselling is a communicating exercise that provides children with the opportunity to work with a social worker who could guide and support them to explore thoughts and feelings, resolve an issue and work towards making healthy changes. Children living in child-headed households are exposed to emotional difficulties and need individual counselling to enable them to adjust to their circumstances by focusing on various personal and interpersonal problems (Lwandiso, 2020). Furthermore, it has been found that children living in child-headed households might have witnessed traumatic events, such as seeing one or both of their parents die or suddenly leaving their home to work as migrant labourers in urban areas at a very young age (Seepamore, 2016; Hall, 2018).

Individual counselling is therefore rendered to help manage and resolve the effects of stressful life events such as loss of parents. Individual counselling is furthermore crucial to such children because it creates an enabling environment and a sense of comfort, love, happiness, and hope (Tonsing & Tonsing, 2017). According to Dutton et al. (2016), traumatised children tend to retreat into secrecy to 'deal' with frightening situations, when these children are not counselled, the traumatised child could start behaving inappropriately, take the wrong decisions, and become maladjusted. Coping with the death of a loved one or having been separated from parents can be difficult to understand and confusing for children (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007). Lack of intervention can result in post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

Social workers delivering services to child-headed households should conduct a thorough investigation of the circumstances and needs experienced by children living in child-headed households to determine the emotional wellbeing of the children. Based on the outcome of such assessment they should render individual counselling services to ensure that the trauma related to living without caregivers is adequately addressed. According to Sincero (2012), individual counselling is aimed at providing emotional support to enhance the children's self-esteem by listening to their fears and frustrations in order to reduce their negative emotions about their unfortunate situation. The advantages of individual counselling include enabling individuals to deal with emotional reactions that emanate from the loss of a loved one (Dutton et al., 2016). Therefore, the goal for social workers should be to engage with children living in child-headed households, to build a relationship with them, to understand their challenges, and to respond accordingly through counselling sessions as stipulated in section 150(3) of the Children's Act. In cases where children are experiencing mental health challenges, such as post-traumatic stress and depression, the children should be referred to other professionals, such as psychologists.

4.4.1.1.2 Family counselling

Family counselling is a type of psychological counselling for families where the counsellor works to nurture change in the family and develop relationships between family members (Roos, 2016). It is a form of intervention that helps family members improve their communication and that allows all family members to be connected and tackle their circumstances as a family, such as emotional difficulties that they are exposed to (Chandrasekara, 2019). Family counselling plays a significant role in family reconstruction and is rendered to enable family members to safely express and explore difficult thoughts and feelings, to understand each other's experiences and perspectives, to appreciate each other's needs, to capitalise on strengths and to make valuable changes in their lives and relationships (Pistor, 2019). There are many advantages of family counselling, namely that it considers the needs of every member of the family and the key relationships in members' lives, it also recognises and build on people's strengths and relational systems and strives to enable family members to talk together or alone, often about difficult, or stressful issues, in a manner that invites engagement and supports recovery (Cummings & Schatz, 2012; Pistor, 2019).

In child-headed families, children need to live together and manage the household in the absence of adult caregivers. They have little experience of family contact and this affects their knowledge of life skills and adult guidance which are normally transferred from parents to children (Agere & Agere, 2020). Therefore, in child-headed households the children should not only adapt to live without their parents; they should also negotiate where possible how the

household will be managed. Thus, a social worker should conduct a series of family counselling sessions to assist children living in child-headed households to develop ways of dealing with important issues such as a lack of parental care and the organisation of the household that may interfere with the family's functioning and threaten the household's stability.

In South Africa, a study about the utilisation of family counselling in child welfare organisations found that families can largely benefit from family counselling in the delivery of child and family welfare services, as counselling enables families to communicate openly with one another and with the social worker (Pistor, 2019). Family counselling also helps children to learn about, grow and change the wellbeing of the family, to express their thoughts and feelings, and to assist family members in understanding each other's experiences and perspectives. However, social workers indicated that they often do not have sufficient time to utilise family counselling in intervention.

Child-headed households' growth in terms of family functioning and available opportunities are already negatively impacted by their social and economic status within their environment, thus, if they did not receive the social support that family counselling can provide them to adapt to their situation, the family could break apart (Jacobs & Slabbert, 2019; Thwala, Ugwuanyi, Okeke & Ncamsile, 2021). Therefore, social workers should consider family counselling as a possible intervention when rendering services to child-headed households or refer such service rendering to other professionals if there are time constraints.

4.4.2 Social services at meso-level

The meso-level is a set of linked microsystems that provides the connection between the structures of the individual's microsystem. In the meso-level, support systems, such as family members, friends, school, and social networks, all interact with the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; DuBois & Miley, 2014). The supporting interrelations that are available between the systems contribute to positive behaviour, whereas the links that are not available contribute to destructive behaviour, such as crime and violence (Neal & Neal, 2013). In the previous chapter certain challenges were identified, namely that children of child-headed households were marginalised because of a lack of care and support from extended family members and neighbours, and that they were experiencing harsh conditions, related to the meso-level of the ecological perspective.

According to the Children's Amendment Act (RSA, 2007) a child-headed household must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court, or an organ of state, or a nonprofit organisation (NPO) determined by the provincial head of the

Department of Social Development. It was found that children living in child-headed households, especially the heads of the households, were forced to perform adult roles such as caring for their siblings. Fulfilling these roles could be burdensome, difficult, challenging, stressful, and frustrating (Diago, 2020). Therefore, children living in child-headed households need support from the different systems on the meso-level, such as family members, friends, school, and social networks, to enable them to develop optimally in the absence of their parents. The target of social work services should be to establish support networks and educational support services and to utilise group work to enhance the social functioning of these households. Possible social services that should be delivered to child-headed households on the meso-level are group work (therapeutic and peer groups), increasing social support networks, developing educational support services, and appointing adults to supervise households. These services are discussed in the next section.

4.4.2.1 Group work

Group work is a method utilised in social service delivery and is a process where people collaborate for personal and social change in order to address shared challenges (Pillay, 2016). Group work interventions are conducted by social workers to help individuals who have similar problems or interests work together, enhance their social functioning, and cope more effectively with their personal problems through purposeful group experiences (Miley et al., 2016; Sebidie, 2022). Therefore, the aim of group work is to share experiences and feelings, to boost a sense of mastery and control of the client, and to share ways of solving common problems together. Group work can also be handy and helpful as a means of continued support (Dutton et al., 2016). According to Abdullah (2013), the aim of group work is not only to educate group members, but also specifically to develop social networks to reduce social isolation, something that child-headed households experience.

In South Africa, children living in child-headed households are often isolated and denied opportunities to play, due to their circumstances. South African scholars are of the opinion that group work would afford child-headed households the opportunity to partake in activities with their peers (Diago, 2020). Through group work, child-headed households would also receive the necessary support to deal with the challenges they are exposed to, for instance, the breakdown of their family environment which forced them to assume adult responsibilities (Seepamore, 2016). In addition, group work intervention could be a cost-effective intervention strategy to be implemented to meet the high demand for child protection services because of its advantages of addressing the social isolation of at-risk families (Van Huyssteen & Strydom, 2015). Therefore, social workers could establish appropriate group work programmes such as therapeutic and peer groups within the community to encourage children, especially those

living in child-headed households, to become involved in and engage with other children within a social safety net (Sibanda & Lombard, 2015). Group interventions will furthermore develop and strengthen the networks of child-headed households. The types of groups that could work for children living in child-headed households are discussed in the next section.

4.4.2.2 Therapeutic groups

Therapeutic groups are groups that encourage individuals to generate insights into themselves through engagement with others who experienced or are experiencing similar personal crises (Hurley, Lakeman, Linsley, Ramsay & Mckenna-Lawson, 2022). According to Healy (2012), therapeutic groups improve the family functioning of at-risk families because it enables members to recognise their roles and cope more effectively with normal life stressors. Children who, among other issues, are dealing with grief or anxiety because their parents have died, migrated, or abandoned them (Diago, 2020) or who must deal with emotional difficulties because they have to survive without parental care (Agere & Tanga, 2017), are recommended to consider therapeutic groups because such groups can be a source of support to them (Hurley et al., 2022).

The advantages of therapeutic groups include offering children the opportunity to realise that they are not alone in their experiences because other children have had similar experiences. This realisation may be a great source of relief to child-headed households as it could help reduce their sense of isolation (Abdullah, 2013). Furthermore, Yadav (2014) points out that therapeutic groups should be established to provide social workers with the opportunity to empower group participants to express themselves and communicate freely about their challenges in a safe environment. Therefore, members of child-headed households could benefit from therapeutic groups because it would give them the opportunity to relate to one another in a group setting and to communicate their experiences.

4.4.2.3 Peer groups

Peer groups are groups of people who have similar problems or interests. By interacting with group members of a peer group, a sense of belonging and being valued is usually experienced. People also refer to these groups as being helpful, providing empathy, being resourceful, and providing mutual aid (Theron & Malindi, 2012). Peer groups also serve several useful functions for children, including addressing their feelings of discontentment and extending the networks available to offer social support. According to Barlow and Durand (2012) peer groups could be beneficial to children living in child-headed households as it will enable them to interact with other children who are in similar situations, build social relationships, expand their social networks, and motivate and learn from each other.

It was found that peer groups were specifically helpful to heads of child-headed households who were young and not used to being responsible parents but who had to deal with parental issues. These heads of child-headed households face tremendous difficulties in coping with problems such as having to provide adult guidance to their siblings, dealing with their own and the biological changes of their siblings' bodies, and having to do their own and helping their siblings with school homework all because they do not have an adult advisor to turn to for assistance (Makuyana et al., 2020).

In peer groups, members are also educated about possible strategies to solve problems effectively. Section 150(3) of the Children's Act states that children living in child-headed households should be provided with support that involves problem-solving. Thus, social workers in peer groups should focus on identifying problems in peer group sessions to assist group members to consider multiple perspectives and outcomes before making decisions (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2013). These problem-solving strategies can be used to manage a wide range of problems, including anxiety, stress, and financial difficulties. Peer groups can also teach skills that aid the individual in gaining increased control over life issues that might have been overwhelming or unmanageable (Boshoff & Strydom, 2017). Therefore, social workers should consider establishing and implementing peer groups in service rendering to child-headed households to empower such households to express the difficulties they experience and to assist them to improve their problem-solving skills. In a South African study of Skobi and Makofane (2017) about utilising peer groups with teenagers, it was found that social workers used peer groups as it was advantageous in reducing anxiety and increasing self-expression for the children, which could be beneficial to children in child-headed households.

4.4.2.4 Increase social support networks

Social support is the actual structure of the individual's support networks and has been found to be essential in safeguarding the effects of stressful life events (Taylor, Budescu, Gebre & Hodzic, 2014). The advantage of social support includes buffering stressful life events such as being a child who has to assume adult responsibilities. For children living in child-headed households it is essential to have an extensive network of resources to support their needs. Therefore, it is important that social workers encourage and assist children of child-headed households to develop and maintain relationships with those in their informal support networks, such as neighbours and extended family members, and to ensure that the support offered to them is in fact beneficial. Furthermore, social workers should also assist child-headed households in building and maintaining relationships with other child-headed households.

Yang (2016) concur that being connected to family and significant others diminishes vulnerability, isolation, guilt, pessimism, and even suicidal ideation which tend to be the outcomes of the circumstances child-headed households are exposed to. South African literature (Ngconjana et al., 2017) confirms that support from extended family members is important as these members could provide child-headed households with basic items such as food. Family members could also offer crucial support to child-headed households trying to cope with difficult circumstances; they could furthermore refer such children to reach out to welfare organisations in search of assistance. Thus, social workers should ensure that children living in child-headed households are connected to social support networks such as their extended family members and supportive community members for the children to benefit from sustainable informal social support services and resources.

4.4.2.5 *Develop educational support services*

Educational support services are understood as opportunities and resources to enhance educational success and may include transportation assistance, day care expenses, clothes, books and supplies, tutoring, academic advising, or other items that are required for children and youth to participate in education (UNICEF, 2019). Education is a purposeful activity directed at achieving goals such as fostering skills. It is also a key factor in working towards a better future (Nyaradzo, 2013). Young people aspire to be educated to improve their chances of being employed through education so that they can live better lives (Sebidie, 2022). In terms of child-headed households, children have a desire to attend school and acquire education (Ibebuike, Van Belkum & Maja, 2014). However, as described in Chapter 3, children from child-headed households must often abandon their education due to the circumstances they are confronted with, such as struggling to afford school fees, being occupied with household chores, and having to care for their household members (Collins et al., 2016). These circumstances force children, especially the heads of child-headed households, to drop out of school (Diago, 2020).

In South Africa, the state is required to ensure that education is provided to and promoted for children living in child-headed households to satisfy the right of the children to basic education as stipulated in section 28(1) of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996). Gutsche, Hoosain and Chigeza (2015) agree that the responsibility to care for children and ensure that they acquire education is not limited to families only. Besides families, the state is the most recognised caretaker of individuals, hence the state is also assigned to support families in their caregiving tasks. In the case of child-headed households, research indicated that especially the heads of these households decided to drop out of school to take care of the younger children and to find work wherever it is available to earn money (Diago, 2020).

Children in child-headed households should have the right to attend school and not to be in a position where they are forced to leave school to earn a living. They should have the same rights as children who were in need of care and protection in terms of section 150(1) of the Children's Act and who were removed and placed in alternative care. According to section 180(a) and (b) of the Children's Act, the aim (specifically of foster care) is to protect and nurture children by providing them with a safe and healthy environment, giving positive support, promoting the goals of permanency planning, and connecting the children to other safe and nurturing family relationships intended to last a lifetime. Therefore, the state, through its social workers and other role players in the Department of Education, should provide children living in child-headed households with educational support, such as school clothes, books, and academic assistance. Furthermore, as prescribed in the Children's Act, children living in child-headed households should be provided with adult caregivers who can nurture them and provide a safe environment by assuming the parental role instead of the children being expected to do so, leaving the children to concentrate on their academic responsibilities.

4.4.2.6 *Appoint adults to supervise household*

Adult supervision is a process whereby an adult caregiver assumes parental responsibilities. This means it is an adult person who, inter alia, takes care of the children, ensures that their needs are met, makes decisions in important matters concerning the household, and provides the necessary material support to the children (Phillips, 2011; Ngconjana et al., 2017). Chapter 2 of the study emphasised that, according to the Children's Amendment Act, children living in child-headed households must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court, or an organ of state, or an NPO determined by the provincial head of the Department of Social Development (RSA, 2007). Child-headed households must be referred to a designated social worker who must investigate the child-headed households and report them to the head or deputy head of the provincial Department of Social Development.

The stipulation also requires that the head or deputy head of the Department of Social Development as well as a social worker, must recognise child-headed households and recommend that an adult supervisor/caregiver be appointed (Reyneke, 2020). This requirement is significant as it attempts to address the unsatisfied needs and challenging circumstances of the vulnerable children of child-headed households who require special attention, care, and protection in the absence of their parents or adult caregivers. Therefore, it is the duty of social workers to ensure that an adult caregiver/supervisor is appointed to support children living in child-headed households and to assume the parental role in order to rehabilitate the children by restoring their former privileges or reputation as children of

disfavour whereby they were forced into adulthood to improve their social functioning and wellbeing (Onuh et al., 2021).

However, it was found that in child-headed households there is an absence of adult responsibility, and there is an expectation that the head of the household, who is a child under the age of 18, should assume this responsibility (Diago, 2020). The need for adult supervision services is significant in child-headed households because such children are otherwise compelled to look after themselves (Mturi, 2012; Hall, 2018) and to assume adult roles characterised by providing care and support to their siblings, such as cooking and cleaning (Muyomi, 2012; Diago, 2020). Lack of adult supervision could influence school attendance and progress as literature indicates that children need to be supervised and motivated by parents to attend school and to commit to their responsibility of regularly doing homework and completing school assignments (Louw & Louw, 2014). Children could further be exposed to abuse and maltreatment because of a lack of adult supervision (Mturi, 2012).

In a study executed in the Limpopo province in 2020, the heads of child-headed households indicated that no adult supervisors were appointed to assist them. It was found that social services were also not available and that although some of the heads contacted the social workers who were supposed to assist them, they were not assisted, which left them frustrated. Furthermore, heads of child-headed households indicated that there were not enough social workers in their geographical area and consequently they had never been assisted by social workers (Diago, 2020). Nziyane and Alpaslan (2012) concur that an adult caregiver/supervisor must be provided to promote the care and protection of South African children living in child-headed households to prevent the perpetuation of their challenges, such as taking over parental roles. Social workers should therefore work closely with the children living in child-headed households to ensure that an adult caregiver/supervisor is appointed to fulfil the requirement of the Children's Amendment Act. Furthermore, social services such as parental training, should be provided to the appointed adult caregiver/supervisor to ensure that children living in child-headed households are able to benefit from a well-trained caregiver who can adequately respond to their needs and enhance their development.

4.4.3 Social services at macro-level

The macro-level is the largest level and consists of children's cultural patterns and values, specifically their dominant beliefs and ideas, as well as political and economic systems (Forenza & Eckert, 2018). Macro-level social work generally addresses issues experienced in meso or micro social work practice and consists of elements, such as government acts, policies, and regulations which form the culture and subculture of a society (Hutchinson, 2015; Forenza & Eckert, 2018). In Chapter 3 it was found that children living in child-headed

households are exposed to poverty which robs them of their dreams, hopes and rights. Being poor could also dramatically change their chances in life and could easily infringe upon their right to access food as contained in section 27(1)(b) as well as their right to basic nutrition as described in section 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996; Save the Children, 2020).

Social workers at child and family welfare organisations should, in accordance with the Children's Act, concentrate on the preservation of families by focusing on prevention services. Thus, prevention services should be rendered to promote the participation of families, parents, caregivers, and children, identifying and seeking solutions to their problems (Strydom, 2013). The ISDM defines prevention services as interventions that are designed to strengthen and build the capacity, self-reliance, and resilience of children while addressing individual, environmental, and societal factors to create conditions that enhance or support wellness (Department of Social Development, 2013). Furthermore, prevention services aim to prevent development needs to develop into social challenges or risks. In the delivery of child and family welfare services prevention services are aimed at the development and utilisation of community-based resources to support, protect and ensure the wellbeing of children to develop and thrive to their full potential (Kotze, 2011; Strydom, 2013). Thus, effective community-based resources entail that families should have access to a wide range of services via child protection organisations and/or community-based services, while their networks are expanded to encourage independent functioning (Strydom et al., 2020; Strydom, 2013). Prevention services are rendered to establish support networks around child-headed households, hence social services at this level should focus to link child-headed households to resources in order to build their capacity and reduce risk behaviour (Kotze, 2011).

It was found that children living in child-headed households frequently went to bed hungry, which places them at risk of mental distress because hunger is a source of pain and sadness for them. These children were furthermore exposed to multiple material challenges, including food insecurity and dilapidated housing, which make their situation drastic because they do not have enough resources to survive (Hall & Mokomane, 2018; Lwandiso, 2020). The services identified that should be rendered to address these circumstances of child-headed households are the provision of sufficient income and adequate shelter, the development and implementation of awareness programmes, as well as advocacy on their behalf and the amendments of policy and legislation. These services are discussed in the next section.

4.4.3.1 Provision of sufficient income

Sufficient income refers to having enough funds to fulfil the different needs of children, such as food, clothing, shelter, and education, in order to sustain their wellbeing (Gennetian,

Castells & Morris, 2010). Article 26(1) of the UNCRC (UN, 1989) specifically obliges state parties to recognise the right of every child to benefit from social security and to take the necessary measures to achieve the full realisation of this right. As mentioned in the previous chapter, children living in child-headed households are exposed to rampant poverty. Having little to no access to income or funds causes children of child-headed households to have insufficient food, thus they become undernourished causing them to be susceptible to disease (Blaauw et al., 2011). South African literature (Hall, 2018) indicates that children in child-headed households do not have easy (if any) access to social security or income such as a child support grant or foster care grant. This is because the Social Assistance Act (13 of 2004) does not allow minors to register for a grant, and as children of child-headed households mostly do not have adult caregivers, they do not qualify for a grant.

A lack of social security has negative implications for children living in child-headed households, as they do not have sufficient finances to support their needs. A study about the experiences of heads of child-headed households in South Africa indicated that, in their role as a caregiver to their siblings, the heads required a stable income because they were under pressure to provide basic items, such as food. When they cannot secure any income, the heads are often forced to beg for food from their neighbours or other people. Sometimes, when they have not been successful in asking for food or money, the households would have to go without any food (Diago, 2020).

An appointed supervisor or adult caregiver should assist children from child-headed households with their grant applications because they are appointed to provide care, guidance and be responsible for children in child-headed households. Section 137(5)(a) of the Children's Amendment Act states that the child heading the household, or the appointed adult caregiver, may collect and administer any social security grant for the child-headed household. Furthermore section 137(b) of the Amendment Act reads that an adult that collects and administers money for a child-headed household is accountable in the prescribed manner to the organ of state or the NPO that designated them to supervise the household (RSA, 2007). It is thus important that current legislative measures be implemented to ensure that child-headed households do not have to live without income. This means that social workers should appoint adult caregivers and assist them in applying for social security for the household.

However, should this legislation not be implemented, it would be in the best interest of child-headed households to adapt legislation in terms whereof such households can be classified and specifically mentioned under section 150(1) of the Children's Act, i.e., as children in need of care and protection, such as children living on the street. This would mean that social workers must investigate the circumstances of child-headed households to ensure if a removal

is necessary. The current classification in section 150(2) of the Children's Act states that they *may* be in need of care and protection which means that there is no obligation on social workers to execute a full investigation. Although it is possible to utilise section 150(1)(a) in the case of child-headed households, as it states that a child who has been abandoned or orphaned and is without any visible means of support *must* be seen as a child in need of care and protection, it could be that section 150(2) where the decision of whether they are a child in need of care and protection must be determined by the social worker, is interpreted to override section 150(1)(a) of the act.

4.4.3.2 Provide adequate shelter

Adequate shelter is a basic human need that is crucial for survival as it provides security, personal safety, and protection from the weather. Having adequate shelter also prevents ill health and disease and provides people with dignity and the opportunity to lead a normal life. According to the South African Human Rights Commission (2011), having adequate shelter plays an essential role in reducing people's vulnerability and in building their resilience. South Africa has always had a dire need for housing, unfortunately this need has not been addressed successfully as the government has consistently failed to meet its own housing targets. The government has furthermore failed to reduce the number of people living in informal dwellings (Mpofu-Walsh, 2017). This is also the case with child-headed households, who, as was confirmed in the previous chapter, often ended up living in makeshift houses characterised by poor conditions (Blaauw et al., 2011). These circumstances are not suitable for children to grow up in. However, because so many people are living in makeshift homes in South Africa, it has become the norm, and with that, the rights of children of child-headed households to adequate shelter as enshrined in section 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution, are being violated (Phillips, 2011; Ngconjana et al., 2017; Manomano, Nyanhoto & Gutura, 2021).

The household in which a child is raised determines the level of wellbeing as well as the developmental process of the child. The South African Constitution obligates the state to take reasonable legislative action within its available resources to fulfil the right of children to adequate shelter (Tshoose, 2015). Although many children in South Africa are living in poverty, they are not responsible for the shelter that they are living in as it is the responsibility of their parents. In the case of child-headed households the children are responsible for the shelter that they are living in and for any repairs to such structure. Therefore, child-headed households should have access to social security, as well as adult supervision to assist them where necessary to ensure they have adequate housing. Furthermore, the state should develop separate assistance to ensure that child-headed households live in adequate housing.

4.4.3.3 *Develop awareness campaigns*

Awareness campaigns are informative sessions or community movements aimed at sensitising people about social issues. These campaigns also try to educate people about social issues and actions that people can take should they find themselves in situations where they have to deal with social issues (Damba, Lunga & Musarurwa, 2013). In section 144(2) of the Children's Act as amended per the Children's Amendment Act, it is stated, among other things, that prevention programmes should include providing families with information to enable them to gain access to services. Diago (2020) found that children living in child-headed households had limited knowledge about the social services that should be rendered to them and that none of the households that took part in the research received any social services. Thus, these child-headed households were also not aware of their rights to social services, as enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa or established in the Children's Act.

According to Zastrow (2017), social workers should present social campaigns about fostering to communities in an effort to raise awareness of children living in child-headed households and their circumstances. This could ensure that the necessary measures are implemented to respond to the rights of these children to care and protection. Such information and awareness campaigns should include radio and television programmes funded by the state to offer information about the circumstances of child-headed households and how they can be assisted. Awareness campaigns are advantageous because they could enable different services and role players in communities such as social workers, community organisations, concerned neighbours, relatives, and members of the broader society to connect; this could lead to the creation of goal-driven partnerships which would assist in preventing child maltreatment, especially for children living in child-headed households (Damba et al., 2013). Therefore, community campaigns should be conducted to enhance visibility of social work services, to inform communities about their social responsibilities towards vulnerable children, and to educate communities about child-headed households (Reynolds & Bacon, 2018). These campaigns could furthermore motivate community members to be available to act as adult caregivers.

4.4.3.4 *Advocacy by social workers on behalf of vulnerable children*

Advocacy is one of the key roles of social workers when looking to change the lives of vulnerable and marginalised groups. Advocacy is also vital for the attainment of the social justice mission of social work (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017). On the macro-level, social workers should assess unmet needs, establish programmes, and take on an advocacy role to overcome the barriers that vulnerable children face (DuBois & Miley, 2016). Advocacy involves vulnerable groups such as child-headed households being represented by role players such

as social workers and having a “voice” that speaks on their behalf to articulate their needs (Cavanaugh, Wingard, Hakim, Eden, Shintani, Walliston, Huizinga & Elastic, 2010). In previous chapters it was confirmed that the heads of child-headed households would become involved in child labour as a means of sourcing money for the household's subsistence. It was also mentioned that many of the girls who were acting as heads of their households were engaged in domestic employment, mainly as maids (Van Dijk & Van Driel, 2012). It was further found that children in child-headed households suffered from emotional and psychological abuse as they were at risk of being sexually abused, becoming pregnant and ending up with children of their own (Rugwiji, 2017). Thus, social workers as advocates should act as intermediaries between children and other social systems in an effort to protect the rights of the children, to ensure that children's rights are not violated, and to see to it that their needs are met.

The need for social workers to advocate on behalf of vulnerable children could enhance the social functioning of children of child-headed households (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017). This is because social workers have skills, such as advocacy which can inspire interventions that can change the circumstances of child-headed households. There is an immense need for social workers to deliver services to and be the voice of vulnerable children of child-headed households. In South Africa, social workers are the cornerstone of the child protection system, thus they should seek social change on behalf of the children living in child-headed households by ensuring that the circumstances in which these children find themselves in which have been discussed in Chapter 3, are eliminated. Social work is a helping profession and social workers should be committed to improve the lives of people, especially the marginalised groups (Klugman, 2011). Therefore, in the case of child-headed households, social workers must act as the voice of the “voiceless” to fulfil the profession's social justice mission and respond to the unmet needs of these children.

4.4.3.5 Policy and legislation amendment

Policy amendment is a process whereby a certain section is added to a policy or legislation in order to change it (Nxumalo & Philander, 2017). It seems as if there is a need in South Africa to evaluate current policy and legislation concerning child-headed households as, despite the legislation's intention to protect children, the situation for children living in child-headed households is dire and necessitates further action to ensure that their rights to care and protection are responded to and that their needs for social services are satisfied (Van Bruwaene et al., 2020). Literature established that the needs of vulnerable children, such as those in child-headed households, are not responded to and that their rights to care and protection are not upheld (Mulaudzi & Rankakane, 2018; Diago, 2020). Furthermore, policy and legislation are not always being implemented and children's rights to care and protection

are not always responded to, since such protection are often not provided with the social services identified in the Children's Act.

It is therefore clear that the current legislation should be evaluated because the rights of children living in child-headed households to family or parental care or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment, to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation, and to education, social services and adequate shelter are all violated because of a lack of policy implementation (RSA, 1996). If these rights of child-headed households are infringed upon, it can be argued that child-headed households should be included under section 150(1) of the Children's Act as a group that needs care and protection. If such changes to the Children's Act are not considered, then measures must be put in place to ensure that an adult supervisor will be appointed, and a foster care grant will be allocated to each child in the household who is under the age of 18. The foster grant will at least provide child-headed households with the same financial opportunities as other children in alternative care. Therefore, as the Department of Social Development is involved with child protection on the macro-level the Department should consider evaluating and amending current policy to ensure that the rights of all children in child-headed households are responded to and that they are provided with the necessary social services and support according to their identified circumstances and outcomes.

Based on the above descriptions and the analysis of social services that should be rendered to children living in child-headed households within the different levels of the ecological system in an effort to respond to the circumstances and outcomes of child-headed households, a schematic representation was developed. This schematic representation is illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.

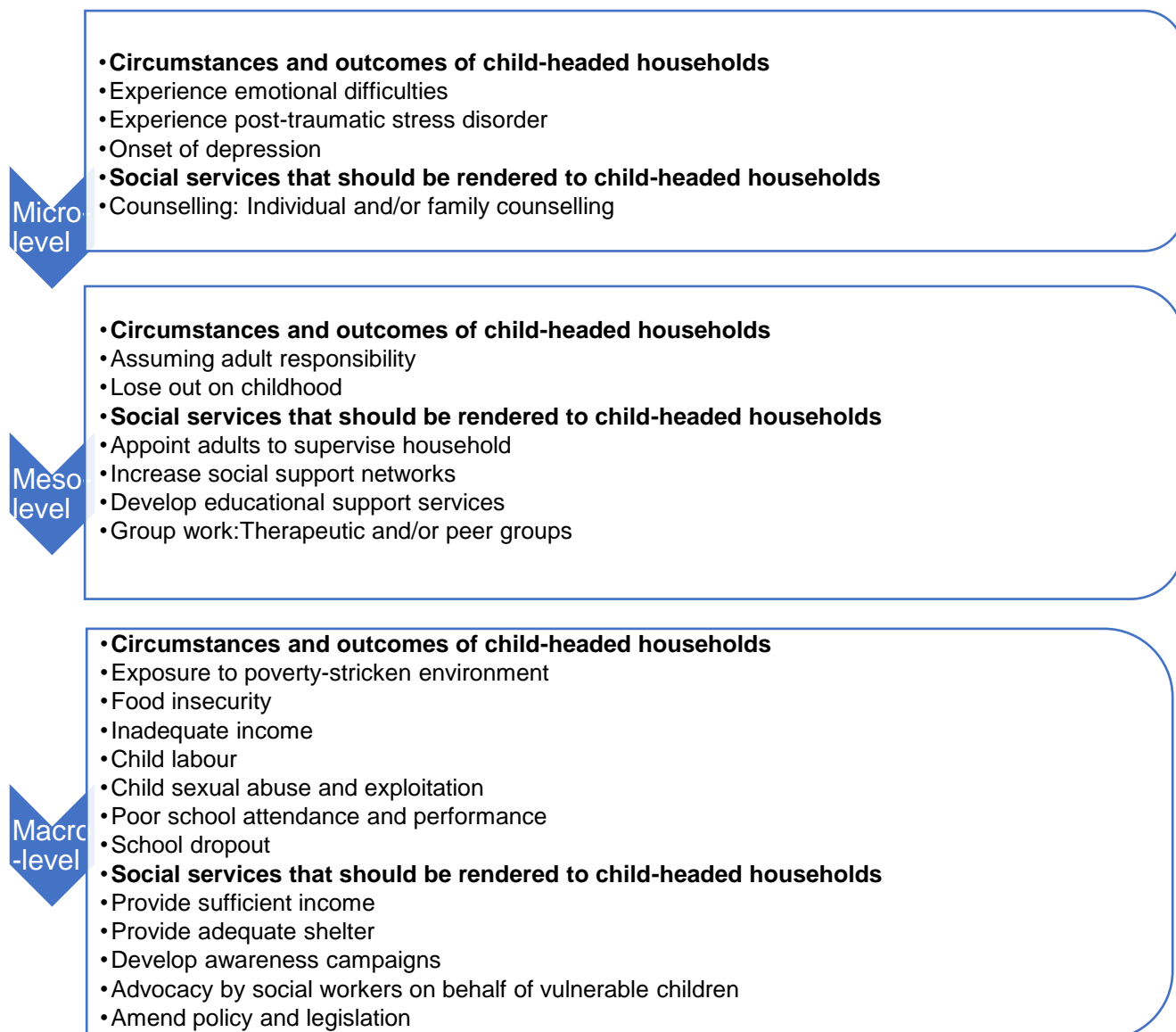


Figure 4.1: Social services that should be delivered to child-headed households

Figure 4.1 above illustrates the social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the different levels of the ecological perspective to respond to the circumstances and outcomes of child-headed households and ensure that the rights of these children to care and protection are upheld and that their rights to social services are satisfied.

On the micro-level, children living in child-headed households are exposed to emotional difficulties which often result in post-traumatic stress disorder and depression of the children. To prevent the development or progression of such problems in child-headed households,

early intervention social services must be provided. To further address the emotional difficulties of children of child-headed households, counselling services such as individual and family counselling should also be provided to them and referrals should be made to psychologists when necessary.

On the meso-level, children living in child-headed households are forced to assume adult responsibilities and as a result lose out on their childhood. Furthermore, these children are marginalised because of a lack of care and support from extended family members and neighbours. Social workers should provide services in terms whereof adult supervisors or caregivers could be appointed as required in the Children's Amendment Act. To further address the challenges, social workers should encourage and stimulate social support networks to diminish marginalisation and initiate group intervention in the form of therapeutic and peer groups to allow children to share their thoughts and feelings and learn how to solve their problems within a group.

On the macro-level, children living in child-headed households live in a poverty-stricken environment, have little to no income, and experience food insecurity. Due to these issues on macro-level, children are exposed to child labour and sexual abuse and exploitation. Furthermore, these children, especially the heads of the households tend to perform poorly at school and eventually drop out of school to stay at home and take care of their younger siblings. Thus, these children need to be provided with access to sufficient income in order to acquire basic food items to prevent school dropout and adequate shelter to uphold their right to adequate shelter. Furthermore, social workers need to develop awareness campaigns about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection as well as to social services. The amendment of policy and legislation should be prioritised by role players because these children live without policy implementation and as a result, their rights are violated. Moreover, social workers should apply their advocacy role and advocate for child-headed households to ensure that issues such as child labour and sexual abuse are addressed to protect their rights.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Child-headed households are viewed as a social ill in South Africa. The effective management of this phenomenon requires a variety of social services delivered by social workers, the government and community resources. For social workers to be able to consider the best interests of the children that live in these households, they must understand the circumstances and outcome of these households and deliver and develop the necessary services on different levels of the ecological system. On the micro-level, counselling services, including individual and family counselling to address the children's emotional difficulties must be offered. On the

meso-level, to address the children's circumstances and give them the opportunity to be cared for by an adult, an adult supervisor must be appointed, social support networks must be increased, educational support services must be developed and group intervention in the form of therapeutic and peer groups must be established. On a macro-level, provision of sufficient income and adequate shelter must be provided to respond to the rights of these children. Awareness campaigns about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection should be initiated and policy and legislation should be amendment to prioritise and promote the care and protection of these children. Social workers on the macro-level should apply their advocacy role and advocate for child-headed households to ensure that issues that affect these children are addressed and that the children are protected. It is clear that there is a need to evaluate the legalisation pertaining to child-headed households in South Africa because due to a lack of resources in the child protection system, there is a real possibility that some of the services indicated in the Children's Act are not implemented.

In the next chapter, the research methodology that was utilised to investigate the social services available and the rights of child-headed households to care and protection are described.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to gain an understanding of the rendering of social services to children living in child-headed households and their rights to care and protection from role players, such as social workers and social worker supervisors of non-profit designated child protection organisations in the Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan), Limpopo (Capricorn), and Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni) and the head/deputy head or designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development in the mentioned provinces. The main aim of the study was unpacked through several objectives which guided data collection.

Research methodology is the specific procedure that provides guidance on how a study should be carried out to achieve its goal. This chapter presents the research methodology which explains how research was undertaken and why particular research methods were used (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wahyuni, 2012), i.e., to collect data to achieve the set aim and research objectives. This research study is a qualitative study that aimed to answer questions about the complex nature of child-headed households, with the purpose of describing and understanding the reflections of role players on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection, the delivery of social services, and the implementation of legislation (Fouché et al., 2021).

The goal of the study was achieved through a sequence of objectives that were organised and discussed as chapters in this dissertation. In this chapter the research paradigms, approach, and process as well as ethical considerations adhered to, are also presented. This part of the research provides insight into the research as a whole and ensures that the researcher followed ethically and scientifically sound methods of qualitative research.

5.2 RESEARCH DIMENSIONS

Before attempting the methodological frameworks, models, and design for the research study, it was crucial to understand the wider depiction of the scientific research process, in terms of the philosophical, ontological, sociological and epistemological dimensions through which the research techniques were formulated to ultimately explore the phenomenon.

5.2.1 Philosophical dimensions

Social science research is concerned with exploring, describing, and explaining social phenomena involving human behaviour. The effectiveness and efficiency of social science depends on the philosophical justifications and assumptions about truth and knowledge (Uddin & Hamiduzzaman, 2009; Nueman, 2014). Uddin and Hamiduzzaman (2009) state that

the start of the social science research process requires the central question of 'why research?'. The response to the question is found in a collection of ideas from the researcher concerning the nature of society and science (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). It was crucial for the researcher to understand concepts such as philosophical justification because it had a direct influence on what the researcher chose to research as well as on the ontological, epistemological and sociological dimensions for the overall research design and process. Therefore, this study explored the concepts of ontology, sociology, and epistemology in the following sections to see how these concepts impacted the study.

5.2.2.1 *Ontological dimension*

According to Nueman (2014), ontology is the fundamental nature of reality or the concerns about what exists. Al-Saadi (2014) explains that ontology is concerned with 'what is' with a focus on the nature of existence, structure of reality and what is possible to know about the world. In addition, Blaikie (2010a) defines ontology as the science or study of being. This study focused on the reflections of role players involved in social service delivery, such as designated social workers, social worker supervisors who are service providers at designated child protection organisations, and designated personnel from the provincial Department of Social Development. The research was about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and their reality regarding social service delivery based on the reflections of role players.

There is limited research about social service delivery to children living in child-headed households, particularly concerning the protection of their rights and how they are supported and cared for in the absence of their parents or adult caregivers. The assumption was that there is a possible lack of social service delivery which could be in violation of the rights of children living in child-headed households to care and protection as indicated in the Constitution of South Africa (1996). Lack of social services from social workers could impede the growth and development of children living in child-headed households because young children require protection and nurturing. To find the structure of reality regarding the rights of child-headed households to care and protection, this study explored the reflections of role players about the social services that were delivered to child-headed households.

In this study the researcher used an ontology, that is essentially of a social world of meanings, to assume that the world they investigated was a world populated by human beings who have their own thoughts, interpretations and meanings. The researcher's investigation was characterised by the use of different research methods and techniques of the interpretive design, such as interviews, to interpret the reflections of role players regarding the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and integrate human interest into the study

(Williams, 2000). Therefore, this research was executed within a framework that reflected on qualitative data and the exploration of a phenomenon that is open to interpretation and humanistic in its approach.

5.2.2.2 Sociological dimension

According to Holden and Lynch (2004), sociological dimension involves a choice between two views, namely, society as regulatory, whereby the researcher assumes that society is unified, cohesive and evolves rationally, or society as radical change, whereby there is constant conflict as humans continue to struggle to free themselves from societal structures. This study assumed the view of society as radical change, i.e., that children's rights could be compromised in child-headed households if they are not cared for, protected and provided with social services. The study further maintained that the recommendation and recognition of child-headed households as a protective measure should include protective benefits for these households and that the absence of social service rendering to child-headed households was a violation of section 150(2) of the Children's Act (RSA, 2005). Not rendering social services to child-headed households was also seen as a violation of such children's right to social services as set out in section 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) which has the potential to negatively impact these children's functioning. Therefore, the researcher leaned closer towards the sociological dimension of society as radical change, with more focus on a series of conflicts, compromises and a human struggles considering the circumstances and outcomes of child-headed households, over a regulatory view of society.

In Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this study, it was argued that the concept of child-headed households was not only a South African phenomenon but a global expanding phenomenon. Child-headed households are thus seen as a social structure. Based on this, the researcher assumed that children in child-headed households would struggle to acquire care and protection. Agere and Agere (2020) postulated that the issue of child-headed households is a serious concern as there are many children around the world that are left behind without adult parental protection and care, making the children more vulnerable to violence, abuse, crime and lack of social services. In South Africa, the social worker should, where necessary, provide appropriate support and services to child-headed households without having to remove the child from the existing placement of care (RSA, 2005; Diago, 2020). Seen in this context, the researcher was interested in gaining an understanding about the type of social services that should be delivered to this vulnerable group in order to uphold their rights to care and protection from the role players' perspective.

5.2.2.3 Epistemological dimension

According to Rosenau (1992;109), epistemology is concerned with “the nature, validity, and limits of inquiry” with more focus on how reality can be known, the relationship between the “knower” and the “known”, and the assumptions that guide the process of knowing. It further involves knowledge and embodies a certain understanding of what that knowledge entails. Richards (2003) defines epistemology as the assumptions we make about the nature of knowledge or how it is possible to find out about the world.

This study was constructed within an interpretivist framework. Within this framework, the epistemological approach of this study recognised that the limits of inquiry are perceived knowledge, and the relationship between reality and the research process was developed through an understanding of the specific context of the phenomenon being explored (Neuman, 2014; Sebidie, 2022). Since, interpretivism is concerned with understanding reality from the participant’s point of view, based on experiences within a social context with the ideology that reality is subjective and context dependent, the exploration of the truth in the sense of this research process was to understand the patterns of symbolic discourse. This was attained by reflecting on the viewpoints, thoughts, professional opinions, observations, and analyses of role players involved in social service delivery, such as designated social workers, social worker supervisors and designated personnel of the provincial Department of Social Development to provide insight into the rights to care and protection and social service delivery of children living in child-headed households within a South African context.

5.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative research approach is an interpretative approach that seeks to understand participants in their natural setting and interpret what their actions mean to them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach ensures that the research problem is understood, defined, and discussed through interpretations of subjective meaning and enables the researcher to construct meanings from the phenomena under study, based on their own experiences and that of the participants in the study (Fouché et al., 2021). Therefore, qualitative research is conducted in the natural settings of participants with a focus on their perspectives and lived experiences to obtain rich and in-depth information and an understanding of their experiences and how they make sense of their lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through this process, qualitative research seeks to understand what people do from their own experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The researcher was interested in gaining an understanding of the social services rendered to children living in child-headed households as well as their rights to care and protection. The qualitative research approach was therefore the appropriate choice for this study because it

enabled the researcher to gain an understanding on what social workers and social worker supervisors relayed about their lived experiences and social contexts as well as explore and describe the depth, richness and complexity of delivering services to child-headed households and upholding their rights to care and protection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher described the reflections of social workers, social worker supervisors and a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development regarding social services delivered to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection. The qualitative approach thus allowed participants to provide an in-depth view of their reflections, opinions, perceptions, and experiences regarding social services to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection (Bell & Waters, 2018; Dawson, 2019). Further, the qualitative approach allowed participants to reflect on broader issues that affect social service delivery to child-headed households as well as challenges in implementing policy and legislation. The qualitative approach was chosen because it produced descriptive data based on social workers, social worker supervisors and a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development's accounts and words, allowing them to reflect on their daily practices (Babbie, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Additionally, the qualitative approach was suitable for the study because the nature of the study's research objectives indicated in Chapter 1 required qualitative data. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews from social workers, social worker supervisors and a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research allowed the researcher to use interviews to obtain information about the experiences of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This approach was used because of its inductive nature which includes building from the bottom up by collecting and ordering data into themes and categories. According to Saldana (2014), the inductive process includes working alternatively between data collection and developing themes to establish a complete final set of themes. Although, the process in qualitative research begins inductively, deductive processes play a vital role as data is being analysed because after data has been interpreted into themes, the researcher can deductively look back at data from the themes to determine if more evidence can support each theme, or whether there is a need for more information from the participants. After data had been collected and interpreted into themes, the researcher deductively assessed the themes to check if there was any missing information or if any details needed explanation from the participants (Appendix H & I: Member checking). In this process the researcher worked alternatively between the themes and collected data both deductively and inductively to ensure that the captured data was established into a comprehensive set of themes.

Qualitative research is all about understanding human behaviour hence it is usually inductive, meaning that it does not predict human behaviour. Therefore, the inductive method was used because it allowed the researcher to establish the participant's meaning to the issue at hand instead of relying on the meaning derived from literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the research was qualitative it was further useful in the study because of its unstructured nature which allowed flexibility in all aspects of the research process. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) an unstructured approach is more appropriate for explorative and descriptive studies and since the study incorporated explorative and descriptive research designs, the unstructured approach allowed for an evolving process in conducting the study (Saldana, 2015). Furthermore, qualitative research was adopted because it is relatively cheaper than quantitative research and it allowed the researcher to collect data virtually through Microsoft team meetings and telephone interviews. The only expense that the researcher incurred was that of data bundles and airtime (Pattern & Newhart, 2018).

5.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

It is imperative to comprehend what a research design is and where it fits into the entire research process, from framing a question, to finally analysing and reporting data. Furthermore, it is crucial to be clear about the role and purpose of a research design before undertaking any type of research. According to Babbie (2001), social science research includes asking fundamental questions, such as what is going on (descriptive research) and why is it going on (exploratory research). Fouché et al. (2021) explain that exploratory and descriptive research designs vary in many aspects because exploratory research entails gaining insight into a situation, a phenomenon, a community, or an individual and descriptive research design presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting, or relationship. In this study the researcher incorporated explorative and descriptive research designs to ask questions related to “what” (descriptive) and “why” (exploratory).

5.4.1 Exploratory design

According to Babbie (2016), exploratory studies are conducted to satisfy the curiosity of the researcher and their desire to understand something better, to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study, and to develop the methods to be employed in any subsequent study. To do this, the researcher also needs to explore and familiarise themselves with the topic to satisfy their interest (Roestenburg et al., 2021; Babbie, 2016). In this study, the researcher was interested in the topic because, in South Africa, many children are living in child-headed households, and because even though these children are denied some of the most basic human rights, such as the right to parental care which denial consequently impairs

their growth and development, they have not been identified as children living in difficult circumstances by the 2016 Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare.

The researcher was furthermore interested in the topic because research about the rights of children from child-headed households to protection, care, and support and social service delivery to them in the absence of their parents or adult caregivers was limited. Therefore, in the absence of social work research about this topic, the researcher recognised an urgent need to gain an understanding about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection, about policy and legislation implementation, as well as about the type of social services delivered with reference to the different levels of the ecological perspective. The researcher used the exploratory design to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or individuals (Roestenburg et al., 2021). This was an appropriate design and fitted well with the goal of the study because little existing knowledge that related to the research topic, was available (Babbie, 2016). Furthermore, there was no information about the reflections of key role players, such as social workers, social worker supervisors and designated persons of the provincial Department of Social Development regarding the rights of child-headed households to care and protection in South Africa.

5.4.2 Descriptive design

Babbie (2016) indicates that descriptive research presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting or relationship. This design aims to describe situations and events and allows the researcher to observe and then describe what has been observed. In this study the researcher applied the descriptive research design to intensively examine social service delivery to children from child-headed households and how their rights to care and protection are upheld by role players, such as social workers, social worker supervisors and designated persons of the provincial Department of Social Development. Therefore, this research design presented a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting, or relationship, and it was chosen because it described the study accurately (Fouché et al., 2021). The use of this design together with the exploratory design was appropriate because the subject about the reflections of role players such as social workers regarding the social service delivery and rights of child-headed households to care and protection in the South African context was relatively new.

5.5 RESEARCH METHOD

As mentioned previously in this chapter, this study adopted a qualitative research method. The researcher realised that no existing studies could be found on social services delivered to this vulnerable group and their rights to care and protection. Furthermore, the method was utilised because the researcher was specifically interested in the reflections, observations,

and analyses of key role players in service delivery to provide insight into a matter of child-headed households to emphasise the interest and authenticity of human experiences (Fouché et al., 2021).

The qualitative method is a naturalist point of departure, and the first stage of the naturalistic researcher's study is to review the context from which the researcher approaches the means of investigation and exploration through several research questions as highlighted in Chapter 1 of the study. This was achieved through the use of inductive theorising. Within this study, an inductive research method was implemented through the development of a literature study, the execution of sampling, as well as the implementation of different data collection methods related to the study design. The steps that were followed are explored in detail below.

5.5.1 Selecting a researchable topic

Whittaker (2009) states that the first step in the research process is the selection of a topic. The topic serves as a foundation which suggests the idea of the study, both to the researcher personally and others who may read the study (Cresswell, 2014). The topic may develop through observation of concerns in practice and the reviewing of literature which is of interest to the researcher. It may also originate from reasons which could be personal, academic or social in nature (Blaikie, 2010a; Roestenburg et al., 2021). According to Mouton (2011), there are four important rules in deciding on a topic, namely that the topic should be relevant to the researcher's own career, intellectually stimulating, researchable, and interesting and worthwhile.

The topic was relevant to the researcher's career. The researcher is a social work graduate from the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, with personal and professional experience in the field of child and family welfare. It has become clear that the phenomenon of child-headed households is a serious social issue in South Africa and that there is a need for research on this issue. The researcher's previous study about the experiences of heads of child-headed households found that children from child-headed households experienced multiple challenges, including lack of social services and parental care and that their rights to care and protection were violated. It has become clear that the rights of child-headed households to care and protection are infringed and as the researcher is a social worker and advocates for change to ensure that all children have equal access to the resources and opportunities required to meet basic needs and develop fully, the study about the rights of these children to care and protection and social services was relevant to the researcher's career.

The topic was also intellectually stimulating to the researcher because after previous research, it was clear that no studies existed on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection, especially from role players such as social workers, social worker supervisors and designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development. This meant that children of child-headed households could be vulnerable in multiple ways because, not only were they going through life without adult caregivers; they were also not provided with sufficient support and social services. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate that, to determine whether a topic is researchable or not, consideration had to be given to time, resources, and the availability of data. The researcher had sufficient time and financial resources as they obtained partial funding from the National Research Foundation (NRF). The availability of data was investigated and it was found that there were designated child welfare NPOs that were rendering services in the Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape provinces through service level agreements with the respective provincial Departments of Social Development.

The research topic was interesting and worthwhile because the studies on child-headed households in South Africa that were available, did not focus on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and social services delivered to this vulnerable group, especially from the perspective of role players such as social workers, social worker supervisors, and designated persons from the provincial Departments of Social Development. The studies available focused on the need for children's participation in early childhood intervention (Pillay, 2016), the legal and ethical implications when children are the primary caregivers (Le Roux-Kemp, 2013), and the legal recognition of child-headed households (Kruger, 2014).

5.5.2 Literature review

The literature review in the study was done through the process of reading and evaluating literature materials as well as what has been studied related to the topic to avoid repetition of previous study or conducting the study that has been executed before (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, literature was reviewed in order to gain an understanding of the concerned issue, to identify similarities and differences between previous and current issues and to identify gaps or weaknesses in previous studies so that the study could focus on those gaps and weaknesses (Roestenburg et al., 2021; Creswell, 2014). The literature review also helped with the designing of the study and planning how the study would proceed, and assisted with the methodology part of the study that was used to answer the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the literature review informed the selection of participants that were utilised in the study, the study area, the method of data collection, the theoretical perspective, and the interpretation of the findings (Roestenburg et al., 2021). The literature

review in this study was a continuous process that assisted the researcher to keep up with the developments and improvements on the topic as time evolved. It also allowed for such developments to be included in the study (Babbie, 2016).

The literature review further assisted to frame the problem in the introduction of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The review of literature in this research study was separately presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Chapter 2 analysed international, regional, and local child and family welfare policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households, as well as the rights of child-headed households to care and protection from a human rights-based perspective. Chapter 3 explored the circumstances of child-headed households within the South African child protection system and Chapter 4 dissected social services that should be delivered to child-headed households utilising the ecological systems perspective. The researcher made use of both local and international research, online databases, such as EBSCO host, ResearchGate, Google Trends, library research and peer-reviewed articles, but no research was found on the reflections of role players on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and the social services delivered to them in South Africa.

Recent research that was conducted by Bhengu in 2021 was about the challenges experienced by children in child-headed households in South Africa as well as that of Tsoaledi and Muruge, conducted in 2022, about the behavioural experiences endured in child-headed households. It is therefore undoubtedly clear that no studies had been done about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and the social services delivered to them. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) literature does not guide the study in qualitative research, instead it serves as an aid once the study themes, subthemes and categories had been established. Therefore, the researcher reviewed literature at the end of the study in the empirical chapter (Chapter 6) to discuss and compare the findings with the findings of the literature.

5.5.3 Population and sampling

Research population is defined as a specific group of subjects that participate in the study and include individuals who are of interest to the researcher (Bless et al., 2013). Furthermore, sampling is defined as a subset of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study. The study population has to be measured, precisely defined and the individuals that are of no interest to the study, should be excluded. Purposive sampling was used in this study as the researcher made the decision about which organisations were to be the focus of the study and the individual participants who could most likely contribute to appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Roestenburg et al., 2021).

In addition, Strydom and Delport (2011) explain that in a purposive sampling method, a sample is formatted in such a way that it contains most characteristics or typical attributes of the population that best serves the study. The authors further state that, in a purposive sample, the researcher relies on an existing social or psychological understanding of the problem as a basis for choosing the population elements in the sample. The researcher purposively selected participants who were most directly linked to the research area. After selecting participants, a sample that contained the most characteristics or typical attributes of the population that best served the purpose of the study was formatted (Fouché et al., 2021). In this study the population consisted of social workers and social worker supervisors in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and the Eastern Cape as well as a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development. These provinces were selected because of all the provinces in South Africa, child-headed households were most prevalent in them (Hall & Mokomane, 2018).

In South Africa, different designated child protection organisations deliver child and family welfare services to children and families in different provinces including, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and the Eastern Cape. In each province the designated child welfare NPOs rendering services were identified from the Children's Service Directory website. In Limpopo province, child welfare NPOs such as Child Welfare South Africa (CWSA) and the Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie (SAVF), in Mpumalanga, the *Christelike Maatskaplike Raad (CMR)* and the *Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie (SAVF)*, and in the Eastern Cape, organisations such as Child Welfare South Africa and the *Christelike Maatskaplike Raad* of the Dutch Reformed Church deliver child and family welfare services. The researcher learned from the Children's Service Directory website that in certain districts or regions there was a sufficient number of child welfare NPOs who could have a sufficient number of role players that can be part of the study compared to other districts identified on the website which did not have as many child welfare NPOs.

The researcher's thought process was that, where certain districts had more organisations than other districts, there would be a sufficient number of social workers and social worker supervisors in those designated organisations to invite to partake in the study. The researcher also believed that they could gather useful data in these areas from different child welfare NPOs who could manage child-headed households differently. Through the Children's Service Directory website in Limpopo, the Capricorn district was identified (six (6) designated child protection organisations). In Mpumalanga the Ehlazeni district was identified (six (6) designated child welfare NPOs). Five (5) designated child welfare NPOs were also identified in the Eastern Cape in the Buffalo City Metropolitan area.

All of these designated child welfare NPOs, seventeen (17) in total, had letters written to their deputy directors to obtain permission to conduct interviews with role players. Out of all seventeen (17) organisations in three provinces combined, only six (6) child welfare NPOs provided permission for the study to be conducted, two (2) NPOs in each district. Eleven (11) child welfare NPOs did not grant permission for the study to be conducted. Some of the NPOs did not respond to the request letters at all, while some NPOs declined the invite and provided reasons such as lack of capacity in terms of available staff who can take part in the study. Some organisations mentioned that their social workers would not be able to take time off to partake in the study because they had demanding tasks and high caseloads. The names of the NPOs who provided permission and took part in the study are not disclosed in order to adhere to the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality agreement that the researcher established with such NPOs.

Furthermore, in South Africa, the provincial Departments of Social Development are also expected to transform society and deliver integrated social development services to children and families. In terms of child-headed households according to the Children's Amendment Act they must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court, or an organ of state, or a non-governmental organisation determined by the provincial Head of the Department of Social Development. Therefore, the three provincial Departments of Social Development in the respective provinces where the study was conducted, had letters written to them with ethical clearance sought at all three provincial Departments to acquire permission to interview the head/deputy head of these Departments in the respective provinces

The study was divided in three phases which are discussed below.

5.5.3.1 First phase

In the first phase of the study, social workers from child welfare NPOs in the Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan), Limpopo (Capricorn) and Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni) were included. Child and family welfare NPOs were the focus because, although the primary responsibility for delivering social services rests with the national, provincial, and local governments, they entered into service level agreements (SLAs) with designated child welfare NPOs in terms whereof the NPOs would deliver the social services. Thus, child and welfare NPOs are designated to implement the principles of the Department of Social Development and render child protection services in accordance with the Children's Act.

These NPOs were used because they provided permission for the study to be undertaken, were interested in partaking in the study and because they were also rendering social services

to child-headed households in the identified areas. Therefore, social workers from two different designated child welfare NPOs in each province were selected because different organisations could manage child-headed households differently. Social workers had information about the services they rendered to child-headed households, the needs of this group, as well as ideas about policy implementation.

The criteria for inclusion were that participants had to be:

- employed as a registered social worker at a registered NPO in Limpopo (Capricorn), Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni) or Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan);
- rendering child and family welfare services for at least a year; and
- conversant in English.

Once permission was granted (Appendix J), the researcher requested to attend a virtual staff meeting to explain the study to the social workers participants and the social worker supervisors' participants. The researcher explained the study to the potential participants at a virtual meeting and provided his contact details should interested parties wanted to reach him. It was mentioned that interviews would first be conducted with the social worker participants and then with social worker supervisor participants in the second phase. The interested participants contacted the researcher immediately after the virtual meeting and individual interviews were arranged.

During individual interviews, the objective of the study was again explained to ensure that participants fully understood what the study was about, as well as the content of the informed consent form (Appendix A). Participants were then asked to complete, sign, and send the informed consent forms back to the researcher via email before any interviews could commence. An appointment was then made for a follow-up contact to conduct the interview virtually with the social workers. A total of seventeen (17) participants were interviewed, namely six (6) social workers from Limpopo, six (6) social workers from Mpumalanga, and five (5) social workers from the Eastern Cape. The data obtained in this first phase was analysed before the commencement of the second phase so that the researcher had knowledge about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection as well as social services rendered to them from social workers' perspective.

Further, since the study was explorative, it sought to find information on the subject that was not presented clearly in the available literature (Babbie, 2016). Purposive sampling was thus relevant for this study because the sample was composed of the fundamentals which contained most of the characteristics and representative attributes of the population being studied (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). The sample that was chosen for the study was social

workers that had one year experience in providing services to children in child-headed households. Therefore, social workers were able to provide rich data for the study based on their knowledge, skills and experience in rendering services to children in child-headed households. Thus, the researcher chose the sample in line with the view of Maree (2016), who indicated that the sample chosen should be able to enhance the transferability of the findings.

5.5.3.2 Second phase

In the second phase of the study, social worker supervisors from the same organisations and areas as mentioned above, were invited to partake in the study and a similar procedure was followed. Due to their managerial positions in the organisations, social worker supervisors had a holistic view about the extent of child-headed households registered at their particular organisations, about policy implementation, as well as about the challenges that organisations were experiencing in service delivery to these households.

A total of six (6) potential social worker supervisor participants were invited to participate in the study, two from each province, but only five (5) participants expressed interest, came forward, and participated in the interviews, namely, one (1) participant from Limpopo province, two (2) from Mpumalanga province and two (2) from the Eastern Cape province. No participant was forced to take part in this study. The researcher simply informed participants about the study and asked them to call or email the researcher if they were interested in participating. In the case of one (1) social worker supervisor who did not report or contact the researcher, it was determined that the participant was not interested in participating in the study for unknown reasons.

The criteria for inclusion were that participants had to be:

- employed as a registered social worker supervisor at a registered NPO in Limpopo (Capricorn), Mpumalanga (Ehlazeni) or Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan);
- rendering supervision for at least a year and rendering child and family welfare services for at least two years; and
- conversant in English.

5.5.3.3 Third phase

In the third phase of the study, the head/deputy head or designated person from the provincial Department of Social Development was included because they were responsible for children and families, specifically child-headed households in terms of child care and protection as well as family wellbeing. Furthermore, they had a holistic view about social service delivery, the implementation of policy and legislation with regards to child-headed households and obstacles experienced in social service delivery.

The criteria for inclusion were that participants had to be:

- employed as a head/deputy head or designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development in Limpopo, Mpumalanga or Eastern Cape province for at least a year; and
- conversant in English.

As mentioned earlier a letter was written to each of the three provincial Departments of Social Development to obtain ethical clearance to include the head/deputy head or a designated person in the study. However only one department expressed their willingness to partake in the study.

Approval was obtained (Appendix L) and details of the individual were provided to the researcher. The researcher contacted this participant and made an appointment for an individual meeting. During the individual meeting, the purpose of the study and the contents of the consent form (Appendix A) were explained. The participant was then asked to complete, sign, and email a consent form back to the researcher before the interview began. An appointment was then made for a follow-up online/virtual interview with a designated person from the Provincial Department of Social Development. This was followed by an interview with the designated person.

5.5.4 Target population

According to Kumar (2019) the target population is the group from which the answers about the research question will be obtained. It is impossible to study the whole population, thus a small fraction of people should be selected from the population to be studied (Babbie, 2016). In this study, the research was conducted with three different groups of participants, utilising the same research instrument, namely a semi-structured interview schedule to collect the required data. Seventeen (17) social workers formed part of the first group of participants. They were all social workers from registered NPOs in Limpopo (Capricorn), Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni) and the Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan), rendering child and family welfare services for at least a year. The second group of participants included five (5) registered social worker supervisors from registered NPOs in Limpopo (Capricorn), Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni) and the Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan), rendering child and family welfare services for at least two years. The third group included one (1) head/deputy head or designated person of one of the three provincial Departments of Social Development responsible for children and families, specifically child-headed households.

In total there were twenty-three (23) participants from the three provinces of Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. These identified areas formed part of the study because

they were the areas where child and family welfare NPOs were available, because they provided permission for the study to be conducted, and because they were willing to partake in the study compared to other areas or districts where there was a lack of child and family welfare NPOs and permission was not provided for the study to be conducted after several requests.

Kumar (2019) explains that the study population should be narrowed to the people who will fit the description of the study. In this study, focus was on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and social services rendered. Thus, the most important role players, namely social workers, supervisors and a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development reflected on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and the services rendered. These target groups were selected, because according to the Children's Act they are responsible for the implementation of legislation and subsequently the rendering of services to child-headed households.

5.5.5 Research site

Researchers have to take many factors into consideration when choosing a study site and planning to connect with prospective research participants for a qualitative study because entry to a research site and recruiting the prospective participants is not a straightforward process. Time needs to be invested in the careful planning of this phase since it has a significant impact on the subsequent research journey (Patton, 2002; Kondowe & Booyens, 2014). The research was conducted in the following sites: the Capricorn district of Limpopo province which is one of five districts of Limpopo and is located in the northernmost part of South Africa; the Ehlanzeni district which is one of three districts in Mpumalanga province located in the north-eastern part of the province; and Buffalo City Metropolitan which is situated on the east coast of the Eastern Cape province. These sites in the different provinces were selected because they were accessible to the researcher as it was possible to email the organisations letters asking for permission to conduct the study since their contact information was available on the website. Furthermore, these sites had sufficient numbers of child welfare NPOs according to the Children's Service Directory website compared to other regions which did not have as many child welfare NPOs. Finally, the researcher believed that useful data could be collected from these sites, considering the number of NPOs that were available and the potential participants. The objective was to have a sufficient number of participants who could reflect on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and social services delivered. The researcher believed that conducting the research in these sites could fulfil that objective. Two child welfare NPOs from each province and one provincial Department of Social Development formed part of the study because these NPOs and the Department

were rendering services to child-headed households and provided permission for the study to be conducted. Furthermore, it was important to be able to collect information from areas where there were a concentration of child-headed households in order to acquire accurate information about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and social services rendered to them, as was the case in these selected research sites.

5.5.6 Data collection

Data collection procedures consider the setting of boundaries for the study through sampling, collection of data through interviews, and establishing protocol for recording interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The following section presents the procedure followed in this study's data collection.

5.5.6.1 Pilot study

In this study, a pilot study was conducted to evaluate and test the methods and materials that were going to be used in the main study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Two social workers from the NPOs, who qualified for inclusion in the study, participated in the pilot study. Prior to conducting the real interviews, the researcher had the chance to test how the study would be conducted, allowing any potential errors in the data collection procedure to be removed (Kumar, 2019). Sampson (2004) adds that pre-testing is helpful for highlighting important issues including study validity, ethics, and representation in addition to help improve the research tools. Whether the interview questions need to be improved, changed, or rephrased for clarity is also revealed through pilot study. It aids the researcher in anticipating and removing potential obstacles that could arise during the actual investigation (Dikko, 2016). As a result, it gives the researcher the chance to conduct effective interviews throughout the main study. To test the efficiency of the interview schedule in gathering data for this study, two social workers participated in a semi-structured interview. Following the results of the pilot study, a few small adjustments were made to some of the interview questions of this study, such as making sure that questions to the participants on social services that should be provided and those that were provided to the children of child-headed households, were unique to the various levels of the ecological systems perspective. The two pilot interviews were included in the results of the study.

5.5.6.2 Methods for data collection

According to Fouché et al. (2021) the successful execution of a study design and data gathering is usually determined by the accessibility of the research setting and the researcher's ability to build and maintain relationships and agreements with gatekeepers and participants because the collection of data begins with gaining access to the participants. In

this study, the researcher made use of semi-structured interviews as a method to collect data. The following section presents the method that was used in the study.

5.5.6.2.1 Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview schedule was applied as a research instrument during online/virtual interviews with participants (Appendix B: First phase, Appendix C: Second phase & Appendix D: Third phase). Online/virtual interviews through Microsoft Team meetings were conducted with participants instead of face-to-face interviews because conducting face-to-face interviews in different parts of South Africa would have taken substantial time and would have been more expensive because the researcher would have had to travel to the participants (Oltmann, 2016). Telephone interviews were also used as an alternative, especially when participants did not have data to be online or when there was loadshedding in their area. This type of interview still allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection as well as the social services rendered to them by social service providers.

Even though telephonic interviews have been critiqued for their inability to assess non-verbal responses and the loss of the relational components frequently cultivated in a face-to-face interview, telephonic interviews were convenient for the researcher and the participants because they took place when the participants were available and in environments where they felt most comfortable (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017). The fact that the researcher called the participants meant that there was no financial expense to them, which was another benefit of the telephonic interviews.

Consent to record the interviews was obtained from the participants through the consent form. By allowing flexibility to explore the subject holistically and obtain answers to predetermined questions rather than being disturbed by trivial information that did not contribute to answering the research questions, the researcher further ensured that a delicate balance was maintained during the course of the interviews. The use of a semi-structured interview schedule allowed for the collection of extensive descriptions, and participants actively contributed to the interview's direction (Fouché et al., 2021). In order to ensure that all the information required for the study was obtained, each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Each interview was also recorded.

All semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted in English as all participants were graduates who had a good command of the English language (proficiency in English was part of the inclusion criteria). Appropriate climate-setting techniques were implemented in order to ensure that participants were comfortable and able to share information freely

(Roestenburg et al., 2021). Climate setting techniques that were utilised in the interview were building rapport and establishing comfortable interactions with participants. The researcher was not familiar with the participants prior to the interviews, and it was important for mutual trust to first be established. Therefore, the researcher engaged participants in informal discussions, such as talking about loadshedding with participants. Establishing comfortable interactions were achieved because the researcher listened more than talked and followed up on what participants said. The researcher would ask questions when the input of the participant was not quite clear, and asked to hear more about the subject, or explored and probed even further. The researcher asked open-ended questions that did not anticipate a particular response, the researcher also followed up but did not interrupt, or keep participants focused and asked for concrete details.

At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the participants if there was anything they wanted to add. If it was clear that all had been covered by the interview the researcher properly thanked each participant for their time and valuable contribution.

Data saturation was reached when the researcher interviewed participant number fifteen (15) of the social worker participants, however the researcher completed another two interviews to ensure that no new information was forthcoming. Data saturation was also reached at the interview of the third social worker supervisor, yet the researcher continued until he completed the fifth interview to ensure that no new data was being shared. Data saturation is the point in data gathering when no new information or issues are uncovered and when participants are repeating material already identified (Rees, 2010).

All recordings were removed from the original devices and stored on a password-protected online system on Microsoft cloud. All field notes were also typed and stored on the same password-protected Microsoft Cloud online system. The researcher also used the One Drive facility of Stellenbosch University as an alternative storage option to back up the research data. All hard copies of notebooks used to record field notes were responsibly destroyed. Depending on the availability of the participants, interviews were conducted from March 2023 through to September 2023. The delay in completing interviews was due to many of the participants who had to attend to their work commitments due to high caseloads and who thus postponed interviews often. In addition, some of the designated child and family welfare NPOs only responded to the requests to conduct the study after an extended period.

Other challenges experienced relating to data collection occurred when potential participants would decide to not respond to the researcher's enquiries about the individual meetings after agreeing to partake in the study. This resulted in a lot of time spent on contacting participants

numerous times to set up new interview times. It was frustrating and affected the set time frame for data collection and the completion of the research process. Furthermore, not being granted permission by several child welfare NPOs in the mentioned provinces was challenging, although the researcher managed to include two different NPOs in each province. The difficulty to obtain responsible individuals to partake in the study from the provincial Departments of Social Development was a further challenge in the data collection phase. Some of the provincial Departments were difficult to reach because they would not respond to emails and when the office line was called, the expectation was to hold for an extended period. In other instances, the line went to voicemail immediately. In instances where they were reached through calls, the researcher was referred to multiple individuals who were not able to assist. Eventually, the researcher managed to recruit one participant from one provincial Department.

5.6 DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

Data analysis entails making sense of the data that was collected and involves arranging the data in a particular manner that would make sense (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Processing, analysing and interpreting of results are required once data has been collected and at this point the researcher only had raw data which contained vast amounts of information in the form of digital recordings of interviews, transcriptions and field notes of which not all could be used in the qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). It is for this reason that unpacking collected data from participants and giving it meaning and structure was essential as a form of data analysis (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

After each interview, the researcher transcribed the data immediately. This enabled the researcher to emerge himself in the data. This is one of the first steps in the analysis of qualitative data and involves bringing structure and meaning to the data by a process of critical reflection, making linkages, seeking explanations and contemplating reasons for actions and behaviours (Roestenburg et al., 2021).

For the analysis of the data, Atlas.ti software was utilised. This software allowed for the collected data to be easily analysed, reorganised and regrouped according to themes, categories, and areas of interest, which resulted that the data handling was consistent. Furthermore, as the Atlas.ti software allowed for several research materials to be explored simultaneously and for the analysis to be consistent and transparent, the time spent on the data and the number of mistakes that could have occurred, were greatly reduced.

The researcher uploaded the transcribed scripts in the software, then assigned preliminary codes (e.g., Participant 1) to the data in order to describe the content, search for patterns or

themes in the codes across the different interviews, review themes, and finally produce a report. Data was coded by identifying words, sentences or meaning. Some of these codes were organised to create subthemes. The relationships among the preliminary subthemes were further refined and reduced in number by grouping them together, to eventually produce the final subthemes. The Atlas.ti software package that was used assisted in this process and allowed for the systematic presentation of the findings, which were compared to the literature presented in the literature review. Inductive conclusions were formulated about the population from which the sample was drawn (Siepert, McMurty & McClelland, 2005).

The researcher used an independent coder who was a registered social worker with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), who had experience as a social worker in child and family welfare, and who was in possession of a postgraduate degree in social work, in order to obtain rich data and to contribute to the credibility and dependability of the research study. The researcher and the independent coder met to review the data in order to gather rich information. The researcher and the independent coder utilised the same approach of thematic analysis. They read over the researcher's transcriptions and confirmed the themes, subthemes, and categories. The independent coder then gave the researcher comments both during and after the study which were incorporated into the final analysis and concluded the data process (Friese, 2020). (Appendix G: Letter from Independent Coder).

5.6.1 Denaturalisation

According to Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005) denaturalisation allows for the correction of grammar, where necessary, so as not to hinder or obstruct the understanding of the participant's narrative, for the removal of interview noise, such as pauses and stutters, and to ensure for the standardisation of non-standardised accents. The researcher manually transcribed audio recordings of semi-structured interviews with participants to allow for a more robust exploration of patterns, themes and dialogue interpretation and in the transcription process, the method of denaturalisation was employed to correct the grammar, where deemed necessary.

5.6.2 Method of data verification

The criteria for a research study should be established to ensure that the quality of the data can be verified (Fouché et al., 2021). The criteria should refer to the reliability and validity of the research study. According to Bless et al. (2013) reliability is concerned with the extent to which the observable (empirical) measures that represent theoretical concepts are accurate and stable over repeated observations, while validity is concerned with just how accurately the observable measures represent the concept in question or whether in fact, they represent something else. Therefore, different criteria must be used to evaluate the quality of the data

collected and must be analysed in terms of the two approaches, either quality of quantitative research or quality of qualitative research (Bless et al., 2013). Since the study was a qualitative study, the quality of the research study was evaluated and its trustworthiness was improved, based on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Bless et al. (2013) state that credibility corresponds to the concept of internal validity, since it seeks to convince that the findings depict the truth of the reality under the study, in other words that they make sense. In this research study, the credibility was achieved through collecting rich data that offered the potential of inclusive data analysis rather than low quality data that offered little potential for analysis to ensure credibility of the study. Furthermore, credibility was achieved by providing clear parameters of the population, namely that the population referred to social workers and social worker supervisors both directly and indirectly (Delpont & Roestenburg, 2013). Moreover, asking participants to share what they knew and what they had been exposed to in terms of child-headed households as professionals helped ensure that honest information was shared by participants, further adding to the credibility of the study. Credibility was also ensured by utilising the service of an independent coder who was a registered social worker with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), had experience as a social worker in child and family welfare and was in possession of a postgraduate degree in Social Work. The independent coder read through the researcher's transcriptions, confirmed the themes, subthemes, and categories, and concluded the data process. (Appendix G: Letter from Independent Coder).

Transferability

According to Bless et al. (2013) transferability can be compared to external validity since it refers to the extent to which results apply to other studies. Furthermore, Fouché et al. (2021) explain that transferability refers to whether the results from empirical findings could be transferred to other settings. In this research study, transferability was achieved through ensuring that the study had a thick description by providing enough details about the participants, namely the social workers and social worker supervisors employed at child and family welfare NPOs and the designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development as well as the settings in which the study took place, namely the Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan), Limpopo (Capricorn) and Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni). Transferability was also achieved through good research design, critical data analysis, rigorous planning, action, and critical reflection.

Dependability

According to Padgett (2008) and Bless et al. (2013) dependability means reliability, which suggests that the same thing would reoccur under similar circumstances, in other words, the findings had to be consistent even if the study was replicated with the same participants. Schurink et al. (2021b) contend that the concept of replication is problematic in qualitative research because the social world is continuously changing, therefore dependability should seek to establish whether the research process is logical and documented and audited well. In the research study, the researcher achieved dependability of the research by ensuring that the collected data was presented in a logical, organised, and systematic manner. The researcher ensured that findings from the empirical investigation were well documented. Furthermore, both international and national research articles were utilised in the study to allow for a dependable research study. Dependability of the study was further ensured by comprehensively discussing the phases of the research process followed by problem formulation, to finalising the research report presented in this chapter.

Conformability

Confirmability aims to safeguard that the research findings were based on the true data and the process of data analysis was properly applied (Padgett, 2008). The conformability of a research study requires that other researchers or observers should be able to obtain similar findings by following a similar research process in a similar context (Bless et al., 2013). To add to the conformability of the research study, the researcher utilised the participants' narratives with minimal changes to conform to previous studies on related topics. Schurink et al. (2021b) observe that the researcher should provide evidence for each claim or interpretation from at least two sources to support the data and the researcher's analysis of the findings. Direct quotes from the collected data were used when presenting the findings, with conclusions drawn from the empirical study and the existing global body of knowledge on child-headed households as are presented in Chapter 6.

Confirmability was further ensured in the study as the researcher randomly asked one participant from the first phase of the study (Appendix H) and one participant from the second phase of the study (Appendix I) to read the themes, subthemes and categories done for this study, they were then given the opportunity to state whether they agreed with the content of the themes, subthemes and categories that the researcher shared from the study. The participants from both groups informed the researcher that they agreed with the content of the themes, subthemes, and categories.

5.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research can be classified as a low-risk study as the participants were required to reflect on the phenomenon of child-headed households, the services that were rendered to such households, and the implementation of legislation. They were not asked to reflect on their personal experiences in delivering such services. Thus, participants were not expected to experience discomfort, emotional distress, or a range of negative emotions while participating in the research activity.

Fouché et al. (2021) explain that social science research makes people the objects of the study, therefore, delicate care must be taken to protect participants from any harm. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Department of Social Work Ethical Screening Committee (DESC) of the University of Stellenbosch and the Research Ethics Committee (REC) prior to the initiation of this study (Appendix E). Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the director or deputy director of the different NPOs in the Capricorn district of Limpopo, the Ehhlazeni district of Mpumalanga and the Buffalo City Metropolitan of the Eastern Cape, as well as one of the three provincial Departments of Social Development in the provinces selected for the study. As a qualified and registered social worker, the researcher was bound by the Ethical Code of the South African Council for Social Service Professions (1986). The ethical procedures that were applicable to the researcher included the following:

- **Non-maleficence:** The researcher was aware that, even though the research could be classified as a low-risk study which focused on the participants' professional reflections about child-headed households in South Africa, policy and legislation, and service delivery, and not on personal experiences that could trigger emotions, research with humans could still elicit emotional reactions. Therefore, out of respect of the participants' emotional reactions (if any), participants were offered short breaks during the study to allow them to recollect their thoughts.
- **Beneficence:** Beneficence refers to actions which help others and that promotes the betterment of others for altruistic reasons (Faden & Shabaya, 2010). The implementation of beneficence requires the researcher to take action by helping others. Acting beneficently in human research thus requires some assessment of both the intended benefits of the research and of the risks to which participants will be exposed. These assessments are sometimes referred to as balancing the risks and benefits or finding a favourable risk: benefit ratio (Beauchamp & Childress 2013). The researcher focused on improving the awareness of the participants. Furthermore, the researcher was also aware of the benefit that the study findings could have for the population, i.e., that the findings could be used to understand role players' viewpoints about the rights of child-headed households to social services and ultimately address

their plight as role players are expected to provide support to such households. For human research to be ethically defensible, Pieper and Thomson (2016) state that there must be a positive justification of the project. Thus, the new knowledge obtained through this study could assist the NPOs and the Department of Social Development in developing strategies that would focus on responding to the needs of child-headed households, thereby ensuring that the rights of these children to care and protection are protected.

- Voluntary participation: According to Rubin and Babbie (2017), ethical research requires voluntary, unforced decision-making about participation and its consequences. The researcher upheld this principle of voluntary participation by ensuring that no participants were coerced into partaking in the study. The researcher asked interested potential participants to email the researcher after they attended a meeting where the study was explained. The researcher also stipulated in the informed consent form that was signed by all participants before the interviews commenced, that participation was voluntary and that participants had the freedom to choose to partake or not, and to withdraw at any time.
- Informed consent: The researcher developed an informed consent form which was discussed with the participants prior to their interviews. In this form a clear outline of this study and its goals and objectives were provided to the participants for them to make informed decisions about their participation in the study. Besides being informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point, participants were also informed that the interviews were to be audio recorded. The interviews were conducted in English and participants participated voluntarily, with no one being coerced to take part in the study.
- Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality: The researcher handled all the data and information of the participants privately. In the context of this study, only the researcher was aware of the identity of the participants. Confidentiality was maintained, and the identities of the participants were not used in any compromising manner or to the disadvantage of the participants. The names of the NPOs were also not mentioned in the final report. The participants were all informed about the privacy and confidentiality of the study. Participants were thus referred to in the study as participant 1, 2, etc. The researcher conducted all the interviews online from a private room with minimal interruptions to enable participants to partake confidently without worrying about any confidential information leaking (Leary, 2012). The researcher asked participants to ensure that they were also in a place where they felt comfortable to talk. The researcher further explained that any information that was obtained in connection with

the study would remain confidential and would only be disclosed with the participants' permission or as required by law.

- Debriefing: In this study, the collection of empirical data was focused on the reflection about a specific phenomenon and not on personal experiences that could trigger emotions; the research could thus be regarded as low risk. However, uncertainties on any of the aspects of the interview schedule which participants might have experienced during the interview could be discussed and clarified at any time.
- Actions and competence of the researcher: The researcher is a registered social worker and has experience in child and family welfare service delivery. The researcher further completed a successful research study focusing on the experiences of heads of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of Limpopo and has knowledge about the difficulties that children in child-headed households were experiencing.
- Dissemination and publication of findings: The final step in the research process is disseminating the results of the study by writing the research report. According to Fouché et al. (2021) the findings of the research must be introduced to the reading public in written form to ensure that it is scientifically recognised as formal research. Schurink et al. (2021b) are of the opinion that researchers have a responsibility to disseminate their findings as widely as possible. Strydom and Roestenberg (2021) concur that publishing research is in the best interest of the scientific community and society. Thus, a research study will be published for academic or professional purposes. In addition to this research report, part of the work emanating from the study will be disseminated via conference presentations, book chapters, or peer-reviewed journal articles.

5.8 REFLEXIVITY

According to Koopman, Watling and LaDonna (2020), reflexivity is a key feature in qualitative research and essential for ensuring accuracy. Reflexivity emphasises the significance of self-awareness, political or cultural consciousness, and ownership of perspectives. Maree (2016) adds that reflexivity involves a critical self-reflection of the researcher's potential biases, predispositions and modifications made in the methodology. Moreover, Fouché et al. (2021) indicate that the circumstances of the researcher can influence the data collection procedures and the research process. Thus, the researcher kept track of his own influence, biases, and emotional responses, as they constructed meanings that clearly painted the true state of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014). The researcher conducted thorough literature study and accurate analysis of the data, and interpreted the data based on the participants' reflections and existing research, while still recognising that he was the primary tool in the data

collection process. In terms of the empirical study, the researcher was objective and kept to the interview schedule and did not bring his personal experiences to the interview process. When addressing questions, the researcher did not lead the participants, but would only ask follow-up questions, in order for participants to clarify their points so as not to influence them in giving their responses

The researcher consistently engaged in introspection regarding his values and interests. Throughout the research process, the researcher remained acutely aware of his own perceptions, values, and cultural orientations concerning the rights of child-headed households to receive care. The researcher possesses professional qualifications as a registered social worker and has gained experience in child and family welfare through undergraduate studies and as a student social worker in various child and family welfare NPOs. Throughout the study, the researcher carefully examined and managed his own emotions related to the research by openly discussing them with the study supervisor. The researcher firmly believed that insufficient attention has been given to the social issue of child-headed households. Consequently, it was imperative to investigate this social problem that affects the most vulnerable members of society in order to safeguard and promote their rights to care and protection, address their needs through effective and efficient social services, and raise awareness about their dire circumstances.

Furthermore, the researcher grew up in one of the above-mentioned provinces where child-headed households are prevalent and has been aware of the plight of many children who were going through life without their parents or adult caregivers, and who had to rely on the eldest child to take care of them and did not acquire services from social workers. Under these conditions, the children were suffering, many of their rights were infringed upon and because there are so many of them, their plight had become normalised and often overlooked, even though they continued to struggle with basic unmet needs. Although some of the children of child-headed households were able to stay resilient under their conditions and progressed in life, they may still carry emotional scars with them into adulthood. In any case, many of the children of child-headed households were not resilient and could not escape their challenging situation. They generally struggle and it is the researcher's point having witnessed these conditions growing up that no children, anywhere in the world should be expected to live under such conditions and be able to thrive. It should not be that such conditions exist for the defenceless children of child-headed households without there being any reaction or proper services delivered to address their circumstances and ensure that their rights to care and protection are upheld. The number or prevalence of child-headed households should not be the reason or argument that they could not be rendered the appropriate services—the fact is

that these households exist, with very little or no services being delivered to them in a country that has arguably one of the best constitutions in the world.

5.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations in research studies are significant elements that the researcher must be aware of, recognise, acknowledge and present clearly (Roestenburg et al., 2021). Furthermore, Fouché et al. (2021) indicate that no study is without limitations and that acknowledging the limitations of one's study is part of the research process. It was attempted throughout this study to act in a scientific and professional manner. However, certain limitations of this study were identified, namely:

- the study was conducted in only one district in each of the three provinces of Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape;
- the study was conducted with only 23 participants; thus, the sample was a small representation of the research universe and the research could consequently not be generalised; and
- during the initial conceptualisation of the study, it was anticipated that the data obtained from the pilot study would not be incorporated into the actual study, however, in order to incorporate diverse perspectives into the research, the data derived from the pilot interviews were thoroughly analysed and subsequently integrated into the final documentation of the research findings

Furthermore, the shortage of literature on the research topic inhibited the researcher to relate to and compare findings of previous research. In some cases, sources were outdated (Asis, 2006; Meintjes, Hall, Marera and Boule, 2010; Le Roux-Kemp, 2013; Lim, 2009; Seepamore, 2016). Nevertheless, the inclusion of more recent sources was made possible. Moreover, great effort was made to explore as much recent literature of the phenomenon of the rights of child-headed households to care and protection as possible. In terms of the sample size, the researcher made use of purposive sampling, across three provinces with five different child welfare NPOs to ensure that a broad, varied and representative sample of participants was used to access a wider scope of data.

5.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the research methodology applied to the research was explained, from the planned research approach and design, the literature review, to the sampling method of data collection. Furthermore, the ethical considerations and limitations of the study were also addressed. This study was implemented within the subjective and interpretivist approach that particularly focused on the value of dialogue and the meaning it constructs in an attempt to understand a broader phenomenon of the rights of child-headed households to care and

protection. In total the researcher interviewed twenty-three (23) participants, of which seventeen (17) were social workers, five (5) were social worker supervisors from child and family welfare NPOs in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape province responsible for the care and protection of child-headed households in South Africa, and one (1) participant that was a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development in one of the three provinces mentioned above who was responsible for children and families, specifically child-headed households. These participants were interviewed about their professional opinions regarding the rights of child-headed households to care and protection.

In the next chapter, the data that was collected in the field will be presented, categorised and analysed.

CHAPTER 6: EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION ON THE REFLECTIONS OF ROLE PLAYERS ABOUT SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY TO CHILD- HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND THEIR RIGHTS TO CARE AND PROTECTION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter builds on the previous chapters and relates to the fourth objective of this study as it presents the investigation into the reflections of role players such as social workers from non-profit designated organisations in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and the Eastern Cape province about social service delivery to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection. Since this is a qualitative study that is largely concerned with the interpretation of meaning, the empirical findings are presented in the form of narratives and an exploration of dialogue and its meaning. The empirical data was collected through virtual or online semi-structured interviews with seventeen (17) social workers employed at different child welfare NPOs in Limpopo (6), Mpumalanga (6), and Eastern Cape province (5), who had information about the social services rendered to children living in child-headed households, the needs, and circumstances of this group, as well as ideas about policy implementation. Furthermore, five (5) social worker supervisors were also interviewed who, due to their managerial position, had holistic views about the extent of child-headed households registered at their NPOs, about policy implementation, as well as the challenges that the NPOs were experiencing in social service delivery to these households. Moreover, one (1) designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development in one of the three provinces was interviewed due to the Department's responsibility for children and families, specifically child-headed households. This person shared their views about social services delivered, the implementation of policy and legislation with regards to child-headed households, and the rights of these children to care and protection.

The findings of this study are presented and analysed by means of different themes, subthemes and categories that are typical of qualitative research. First, the biographical details of the sample are presented and discussed. This is followed by a discussion of the results of the study. The themes that were subdivided into subthemes which were then all divided into relevant categories are illustrated with narratives of the participants. A summary of significant statements about circumstances and needs of child-headed households as well as social services rendered, were compiled, the meaning of these statements was conceptualised and then categorised according to common themes. A conclusion regarding the full picture of the

essence of the reflections was then made. In conclusion, a literature control was presented for each theme, subtheme, and category.

6.2 BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The biographical profile of the participants in the first phase is discussed in the next section.

6.2.1 Biographical profile of participants (Social workers)

The biographical data of the seventeen (17) participants who were involved in the first phase of the study were given numbers to ensure their anonymity. In Table 6.1 below, the personal details of the participants are presented, such as their position in the organisation, years of experience in that position, number of families on their caseloads, qualifications obtained, and year graduated.

Table 6.1: Personal information of participants (Social worker participants)

Participant	Position in the organisation	Years of experience in the position	Number of families on caseload (cases)	Qualifications obtained	Year graduated
1	Social worker	6	800	BA Social Work	2016
2	Social worker	3	100	Social Work Degree	2019
3	Social worker	7	80	B Social Work	2015
4	Social worker	5	50	Social Work Degree	2018
5	Social worker	23	40	BA Social Work	2000
6	Social worker	1	600	B Social Work	2021
7	Social worker	18	45	BA Social Science	2004
8	Social worker	5	150	BA Social Work	2016
9	Social worker	7	50	Social Work Degree	2016
10	Social worker	2	38	BA Social Work	2018
11	Social worker	1	85	BA Social Work	2017
12	Social worker	6	140	BA Social Work	2016
13	Social worker	15	28	BA Social Work	2006
14	Social worker	13	60	BA Social Work	2010
15	Social worker	7	50	BA Social Work	2016
16	Social worker	5	35	BA Social Work	2018
17	Social worker	3	70	BA Social Work	2019

The demographic details of the participants are discussed in the next section.

6.2.1.1 Position in the organisation

The position of the participants was a critical inclusion criterion for this study. The criteria for inclusion were that participants had to be employed as registered social workers at child welfare NPOs that were delivering services to child-headed households at the time of the study. It is clear from the information in Table 6.1 above, that all the participants complied with this requirement. Thus, when analysing the above table, it should be evident that the social workers who formed part of the study and who shared their reflections about social service

delivery to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection, were all social workers who in terms of the Children's Act (38 of 2005), rendered services to child-headed households because they formed part of the cornerstone of the South African child protection system.

6.2.1.2 Years of experience in the position

Participants were asked to give an indication of the number of years they had been working as social workers. The years of experience was part of the inclusion criteria, and it was a significant factor for this study as it showed the social work knowledge and skills the participants had at the time of the study. The criteria for inclusion in the study was that participants should have worked as social workers and rendered child and family welfare services to child-headed households for at least a year. The total years of working experience of the participants ranged from 1 to 23 years. The data indicates that at the time of the study, 8 (47%) participants had between 1 and 5 years of experience, while 5 (29%) participants' working experience ranged between 6 and 10 years. Of the participants, 2 (12%) indicated that they had between 11 and 15 years' working experience. Only 1 (6%) participant indicated that they had between 16 and 20 years' working experience, while another 1 (6%) participant indicated that they had more than 20 years' experience. Most of the participants had more than 5 years working experience which is an indication that the average number of years of work experience was relatively high and that the social worker participants had sufficient experience to share their reflections about the topic of the study.

6.2.1.3 Number of families on caseload

The caseloads of the participants were not a critical inclusion criterion for this study. However, it was a significant factor for this study as this reflected the workload of participants at the time of the study. Participants were asked to give an indication of the number of cases they were working on as social workers. The total number of families on caseloads of the participants ranged from 28 to 800 cases. The data indicates that at the time of the study, 13 (76%) of the participants had between 28 and 100 cases, while 2 (12%) participants' caseloads ranged between 101 and 250 cases. Another 2 (12%) participants indicated that they had between 251 and 800 cases. The majority of the participants had between 28 and 100 cases which is an indication that the average caseload was relatively high considering that their cases were complex and that the social workers were not only responsible for case work services, but also for preventative services in the form of community projects. Furthermore, the participants had to manage these tasks with very limited basic resources. In its Framework for Social Welfare Services document, the Department of Social Development (2013) recommends—with 80%

of a social worker's workload allocated to casework, involving travelling and court work—a caseload of 1:19 cases per month or 1:134 cases annually (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015).

6.2.1.4 Qualifications obtained

In terms of qualifications, participants were trained in the same discipline. According to the information in Table 6.1, all 17 (100%) participants had a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. None of the participants thus had postgraduate qualifications according to Social Service Professions Act (110 of 1978) as amended in 1998.

6.2.1.5 Year graduated

Participants were asked to give an indication of the year that they graduated. Although the year of graduation was not part of the inclusion criteria, it was a significant factor in relation to the experience of the participants. From Table 6.1, it is possible to notice that the year of graduation for some of the participants did not link to their years of experience. This could be because some of the participants had been unemployed after they graduated. The year of graduation of the participants ranged from 2000 to 2021. The data indicates that, at the time of the study, 3 (18%) participants had graduated between 2000 and 2008, while 2 (12%) participants graduated between 2009 and 2015. Of the participants, 12 (70%) indicated that they had graduated between 2016 and 2021.

It is crucial to note that the graduation year does not link with the experience for some of the participants as they were unemployed after graduation. This is consistent with the study of Opperman (2022) which found that more than 9 000 qualified social workers were unemployed in South Africa due to funding constraints within the Department of Social Development. Nevertheless, it was clear that, although some of the participants were recent graduates and were not immediately employed after they graduated, they have at least worked as social workers for a year, during which time they were rendering child and family welfare services, thus they had experience in this field of practice. It can be concluded that the participants had sufficient work experience because after they graduated, they managed to acquire employment and work experience and knowledge about rendering social services to families and children, specifically child-headed households, which was an inclusion criterium in order to partake in a study about this topic.

6.2.2 Biographical profile of participants (Social worker supervisor participants)

The biographical data of the five (5) participants who were involved in the second phase of the study were given numbers to protect their privacy. In Table 6.2 below, the personal details of the participants, such as their position in the organisation, years of experience in that position, qualifications obtained, and year graduated, are presented.

Table 6.2: Personal information of participants (Social worker supervisor participants)

Participant	Position in the organisation	Years of experience in the position	Qualifications obtained	Year graduated
1	Social worker supervisor	9 years as a social worker 3 years as a supervisor	PhD in Social Work	2011
2	Social worker supervisor	8 years as a social worker 1 year as a supervisor	Bachelor of Social Work	2014
3	Social worker supervisor	6 years as a social worker 1 year as a supervisor	Bachelor of Social Work	2016
4	Social worker supervisor	3 years as a social worker 2 years as a supervisor	Bachelor Social Work	2018
5	Social worker supervisor	31 years as a social worker 2 years as a supervisor	Master of Social Work	1990

The demographic details of the participants will be discussed in the next section.

6.2.2.1 Position in the organisation

The position of the participants was a critical inclusion criterion for this study. The criteria for inclusion were that, at the time of the study, participants had to be employed as a registered social worker supervisor at a child welfare NPO. It is clear from the information in Table 6.2 that all the participants in the study were registered social worker supervisors working at a child welfare NPO. It is, therefore, evident that social worker supervisors who, due to their managerial positions could have holistic views about the extent of child-headed households registered at the NPOs, about policy implementation, as well as the challenges that the NPOs were experiencing in service delivery to these households. As such these participants could form part of the study and could share their reflections about social service delivery to children of child-headed households and their rights to care and protection.

6.2.2.2 Years of experience in the position

Participants were asked to give an indication of the number of years they had been working as social workers and social worker supervisors. The years that they had worked in both positions were combined to provide a clear idea of their total years of experience. The years of experience was part of the inclusion criteria. It was also a significant factor for this study as it showed the social work knowledge and skills participants had at the time of this study. The

criteria for inclusion in the study was that participants should have worked as social worker supervisors for at least a year at the time of the study.

The total years of working experience of the participants ranged from 1 to 33 years. The data indicates that at the time of the study, 3 (60%) participants had between 1 and 10 years of working experience, while 1 (20%) participant's working experience ranged between 11 and 20 years. Of the participants, 1 (20%) indicated that they had more than 21 years of working experience. Most of the participants had between 1 to 10 years of working experience which is an indication that the average years of work experience was relatively high. Furthermore, 3 (60%) participants had more than two years' experience as a supervisor and 2 (40%) participants had one year experience in this position, which is in line with the inclusion criteria for social worker supervisors for this study. At the time of the study, all the participants had working experience as social workers and as social worker supervisors which means they had significant understanding within the field of social work practice, specifically with regards to child protection, but that they also had experience in the management of social workers and in policy implementation, as well as the challenges that the NPOs they were working for, were experiencing.

6.2.2.3 Qualifications obtained

In terms of qualifications, anyone that works as a social worker must have a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. All the participants obtained at least a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. This is reflected in Table 6.2, namely that all 5 (100%) of the participants had a Bachelor's degree in Social Work in terms of the Social Service Professions Act (110 of 1978) as amended in 1998. In addition, 2 (40%) of the participants had obtained postgraduate qualifications in social work. Thus, all the participants fulfilled the requirements to be included in the study.

6.2.2.4 Year graduated

Participants were asked to give an indication of the year that they had graduated. The year of graduation was not part of the inclusion criteria. However, it was a significant factor in relation to experience because all the participants were able to obtain employment immediately after they graduated, which contributed to their extensive experience in social work, especially in the field of child and family welfare. The year of graduation of the participants ranged from 1990 to 2018. The data indicates that at the time of the study, 1 (20%) participant had graduated between 1990 and 2010, while 4 (80%) participants had graduated between 2011 and 2018. It can be concluded that all the social worker supervisors were not recent graduates and that they have been in the field of child and family welfare for more than four years. This means they had sufficient work experience and knowledge about rendering social work

services to families and children, specifically child-headed households and could thus be included in a study about this topic.

6.2.3 Biographical profile of participants (Designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development)

The biographical data of the one (1) participant who was involved in the third phase of the study was given a number to protect their privacy. In Table 6.3 below, the personal details of the participant, namely their position in the department, years of experience in the position, qualifications obtained, and year graduated are presented.

Table 6.3: Personal information of participants (Designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development)

Participant	Position in the Department	Years of experience in the position	Qualifications obtained	Year graduated
1	Manager - children and families service office	5 years as a social worker 7 years as a manager	Bachelor of Social Work	2010

The demographic details of the participant will be discussed in the next section.

6.2.3.1 Position in the organisation

The position of the participant was a critical inclusion criterion for this study. The criteria for inclusion were that at the time of the study, participants had to be employed as a head/deputy head or designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development for at least a year. It is clear from the information in Table 6.3 that the participant in the study was a designated member of personnel in the provincial Department Social Development. It is also clear that the designated person of the Department of Social Development was responsible for giving formal recognition to child-headed households and shared their views about social service delivery to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection.

6.2.3.2 Years of experience in the position

The participant was asked to indicate the number of years they had worked as a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development. The years of experience was part of the inclusion criteria, and it was a significant factor for this study as it showed the knowledge the participant had about social service delivery to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection. The criteria for inclusion in the study was that participant have worked as designated persons of the provincial Department of Social Development for at least a year.

The total years of working experience of the participant was 12 years. The data indicates that at the time of the study, 1 (100%) participant had 12 years of working experience.

At the time of the study, the participant had working experience as a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development. This means they had significant understanding of the field of social work practice, specifically with regards to child protection since they were responsible for giving formal recognition to child-headed households, social services delivery, right to care and protection and the implementation of policy and legislation with regards to child-headed households.

6.2.3.3 Qualifications obtained

In terms of qualifications, the participant was trained in social work according to the Social Service Professions Act (110 of 1978) as amended in 1998. The qualification obtained according to Table 6.3 indicated that 1 (100%) participant had a Bachelor's degree in Social Work.

6.2.3.4 Year graduated

The participant was asked to give an indication of the year they had graduated. The year of graduation was not part of the inclusion criteria. However, it was a significant factor in relation to experience because it showed the working experience the participant acquired after they graduated. According to the data at the time of the study, 1 (100%) participant had graduated in 2010. This means that the participant was not a recent graduate and had been working in the provincial Department of Social Development for 12 years, thus, they had extensive work experience and knowledge about rendering social services to families and children, specifically child-headed households, and could be included in a study about social service delivery to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection.

6.3 FINDINGS REGARDING THE REFLECTIONS OF ROLE PLAYERS ABOUT SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND THEIR RIGHTS TO CARE AND PROTECTION

In this section the findings regarding the reflections of role players about social service delivery to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection are presented. The data obtained from the investigation are presented as typical of qualitative analysis by using themes, subthemes, and categories, where relevant. With the human rights-based perspective serving as the theoretical framework for this research study, the circumstances and outcomes of child-headed households indicate how the rights of these children are violated against and were these the points of departure in the development of themes, subthemes, and categories. The ecological systems perspective of Bronfenbrenner was also utilised to point out the

circumstances and needs of child-headed households and the social services that are rendered and should be rendered in the different systems of the ecological perspective to child-headed households to respond to the rights of these children to care and protection. In total, ten (10) themes emerged that could be grouped into twenty-five (25) subthemes and twenty-nine (29) categories. In presenting the data, the researcher used narratives of the participants, followed by literature controls. The themes, subthemes and categories that emerged from the data analysis are presented in Table 6.4 below.

Table 6.4: Themes, subthemes and categories derived from data analysis

Themes	Subthemes	Category
Nature of child-headed households and social services on the micro-level		
Theme 1: Nature of child-headed households on the micro-level	1.1 Circumstances of child-headed households	1.1.1 Experience emotional difficulties 1.1.2 Assume adult responsibilities 1.1.3 Experience depression 1.1.4 Experience frustration and anger
	1.2 Needs of child-headed households	1.2.1 Emotional support and a nurturing household 1.2.2 Counselling services
Theme 2: Social services to child-headed households on the micro-level	2.1 Social services delivered to child-headed households	2.1.1 Home visits 2.1.2 Assess circumstances to determine need for care and protection 2.1.3 Individual counselling services 2.1.4 Placement into kinship and non-kinship foster care.
	2.2 Social services that should be delivered to child-headed households	2.2.1 Family counselling services
Nature of child-headed households and social services on the meso-level		
Theme 3: Nature of child-headed households on the meso-level	3.1 Isolated within the community	3.1.1 Minimal support from extended family and community members 3.1.2 Engagement in underage drinking and smoking
	3.2 Challenges to manage household	3.2.1 Drop out of school.
	3.3 Children need an adult caregiver/parental care	3.3.1 Lack of response to their needs 3.3.2 Assistance from family and community members
Theme 4: Social services to child-headed households on the meso-level	4.1 Different group interventions are offered	4.1.1 Educational groups 4.1.2 Neighbours informally assist to monitor and supervise households

	4.2 Social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the meso-level	4.2.1 Children need a parental figure to take responsibility for management of household 4.2.2 Increase community support
Nature of child-headed households and social services on the macro-level		
Theme 5: Nature of child-headed households on the macro-level	5.1 Child-headed households are exposed to poverty and food deprivation	5.1.1 Live without sufficient income 5.1.2 Live in inadequate shelter 5.1.3 Exposure to child labour 5.1.4 Vulnerable to sexual abuse and prostitution
	5.2 Children in child-headed households have material needs	5.2.1 Need adequate food 5.2.2 Need sufficient income
Theme 6: Social services to child-headed households on the macro-level	6.1 Provision of food parcels 6.2 Community awareness campaigns	
	6.3 Social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the macro-level	6.3.1 Educational assistance to continue school attendance 6.3.2 Provision of sufficient income 6.3.3 Provision of adequate shelter
Policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households		
Theme 7: Reflections about policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households	7.1 Legislation is guiding service rendering 7.2 Child-headed households are not a protective measure 7.3 The best interests of children in child-headed households were not considered 7.4 Adequate resources are required to implement legislation	
	8.1 Rights of children in child-headed households are infringed upon	
	9.1 High caseloads 9.2 Staff shortage 9.3 Transportation challenges 9.4 Limited funding	
	10.1 Provision of sufficient funding for child welfare organisations to render effective social services 10.2 Employment of more social workers	

The results as depicted in Table 6.4 above, are discussed below. As indicated in Chapter 5, participants were coded to protect their privacy, with their narratives being represented with a

capital” PH” referring to Phase and “P”, referring to Participant. For instance, (PH1-P6) will refer to Participant 6 from Phase 1 (social worker participant), Participant (PH2-P1) will refer to Participant 1 from Phase 2 (social worker supervisor participant) and Participant (PH3-P1) will refer to Participant 1 from Phase 3 (designated person from the provincial Department of Social Development participant).

6.3.1 Nature of child-headed households and social services on the micro-level

Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlights that the micro-level is the first level of the ecological perspective and includes intrapersonal factors such as an individual’s self-esteem, as well as emotional coping processes that influence adjustment and aim to facilitate change in individual behaviour or relationships. In Chapters 3 and 4, it was established that children living in child-headed households were exposed to difficult circumstances such as emotional difficulties. Therefore, the participants in phases one and two were asked to reflect on the circumstances and needs of child-headed households, and the social services that were being delivered and that should be delivered to such households. Two themes were identified, namely the nature of child-headed households on the micro-level and the social services available to child-headed households on the micro-level. The themes and the subthemes and categories derived from the data are discussed below.

6.3.2 Theme 1: Nature of child-headed households on the micro-level

Theme 1 refers to the nature of child-headed households on the micro-level and is discussed according to the two subthemes identified, namely circumstances of child-headed households, and needs of child-headed households. These subthemes and their respective categories are discussed below.

6.3.2.1 Subtheme 1.1: Circumstances of child-headed households

The first subtheme under theme 1 identified the circumstances of child-headed households within the family. Four categories emerged from this subtheme namely, that children in child-headed households experience emotional difficulties, depression, anger, and frustration and have to assume adult responsibilities. These categories will be discussed below.

6.3.2.1.1 Category 1.1.1: Experience emotional difficulties

The first category that came to the fore was that children living in child-headed households experienced emotional difficulties. There was no difference in the reflections shared by both groups of participants regarding the emotional difficulties that the children were experiencing, mainly because they were living alone without adult caregivers. Participants stated that children in child-headed households were exposed to emotional difficulties, especially the

heads of the households who had to provide care for their siblings, a task that was stressful and affected their emotional wellbeing. These participants indicated:

Emotionally, they are vulnerable, especially the child who takes the responsibility because they must handle challenging issues such as caring for their siblings since their parents are not present. (PH1-P6)

They have emotional challenges; they are not well simply because they do not have adult caregivers. These children have no one to share their burden with especially the eldest child and this affects their emotions. (PH2-P1)

Other participants indicated that the children were experiencing emotional difficulties because they were struggling to cope with the loss of their parents, and they had nobody that was taking care of them. They were also not able to just be children, because they had adult responsibilities. These participants indicated:

I would say they also experience emotional difficulties because as children they are not able to experience life fully as children, instead they have these overwhelming responsibilities which affect their emotions. (PH2-P2)

Emotionally, they are vulnerable, especially the child who takes the responsibility because they must handle challenging issues such as caring for their siblings since their parents are not present. (PH1-P6)

Furthermore, one of the participants in the social workers participant group added that because these children lived without adult caregivers, they tended to experience emotional difficulties, such as anxiety. The participant mentioned:

They are also distressed because they are taking on adult responsibilities, especially the eldest one who is responsible for caring for their siblings. They have anxiety because of these responsibilities. (PH1-P13)

The finding that children living in child-headed households were experiencing emotional difficulties, because they were living without the care of parents and had to take on adult responsibilities, is confirmed in literature where it is indicated that the loss of one or both parents could be associated with a higher vulnerability for affected children, both from a short- and long-term perspective and that these children were at an increased risk of suffering from mental health problems and threats to their emotional wellbeing (Bergman et al., 2017). It could thus be concluded that the circumstances of child-headed households caused emotional

difficulties and perpetuated the vulnerability of these children, especially considering that they experienced these feelings in the absence of their parents or adult caregivers.

6.3.2.1.2 Category 1.1.2: Assume adult responsibilities

Another category that was identified was that children living in child-headed households assumed adult responsibilities. Most participants from both groups indicated that children living in child-headed households were forced to assume adult responsibilities because they had to go through life without the care and protection of their parents. Both groups explained that children living in child-headed households, especially the heads of these households who were children under the age of 18, had to assume adult responsibilities and that this role assumption was difficult for them. The following narratives were provided:

The older child must care for their siblings because both parents either passed away or they are nowhere to be found. Under these circumstances the older child is responsible for the care of their siblings and this role assumption is difficult for them. (PH2-P4)

These children were under difficult circumstances because they had to take care of themselves though the uncle was there because he did not do anything for them, they had to parent themselves because both their parents passed away. (PH1-P15)

Participants from the social workers participant group mentioned the responsibilities that especially the heads of child-headed households had to take on to execute tasks, such as preparing food in the morning and fetching water, and in the afternoons after school, they had to prepare food again, which sometimes had an impact on their schooling. These participants mentioned:

These children are forced to assume adult responsibilities because they must take care of themselves and their siblings. They must take the responsibility of adults, for example in the morning they must prepare food for their siblings, go to the river to fetch bath water and later when they come back from school, they must prepare food for the entire family. (PH2-P1)

Now they must manage the household while they are studying it becomes a problem because they don't have time for school. They must do house chores and now that takes their time for resting. (PH1-P6)

Participants from both groups indicated that assuming adult responsibilities, especially parenting the younger children, was challenging for the head of the household. The participants indicated:

These children have challenges with parenting their siblings because they are also young but since they live without parents, they must take care of one another even though they are young and underage. They must look after their younger siblings.
(PH1-P10)

Most of these children are in situations whereby there is no one who is taking care of them. Not having an adult caregiver, having to provide care to their siblings are some of the challenges they are exposed to. (PH2-P2)

Both groups of participants in this study reflected that children living in child-headed households were finding it challenging to assume adult responsibilities and that this role assumption was usually forced on the eldest child who would end up being responsible for the caring of their siblings. Parenting these children in the absence of adult caregivers was highlighted as a specific challenge for the heads of these households.

The finding that children who lived in child-headed households assumed adult responsibilities because no one was taking care of them, and that the heads of the households were burdened with parenting responsibilities, is confirmed in literature (Yang, 2016) which indicates that children living in child-headed households, especially the heads were forced into adulthood and were assigned roles and responsibilities normally executed by adults resulting in them losing out on their childhood because they had to spend their time managing their households and worrying about their siblings' wellbeing, instead of being children. The finding also indicates that children living in child-headed households, especially the heads of these households were often not fit to be responsible parents as they would find it difficult to cope with some problems, such as managing their households, parenting their siblings, and finding funds for food.

6.3.2.1.3 Category 1.1.3: Experience depression

The third category that was identified in this subtheme about the circumstances of child-headed households, was that children were experiencing depression. Both groups of participants indicated that children living in child-headed households experienced depression due to the traumatic situations they were exposed to, such as losing their parents, living without adult caregivers, and being neglected. Participants explained that children from child-headed households lived in a depressive environment because of their overwhelming

circumstances such as not being cared for and supported in the absence of their parents. Participants provided the following narratives:

Some of the circumstances that I have been exposed to with these children is that some of them have depression. They are neglected and struggle to communicate. (PH1-P9)

These children are exposed to depression because of the challenges they are facing in their households. They have traumatic experiences, and they are worsened when they are not supported and cared for. (PH1-P8)

One participant of the second phase specifically mentioned that the situation of a child under the age of 18 years that was taking care of three siblings should not be considered normal and that the children were aware that this was an abnormal situation. Being aware of this situation, could be one of the contributing causes of their depression. This participant mentioned:

A 16-year-old having to take care of three siblings, how is that possible, what about their growth and development as children, these traumatic situations affect the mental and emotional wellbeing of these children. Their circumstances cannot be considered normal and that depresses them. (PH2-P4)

The finding that children who were living in child-headed households experienced depression because of traumatic experiences such as being neglected and being taken care of by a sibling who was under the age of 18, is in line with literature. Several authors indicate that children living in child-headed households were vulnerable to developing depression and other psychological issues such as anxiety. This was attributed to them being stressed and because they were living in a socially depressive environment due to the death of, or labour migration or general neglect from their caregivers or parents (Boshoff & Strydom, 2017).

6.3.2.1.4 Category 1.1.4: Experience frustration and anger

The fourth category that was identified in this subtheme about the circumstances of child-headed households, was that children living in child-headed households displayed frustration and anger. Most participants from both study groups indicated that these children tended to be frustrated and angry because of the absence of their parents which would cause them to, for example, engage in fights at school. The narratives are:

These children have anger challenges and frustration based on their circumstances, you can tell with how they carry themselves and how they articulate their challenges.

She got angry (referring to a girl in the caseload) and mentioned that she does not want to share her parents' information and does not want to see her parents. (PH1-P7)

What you also find is that these children have anger issues. I have a child who still goes to school but is always fighting at school because he is angry over what happened in his life. He is a boy. He is in secondary school now, but he was left alone in his house. (PH1-P11)

One participant from the second phase also mentioned that the children were mocked at school and that they experienced being alone. The participant said:

They experience challenges because they do not have adult caregivers. They do not have proper clothes and are made fun of at school and that makes them angry. Imagine being a child and going through what they go through, how you live and behave changes because you feel like everyone is against you. (PH2-P5)

From the above narratives it is clear that children living in child-headed households are frustrated and angry with their circumstances and that they vent their frustration and anger by misbehaving and fighting with others. This finding that children living in child-headed households had anger issues, is supported in literature (Makuyana et al., 2020) which indicates that children of child-headed households were growing up without parents or adults in their families and that certain cultural teachings were thus not instilled in them. In addition, they did not have a sense of security which caused them to become frustrated and angry with their situation. Thwala et al. (2021) state that the loss of parents was frustrating for child-headed households because their emotional needs were often not satisfied, causing them to become emotionally scarred and marginalised. This could then result in such children resorting to delinquency and criminal behaviour. Thus, the anger and frustration of child-headed households must be understood in the context of their circumstances and mitigated to avoid these children resorting to illegal activities which could further jeopardise their lives.

6.3.2.2 Subtheme 1.2: Needs of child-headed households

The second subtheme under theme 1 identified the needs of child-headed households. Two categories emerged from this subtheme, namely that children living in child-headed households need emotional support in a nurturing household as well as counselling services.

6.3.2.2.1 Category 1.2.1: Emotional support and a nurturing household

The first category identified in this subtheme was that children living in child-headed households needed emotional support and a nurturing household because their emotional

needs were overlooked in the absence of adult caregivers. The following narratives were provided from both participant groups:

They are just left on their own and for that they need emotional support. The emotional needs of these children are neglected, and they need someone who can focus on their emotional care in their household to ensure that they are able to share their feelings. (PH1-P6)

They need emotional support from adult caregivers, someone who can respond to their variety of needs, an elderly person who can listen to them, allow them to share their thoughts and feelings and respond to their emotional needs. (PH2-P2)

Participants stated that children living in child-headed households needed emotional support for different reasons, such as living alone, going through life without adult caregivers and the need for someone who could listen to them and who showed them that they were loved. The participants said:

They need emotional support because first they stay alone, they don't have a parent in their household or an adult who cares for them and respond to their emotional needs. (PH1-P16).

They need someone in their household who can respond to their emotional needs, someone who can be there for them and provide emotional support that a parent can provide. They are all alone and need emotional support. (PH2-P4)

The finding that children living in child-headed households had a need for emotional support in a nurturing household because they were living without parental caregivers and that their emotional needs were overlooked, is confirmed in literature. Roelen et al. (2017) indicate that children from child-headed households needed to grow and develop in an environment where they were provided with emotional care, protection, and attention. The advantages of having parents were identified in literature (Mogotlane et al., 2010) which indicates that younger children had specific needs for love and affection or warmth and that children who received affection, stimulation, and support in early childhood, had a good foundation for growth and development and were able to cope with and could overcome challenges and disadvantages, thus making positive contributions to society. In line with the findings of the study, literature (Louw & Louw, 2014) indicates that children needed unconditional love, stability, and warmth which parents and caregivers were responsible to provide. Thus, the emotional support of children from child-headed households must be prioritised to ensure their optimal growth and development.

6.3.2.2.2 Category 1.2.2: Counselling services

The second category that was identified under the subtheme, needs of child-headed households on the micro-level, was counselling services. Both groups of participants indicated that children from child-headed households were exposed to traumatic situations such as sexual abuse which affected their emotional wellbeing. This resulted in them needing counselling services. The participants indicated:

Observing their emotional wellbeing, you can tell that they need psychosocial support such as counselling services because of the challenges and traumatic situations they are exposed to such as sexual abuse. (PH2-P2)

Participants indicated that children living in child-headed households needed counselling services for different reasons such as speaking to someone about their unresolved issues caused by their challenges. The participants said:

They also need social work services and support such as counselling services because most of them have unresolved issues caused by their challenges such losing their parents. (PH2-P3)

I would say they need counselling services because of their challenging situation. They need someone they can speak to about their experiences. (PH1-P4)

One of the participants from the social workers participant group added that although the children needed counselling services, they tended to overlook counselling services as a need because they were focused on their material needs. The participant mentioned:

They do need professionals whom they can speak to who can provide counselling services but under their circumstances, they do not prioritise counselling services because to them they need food and income to survive. (PH1-P10)

This participant also mentioned that it might be difficult to motivate children of child-headed households to utilise counselling services, because they had to survive and therefore, they needed to find ways to generate income. The narrative is:

I understand because they are in survival mode. To them no one is going to save them, so they must figure out ways to survive. They will not even listen to you because for them they would rather go find a piece jobs (part-time jobs) around the village, at least that will give them some money to buy some bread. (PH1-P10)

From the above it is clear that children living in child-headed households were going through life alone without adult caregivers, that they had no one who responded to their care and protection, that they needed someone they could talk to, and that they were exposed to traumatising situations such as sexual abuse. These were all contributing factors to them requiring counselling services. The finding that children who were living in child-headed households needed counselling services as a result of them facing multiple challenges such as going through life without adult caregivers, is new, as existing literature (Agere & Agere, 2020) only indicates that children living in child-headed households were exposed to traumatic events which left them lonely and distressed because they were deprived of mental and emotional security from their caregivers. Thus, existing literature did not state the children's need for counselling services. This may indicate that delivering counselling services are overlooked for children living in child-headed households because such children might not be seen as a priority. This is significant considering the narrative that some of the children in child-headed households prioritised their needs for food and income as they could only think about their survival instead of asking for counselling services. Thus, counselling services for child-headed households should also be seen as a major need and should be prioritised because literature (Tonsing & Tonsing, 2017) indicates that the effects of stressful life events such as loss of parents, are buffered by counselling and that counselling also creates an enabling environment and a sense of comfort, love, happiness, and hope, which environment is crucial in the lives of children.

6.3.3 Theme 2: Social services to child-headed households on the micro-level

Theme 2 pertains to social services delivered to child-headed households. Since the micro-level focuses on the immediate environment of individuals, social services on this level are delivered directly to the individual, client, or family. The role players such as social workers, engage with individuals or families to solve problems and include approaches such as counselling and therapy. Participants from the three phases of the study were asked to explain the type of services they were rendering to children living in child-headed households on the micro-level. They were also asked how they addressed the children's circumstances and needs, as well as the procedures that were followed when a child-headed household was reported to the organisation. Two subthemes emerged from this theme, namely, social services delivered to child-headed households and social services that should be delivered to child-headed households. These subthemes and their respective categories are discussed below.

6.3.3.1 Subtheme 2.1: Social services delivered to child-headed households

The first subtheme that came to the fore was social services that were delivered to child-headed households. Four categories emerged from this subtheme, namely, home visits, assess circumstances to determine the need for care and protection, individual counselling services, and placement into kinship and non-kinship foster care. The first two categories are about the procedures that the organisation had to follow when they received a report of children living in a child-headed households, as it is indicated in legislation that a report must be followed up to determine whether the children are in need of care and protection according to section 150(1) of the Children's Act. The last two categories focused on the general services that were delivered to these households.

6.3.3.1.1 Category 2.1.1: Home visits

The first category that came to the fore was home visits. Both groups of participants mentioned that when cases of child-headed households were reported to them, they conducted home visits to investigate the circumstances of these children, as became evident from the narratives below:

We will do a home visit and fully examine what is occurring in the household (PH1-P3)

If there is a child who lives alone, first thing we do is home visits to investigate (PH1-P6)

Furthermore, participants indicated that they conducted home visits to obtain information about the living conditions of the children of child-headed households, such as determining who the children were living with, if they were cared for and protected and if they had any needs. The participants said:

I will have to do a home visit to investigate the family, the circumstances, and whether these children need care and protection, whether they are safe or not, whether there is risk in the future or not. (PH1-P7)

We do home visits to establish who these children live with, whether they have other families that can care for them because every child belongs in a family, and it is important for them to be cared for. (PH2-P2)

The finding that home visits were conducted to determine the circumstances of these children and to investigate who the children were living with, if they were cared for and protected, and if they had any needs, is confirmed by Mulaudzi and Rankakane (2018) who indicate that home visits were significant in order to investigate the circumstances and needs of child-

headed households so that proper social services could be delivered to this vulnerable group. The advantages of conducting home visits are identified in literature (Mturi, 2012) which indicates that home visits can help social workers increase family involvement, improve communication and coordination, and reach children from diverse family backgrounds. Thus, considering the myriad of psychosocial and economic challenges that child-headed households are exposed to, it is important for social workers to conduct home visits to investigate the circumstances and needs of child-headed households in order to ultimately render services according to section 150(1) to (3) of the Children's Act and section 28(1)(c) of the Constitution which makes provision for social service delivery to these households.

6.3.3.1.2 Category 2.1.2: Assess circumstances to determine the need for care and protection

The second category that was identified in this subtheme about social work services to support child-headed households on the micro-level, was that of assessing circumstances to determine the need for care and protection. Both groups of participants indicated that they assessed the circumstances of child-headed households to identify the need of the children to care and protection when a child-headed household was reported to the organisation, as well as to determine which social services had to be rendered to them. Participants indicated:

I must go there and assess, speak to them, look at the house that they are living in, the conditions that they are exposed to, also assess the close family that they are having and then you take that information and determine if they need care and protection. (PH1-P8)

We do assessments to identify the needs of the children as well as their circumstances and through our assessments we determine how best we can help the children. (PH1-P7)

They also indicated that an important part of their investigation was to determine who the extended family members were in order to formulate a proper intervention plan. These participants indicated:

...We assess their circumstances to see who their extended relatives are to formulate a proper intervention and ensure that the needs of these children are satisfied. (PH2-P3)

When a case is reported to us, the first thing we do is intensively examine the case, assessing the functioning of the children, whether they have other families that can

care for them because every child belongs in a family, and it is important for them to be cared for. (PH2-P2)

The finding that assessments of circumstances were conducted to identify the needs of the children to care and protection, and to determine the social services that should be rendered to them as well as to determine who the extended family members were to formulate a proper intervention plan, is in line with literature (Thwala et al., 2021) which indicates that assessments enabled social workers to recognise the needs and circumstances of child-headed households to ultimately render services to support them. Furthermore, in line with the finding of the study, literature (Hope & Van Wyk, 2018) states that the circumstances and needs of child-headed households must be assessed before services could be rendered to them. This is also prescribed by section 150(2) of the Children's Act (RSA, 2005) which obligates social workers to investigate child-headed households to establish if the children in those households needed care and protection and, if found necessary, social workers had to provide them with appropriate support and services such as counselling services (RSA, 2005). Thus, to implement the Children's Act, social workers' first point of departure would be to clearly assess the circumstances of child-headed households and provide them with necessary social services.

6.3.3.1.3 Category 2.1.3 Individual counselling services

The third category that came to the fore was individual counselling services. Both groups of participants indicated that they rendered counselling services after assessment to help with the emotional difficulties these children were exposed to as a result of their traumatising situations, such as sexual abuse, losing a parent, and living alone. The participants said:

We provide counselling services for these children considering some of the challenges they are exposed to, especially the issue of sexual assault. (PH1-P2)

We render counselling services because we recognise the difficult challenges these children are exposed to, such as losing their parents, living alone, and having to assume adult responsibilities. (PH1-P6)

Participants also indicated that they rendered counselling services for different reasons, such as giving the children a platform to enable them to discuss their challenges, giving the children the opportunity to understand their thoughts and feelings, and also giving them the opportunity to address some of their challenges, including being bullied. The participants indicated:

We prioritise their emotional wellbeing and through our social workers, counselling services are provided to enable them to discuss their challenges and ultimately resolve their emotional difficulties. (PH2-P3)

Counselling is provided because we recognise that they have challenges with bullying, so we give them a safe space to discuss those challenges and attempt to resolve them. (PH1-P7)

It seems that counselling services are significant in addressing the emotional challenges of children in child-headed households and further assisting them to deal with their traumatic situations, such as the death of parents and having to go through life without adult caregivers and the experience of sexual abuse in certain cases. The finding that counselling services were provided to child-headed households links with the requirement of section 150(3) of the Children's Act which states that counselling services should be provided to child-headed households. This finding is further in line with literature (Sincero, 2012) which states that counselling services should be rendered to provide emotional support to enhance the children's self-esteem by listening to their fears and frustrations in order to reduce their negative emotions about their unfortunate situation and enable them to deal with emotional reactions that emanate from the loss of a loved one. The advantages of delivering individual counselling services are that these services address trauma related to living without caregivers.

6.3.3.1.4 Category 2.1.4: Placement into kinship and non-kinship foster care

The fourth category that came to the fore was placement into kinship and non-kinship foster care. Participants from all three phases of the study confirmed that they had placed children living in child-headed households into kinship and non-kinship foster care after they found that the children were without adult caregivers and were in need of care and protection. The participants clarified that they had reasons to consider kinship and non-kinship foster care, such as that it was difficult to identify a suitable adult caregiver who could live with those households and that kinship and non-kinship foster care were the best options for the children because, under that kind of care, their needs would be responded to. It was clear that kinship and non-kinship foster care placements were utilised. The participants mentioned that non-kinship foster care was utilised in some cases. The participant from phase three mentioned:

You also find that social workers have foster parents that are willing to assist even if they are not related to the children then the children are placed in foster care. (PH3-P1)

This participant also mentioned that social workers were able to recruit non-kinship foster parents who were willing to take care of the children. This participant said:

I always recommend foster care whereby I know that the children will be taken care of by an adult because there are people who are interested in fostering children even if they are not related to the children, but they are rare. (PH2-P3)

Some participants mentioned that the children were placed in kinship foster care with extended family members which is in line with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1990), which places a strong emphasis on keeping children within the family set-up if they had to be removed. These participants mentioned:

The first step in our intervention is to identify the extended family who are available to take care of the kids or foster care, we consider those things, we place these children in foster care with one of the family members if they agree. We ask if there is anyone who can take full parental responsibilities for the children and if they agree and meet the requirements, we place the children with them. (PH1-P5)

Some of them are taken care of by extended family members who foster them after we have established that they need care and protection. (PH1-P10)

After we have done our investigation and are sure that these children need care and protection, the courts will be involved and through a court order we place them in foster care. That is also based on whether we found a suitable person. *Most of the successful foster placements are with extended family members.* (PH2-P1)

The finding that children living in child-headed households were placed into kinship and non-kinship foster care after they were found to be without adult caregivers and in need of care and protection, is in line with section 7 of the Children's Act and section 28 of the South African Constitution which both state that children who were not living with their parents or caregivers and who were thus without parental care, should be provided with alternative family care if it was found that they were in need of care and protection and to serve the best interests of the children (RSA, 2005; 1996). This finding is also confirmed in literature, with Songca (2011) who indicated that alternative care was significant for service beneficiaries whose quality of life or social functioning had already been compromised. Thus, placement into alternative care must be recognised as a viable option to implement the above-mentioned policies when considering the circumstances and needs of child-headed households, especially as most of these children are not removed from their households and are not provided with adult caregivers.

It is significant that the services identified on the micro-level related to home visits, assessments to determine if the children were in need of care and protection, rendering of individual counselling services as per section 150(3) of the Children's Act, and removing and placing children in kinship and non-kinship care if it was found that they were in need of care and protection. However, according to the Children's Act, if it was found that the children were not in need of care and protection they may stay in child-headed households as long as certain services were still delivered to their households, such as counselling, mediation, prevention and early intervention services, family reconstruction, rehabilitation, behaviour modification, problem-solving and referral to other suitably qualified persons or organisations.

What have been established is that of all the different services listed in section 150(3) of the Children's Act, the participants only mentioned the rendering of counselling services on the micro-level. This indicates that there is a huge gap between social services delivered on the micro-level by social workers and services that should be delivered to children of child-headed households in terms of section 150(3) of the Children's Act. This can be linked to the point that the services enshrined in the Children's Act were established from the point of view that child-headed households **may** be in need of care and protection and were not automatically regarded as children in need of care and protection according to section 150(1) of the Children's Act, even though such children were practically children in need of care and protection. This could also explain why services such as being removed and placed into kinship and non-kinship care if they were found to be in need of care and protection were delivered to them on the micro-level.

It is thus imperative that the Children's Act should be interpreted to consider children in child-headed households to be children in need of care and protection according to section 150(1) of the Children's Act and that appropriate services for such children should be established for them to uphold their rights to care and protection. If these children were left in child-headed households and were not considered children in need of care and protection according to section 150(1) of the Children's Act, then the stipulation that they should be provided with an adult caregiver who could provide care for them within their household, must be implemented to adhere to legislation.

6.3.3.2 Subtheme 2.2: Social services that should be delivered to child-headed households

The second subtheme that emerged under theme 2, was social services that should be rendered to child-headed households. One category was identified in this subtheme namely, family counselling services.

6.3.3.2.1 Category 2.2.1 Family counselling services

Family counselling services emerged as the first and only category in the subtheme about social services that should be rendered to child-headed households. Both groups of participants indicated that family counselling services should be delivered to build the capacity of these children, to nurture their relationships within their family, and to ensure that they addressed the challenges they were exposed to, such as the loss of their parents and dropping out of school. The participants also referred to the challenges that they were experiencing in delivering services, such as lacking resources in terms of available social workers and vehicles, making it difficult for family counselling services to be delivered to the children of child-headed households. Participants mentioned:

We should provide family counselling services and social workers should be present in high numbers to assist because these services are important in addressing issues within families from becoming a crisis whereby you have children wandering the streets without care and support. (PH1-P2)

Even if you look at family counselling or family support services. We would like to deliver most of those services, but we are unable because to a certain extent we are short staffed, we have a lot of cases, and we cannot get to everyone, I mean clients, as effectively as we would like to. (PH1-P14)

Some of the participants mentioned that they would have liked to provide family counselling services on a long-term basis, but that they were affected by high caseloads and a lack of resources such as vehicles. The participants mentioned:

They need family counselling services to be provided on a long-term basis, not just one or two sessions and for that to happen resources are required because you are unable to provide long-term services and constant monitoring with lack of resources and multiple cases. (PH2-P1)

They have questions such as 'why my parents died' and family counselling services will play a huge role in assisting in their grieving process and also attempting to respond to their difficult questions for them to find closure. These services require resources because you need to be consistent but the resources such as vehicles are not there to successfully render them. It is subjective to where you are, in other provinces they don't worry about resources but here we struggle. (PH1-P13)

It was thus found that family counselling services should be delivered to these children to ensure that the children could address the challenges they were exposed to, such as the loss

of their parents and dropping out of school. It was also found that social workers were experiencing challenges, such as a lack of available social workers, high caseloads and a lack of vehicles which made it difficult for family counselling services to be delivered to the children of child-headed households. The advantages of delivering family counselling services have been highlighted in literature which indicates that family counselling considers the needs of every member of the family and that it was key in the relationships of members' lives as it enabled family members to talk about difficult or stressful issues (Pistor, 2019). Family counselling also played a significant role in family reconstruction through enabling family members to understand each other's experiences, perspectives and appreciate each other's needs (Chandrasekara, 2019). The fact that family counselling services are regarded as services that should be rendered to these households also highlights that there is a lack of such services for child-headed households. This lack of service delivery can be linked to South African literature, such as Pistor (2019), who indicated that family counselling services were not provided to children and families as social workers were more focused on having to deliver crisis intervention due to their high caseloads. Thus, family counselling services should be rendered to child-headed households to support these children and give them the opportunity to communicate openly with one another, to learn, to grow and to change in order to improve the wellbeing of the family so that they can function optimally. However, challenges such as high caseloads, a lack of staff in terms of employed social workers and a lack of vehicles to access vulnerable children and families, affect the delivery of this service.

6.3.4 Nature of child-headed households and social services on the meso-level

As discussed in Chapter 4, the meso-level is a set of microsystems intertwined with one another that provides the connection between the structures of the individual's microsystem. The meso-level also stipulates the availability of supporting interrelations between the systems and contributes to positive behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Neal & Neal, 2013). Furthermore, the meso-level consists of support systems, such as family members, friends, school, and social networks and focuses on how these different systems interact with one another (DuBois & Miley 2014). In the previous chapters, it was established that children living in child-headed households were forced into adulthood and as a result had to assume adult responsibilities and engage in multiple activities that were detrimental to their growth and development, such as consuming alcohol and illegal substances. Thus, it was important to explore the circumstances of child-headed households within the community, their multiple needs and the social services that were delivered to them.

6.3.5 Theme 3: Nature of child-headed households on the meso-level

Theme 3 pertained to the nature of child-headed households on the meso-level. Three subthemes came to the fore, namely that children of child-headed households were isolated within the community, that they experienced challenges to manage their households, and that they needed adult caregivers or parental care.

6.3.5.1 Subtheme 3.1: Isolated within the community

The first subtheme that emerged under theme 3 was that child-headed households were isolated within the community. Two categories were identified under this subtheme namely, receiving minimal support from extended family and community members and becoming engaged in underage drinking and smoking. These categories are discussed below.

6.3.5.1.1 Category 3.1.1: Minimal support from extended family and community members.

The first category identified in this subtheme was that children living in child-headed households had minimal support from extended family and community members. Both groups of participants indicated that minimal support from extended family and community members, such as having someone attending school meetings on behalf of children of child-headed households, left the child-headed households socially burdened and without any support. The children were left to fend for themselves and were without support and guidance. The participants indicated:

The father left them, then the mother also left them, they ended up staying with their aunt but then the aunt also left them because I think they were a burden to her. In their case no one was signing letters for them at school, and no one was attending their school meetings, they had no support and guidance. (PH1-P7)

These children are struggling because without parents, their extended families are also not supporting them, and they are all alone without assistance. This pushes them to fend for themselves while they are young. (PH2-P4)

The finding that children living in child-headed households had minimal support from extended family and community members resulting in them being left alone to fend for themselves and becoming socially burdened without any support, such as an adult to attend school meetings and sign school forms, is partially supported by literature. Alpaslan and Nziyane (2011) mention that children living in child-headed households did not have a stable family environment and as a result these children's relationships with other people within society, be it their parents, guardians, or family members, were affected. Furthermore, Dutton et al. (2016) caution that limited support for these children may leave them distressed and may typically

interrupt their daily functioning and may cause children to lose confidence in their future. Thus, it can be deduced that child-headed households do not benefit from the support of extended family and community members, and that they continued to live without adult caregivers in their households causing their right to parental care to be infringed upon (RSA, 1996).

6.3.5.1.2 Category 3.1.2: Engagement in underage drinking and smoking

The second category that emerged from this subtheme was underage drinking and smoking. Both groups of participants indicated that children from child-headed households engaged in activities such as smoking and drinking because of a lack of guidance and supervision from caregivers. Participants said:

Some of these children are left on their own without supervision so they do what they want to do without any repercussions, they will smoke, drink, and attend parties at free will because they are not guided in a stable home. (PH2-P3)

You know life is not easy for these children especially in this area because most children abuse alcohol, the parents are not responsible, we have a huge issue with drugs. Underage drinking is worse here. (PH1-P4)

The finding that children living in child-headed households would engage in drinking and smoking in the absence of their parents or adult caregivers is confirmed in literature from China (Zhao, 2013) which states that children from child-headed households tended to be problematic and showed deviant behaviour such as indulging in alcohol, because they were not cared for by an adult caregiver who could provide guidance and discipline but rather by a child without proper parenting skills. This finding is consistent with South African studies that indicated that children from child-headed households were engaging in alcohol and drug abuse (Bhengu, 2021). Thus, if these children continued to live without proper supervision and guidance, their consumption of alcohol and smoking could become worse, thus jeopardising their young lives and health. In this case it is possible to utilise section 150(1)(a) to (d) of the Children's Act which stipulates that children are in need of care and protection if they have been abandoned or orphaned without any visible means of support, or if they were displaying behaviour which could not be controlled and/or because they were addicted to a dependence-producing substance without any support to obtain treatment for such dependency. However, it seems as if this option was not utilised in this study group.

6.3.5.2 Subtheme 3.2: Challenges to manage household

The second subtheme that emerged from this theme referred to challenges experienced in managing child-headed households. The participants of the first two phases indicated that

children in child-headed households were experiencing challenges in managing their households because they were children themselves and because they were not receiving any assistance. Participants shared the following views:

The circumstances are challenging because these children are neglected. They have no one who is looking after them and managing their household is difficult for them because they are just kids. (PH1-P9)

These children are not cared for, have challenges, and are not assisted with their challenges. (PH1-P11)

This participant also mentioned that the phenomenon of children living alone has been normalised in South Africa. This participant said:

The problem is we have normalised children living alone. (PH1-P11)

Other participants specifically mentioned that it was difficult for the eldest child to manage the household, because they were normally taking care of their siblings. These participants said:

They are left alone without a caregiver and the eldest child must take the responsibility for their siblings such as managing their household, ensuring that they are fed, and these roles are difficult. (PH1-P13)

It is challenging for these children to head their households, think of a 16-year-old having to care for children around the ages of 9 and 8, that is a tough job... (PH2-P4)

This participant also felt that it is not something that should be expected of a child and mentioned:

... and it is not something we can expect these children to do. (PH2-P4)

The finding that children from child-headed households found it challenging to manage their households because they were alone as children, they were not assisted to cope with their challenges, and they were normally taking care of their siblings, is confirmed in South African literature of Nziyane and Alpaslan (2012) and Diago (2020) who indicate that in child-headed households the expectation was that the head of that household who was a child under the age of 18, should perform the roles of an adult caregiver which were burdensome, difficult, challenging, stressful, and frustrating. In line with this finding, Phillips (2011) and Lwandiso (2020) state that the development of children in child-headed households was affected

because they did not have a stable family environment that could serve as a safety net or protective measure.

Thus, because these children were not being assisted in dealing with the challenges of managing their households and were not provided with parental or alternative care in looking after their siblings, it can be concluded that their best interests were not regarded as a primary consideration in any of the actions concerning them, because they were not being protected or provided with the necessary care as required by the UNCRC (1989). It was furthermore found that some participants felt that child-headed households should not be regarded as a “normal” family form and that it should not be expected of children to take care of other children. Although all the participants mentioned that children from child-headed households had to deal with challenges in managing their households, the specific outcome was explored. The analysis of the data resulted in the identification of one category, namely drop out of school, which category is discussed in the following section.

6.3.5.2.1 *Category 3.2.1: Drop out of school*

The category that was identified was that children from child-headed households would more often drop out of school. Both groups of participants indicated that children from child-headed households, especially heads of households, dropped out of school because they had to take care of their siblings and had to assume adult responsibilities in their households. The participants said:

Some of them dropped out of school because the responsibilities they are exposed to such as caring for their siblings hinder them to continue with school or do well in school, they start by not attending regularly and then eventually they drop out. (PH2-P1)

They are forced to drop out of school because they are taking care of their siblings. (PH1-P13)

Participants indicated that there were also other reasons why children from child-headed households dropped out of school, such as girls becoming pregnant and boys engaging in illegal activities. The participants said:

The young girls who come to us normally drop out of school because they fall pregnant, some of the boys in these households drop out and some of them end up partaking in illegal activities. (PH1-P4)

Peer pressure is a huge challenge for them because in most cases they drop out of school and engage in illegal activities such as stealing. (PH1-P8)

Both groups of participants further indicated that some children in child-headed households attended school, especially the younger siblings, even though they experienced challenges with certain school resources such as clothes. These participants said:

Some of the children do go to school even though their schools are far and have lack of school resources such as clothes. (PH1-P14)

The younger siblings are attending school but are also exposed to challenges such as lack of school clothing, shoes. (PH2-P2)

It seems that some of the children dropped out of school, especially the heads of these households, because they had to assume adult responsibilities, however their siblings tended to stay in school and continued with their education despite having limited school resources such as school uniforms. It also seems that some of these children from child-headed households dropped out of school because they would become pregnant due to a lack of supervision, or they would engage in illegal activities to add to their livelihoods. This finding is confirmed in literature of Collins et al. (2016) who indicate that activities and demands of homes forced children living in child-headed households, especially heads of these households, to drop out of school to take care of their younger siblings who would then be able to continue with their education. In line with this finding, Pillay (2016) and Diago (2020) indicate that the environment where children from child-headed households lived in did not foster academic performance and so diminished their chances of performing at school. This finding is also in line with literature (Maila & Mabasa, 2023; Mawere, 2012) which indicates that females in child-headed households were susceptible to early pregnancy and that some of the children in child-headed households could resort to criminal activities in order to maintain themselves and their siblings.

Thus, section 28 of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) which points out that every child has the right to basic education and to be protected from maltreatment, neglect or degradation, have not been fulfilled for these children and their circumstances, because the circumstances of children of child-headed households caused them to only have limited educational resources and forced them to drop out of school to take care of their siblings, to become susceptible to early pregnancy and to engage in illegal activities.

6.3.5.3 Subtheme 3.3: Children need an adult caregiver or parental care

Children need an adult caregiver or parental care has been identified as the third subtheme under theme 3 on the nature of child-headed households on the meso-level. Two categories

emerged from this subtheme namely, lack of response to their needs and assistance from family and community members.

6.3.5.3.1 Category 3.3.1: Lack of response to their needs

The first category identified from this subtheme was that there was a lack of response to the needs of these children. Both groups of participants indicated that there was a lack of response to these children's needs, and that they needed somebody to fulfil the parenting role. Participants said:

They are left on their own and they need someone who can respond to their needs. They need someone who can be a parent to them. (PH1-P2)

Nobody responds to their needs because the mother will be gone with the boyfriend, and they will leave the children without care. (PH1-P14)

Some participants mentioned that the head of the household had to respond to the needs of younger siblings without any assistance and that the needs of the children were thus not being satisfied. They said:

These children experience life on their own with their siblings and in these households, you hardly find one child, you will have one eldest child responsible for three to four siblings and without any assistance to respond to their needs. (PH2-P1)

You can tell that these children's needs are unsatisfied because they have no one who cares for them. (PH2-P3)

The finding that there was lack of response to the needs of children from child-headed households and that they needed someone to fulfil a parenting role because the head of the household had to respond to the needs of younger siblings without any assistance, thus leaving the needs of the children unsatisfied, is confirmed in literature. Muyomi (2012) and Diago (2020) state that due to there not being adult caregivers, the needs of children from child-headed households were not satisfied and that the heads of these households, who would usually be the eldest child, would assume adult responsibilities that were characterised by providing care and support to their siblings, but that these heads would often have to juggle between fulfilling their household responsibilities, partaking in childhood activities, and satisfying school obligations, thus they would leave their siblings with unsatisfied needs. Studies have shown that appointing an adult caregiver or supervisor in child-headed households could prevent the perpetuation of these children's challenges, such as having to take on adult roles (Kipp et al., 2010). However, due to a lack of response to their needs and

as these children in child-headed households continued to live without appointed adult caregivers as required in terms of section 137(2)(a) to (b) of the Children's Amendment Act and as they are not deemed to resemble children in need of care and protection according to section 150(1) of the Children's Act, there is a real possibility that the stipulations of both these acts, namely to protect and support child-headed households, are not adhered to.

6.3.5.3.2 *Category 3.3.2: Assistance from family and community members*

The second category that came to the fore was assistance from family and community members. Most participants in both groups indicated that children living in child-headed households needed assistance from family and community members to help them in their difficult circumstances. These participants indicated the following:

I think they need sustainable family and community support because some of them are not assisted by their extended family members and even community members. (PH1-P1)

Collective support from families and members of the community is necessary to help these children, we must care. (PH2-P3)

Some participants mentioned that the community members and neighbours were often not willing to support them. They said:

They need guidance from family and community members because no one is there to guide them, even the neighbours, sometimes are not willing to support them. (PH1-P7)

The community is failing these children and they need the support of the community because they spend most of their time within the community. You find people in the community not willing to assist them and the same can be said about their extended families. (PH1-P12)

One participant mentioned that child-headed households should not be allowed. This participant said:

...you cannot have children having to take care of themselves. In which part of the world do you have children taking care of themselves. (PH2-P3)

The narratives seem to suggest that children living in child-headed households were not being supported by their communities or extended family members. Therefore, it was found that children living in child-headed households needed family and community support because

they were isolated and were finding it challenging to acquire assistance from their neighbours and extended family members. The significance of community and extended family support is recognised in literature (Ngconjana et al., 2017) which confirms that support from extended family members was important as it could provide child-headed households with basic items such as food and emotional support in their difficult circumstances. The authors also confirm that these children could be referred for further assistance at child welfare organisations and that family and community support could further diminish their vulnerability, isolation, guilt, and even suicidal ideation which tend to be the outcomes of the circumstances of child-headed households. However, in this study group it was clear that community support was not available.

6.3.6 Theme 4: Social services to child-headed households on the meso-level

Theme 4 pertained to the social services to support child-headed households on the meso-level. As discussed in the previous chapters, the meso-level falls between the micro- and macro-levels and describes how the different parts of a child's micro-level worked together for the sake of the child. The participants were asked about services that they rendered to support child-headed households on the meso-level of the ecological perspective in order to address their circumstances and needs. The responses from participants were analysed into subthemes and categories which are indicated in the next section.

6.3.6.1 Subtheme 4.1: Different group interventions are offered

The first subtheme of theme 4 that came to the fore was that different group interventions were offered to children living in child-headed households. The two categories that were derived from this subtheme are discussed in the following section.

6.3.6.1.1 Category 4.1.1: Educational groups

The first category that came to the fore was educational groups. Both groups of participants indicated that educational groups were established for the benefit of children living in child-headed households. These educational groups addressed various needs and aimed to increase the awareness of children from child-headed households about certain topics, such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, anger management, making decisions and solving problems. Participants mentioned:

Within group work we provide group programmes such as empowerment of teenagers, life skills groups focusing on substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, anger management, decision-making and problem-solving. (PH1-P3)

We also conduct different group projects to raise awareness about issues these children are exposed to such as drug abuse, because that is a huge challenge in these areas, especially amongst children living alone. (PH2-P1)

Another participant from the social workers group indicated that they were focusing on hygiene, developmental life stages, and puberty. This participant said:

In groups we do hygiene teaching for these children to educate them about hygiene, how to take care of yourself. We also do groups on the development of life stages like puberty both with boys and girls for them to know about puberty, what does it mean, we educate them and provide life skills programmes. (PH1-P5)

One of the participants from the supervisor participant group pointed out that educational groups could not be established for the benefit of child-headed households due to lack of human resources, such as social workers or social auxiliary workers. The participant indicated the following:

We do not have human resources to be conducting group projects. We need social auxiliary workers to help with that because our available social workers already have a huge workload. Group programmes will be successful if they were run by a social auxiliary worker who will focus on them. (PH2-P3)

The finding is that group work programmes were conducted with children living in child-headed households to educate and raise their awareness about various topics, such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, anger management, decision-making and problem-solving. The advantages of group work programmes were identified in literature, which indicates that group work programmes helped individuals who had similar problems or interests to work together, to enhance their social functioning and to cope more effectively with their personal problems (Ibebuike et al., 2014).

Although the findings indicate that educational groups were provided for children living in child-headed households, it seems that in some regions educational groups were not provided, due to a lack of human resources, such as social workers or social auxiliary workers. This finding that there was a lack of educational groups for child-headed households partially links with literature which indicates that the consistency of group work was affected by a lack of vehicles which ultimately affected the nature of social services being rendered to child-headed households (Maila & Mabasa, 2023).

Furthermore, the above-mentioned groups which were established for children in child-headed households were mainly focused on educating and raising the children's awareness about various topics such as substance abuse. Although, these groups are important, they were not sufficient to address the issues that children in child-headed households were exposed to such as assuming adult roles in the absence of their parents. That is why literature indicates that a variety of groups, including therapeutic and peer groups, must be established to render services to children of child-headed households because such groups could improve the family functioning of child-headed households and enable the children to recognise their roles and cope more effectively with normal life stressors and to address their feelings of discontentment and extend their available networks to offer social support (Theron & Malindi, 2012; Makuyana et al., 2020).

6.3.6.1.2 *Category 4.1.2: Neighbours informally assist to monitor and supervise the household*

The second category was that neighbours informally assisted to monitor and supervise children in child-headed households in the absence of their parents. Both groups of participants indicated that a few neighbours informally assisted in monitoring and supervising child-headed households because they were concerned about their wellbeing in the absence of their caregivers. These participants indicated the following:

Some of the neighbours are the ones who notify us about the children, they also help them with some basic items such as food sometimes, they generally have the support of the neighbour. (PH1-P1)

The children were staying on their own but under the supervision of the sister from the maternal aunt, they had someone around in the neighbourhood, but she was not living in the same house as them. (PH1-P5)

Other participants added that neighbours were only willing to temporarily help the children when they were able to do so because they considered having to permanently take care of the children to be demanding. The participants mentioned:

Interested neighbours would monitor these children and show care even though they do not stay with them. They do that because they are concerned but they are not interested in caring for the children permanently because they consider that to be challenging since they also have their own children. (PH1-P13).

Usually family or extended family does not want to get involved because they complain that the behaviours of these children cannot be controlled. (PH2-P2)

Some participants from the supervisor participant group confirmed this practice and stated that because children in child-headed households were living alone, neighbours would report them to their NPOs as these neighbours were concerned and would informally monitor the children of child-headed households. The participants added that this type of monitoring was, however, not consistent. The participants indicated the following:

Some of their neighbours monitor them and will inform us of any challenges, even though these neighbours are not legal guardians, they just help where they can. Sometimes their assistance is not consistent. (PH2-P5)

You have neighbours who are concerned about these children because their extended families are not taking care of them and report them to us because they are neglected by their legal guardians. They monitor them at times and help with some food. (PH2-P3)

The narratives seem to suggest that adult caregivers were not available to live with the children and to take care of them in their own households, but that some neighbours and community members did monitor and supervise the children informally and would inform social workers about issues in the absence of caregivers. This finding suggests that for this study, the requirement of section 137(2)(a) to (b) of the Children's Amendment Act which states that a child-headed household must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court, an organ of state, or a non-governmental organisation, was not fully realised and implemented. Furthermore, concerned neighbours might be temporarily assisting child-headed households but they were not obligated to satisfy the needs of these children because they were not appointed as their adult caregivers and should not be used as a substitute to an appointed adult caregiver, as this would still leave the children without consistent adult support and supervision. It consequently seems that the proper procedure to appoint adult caregivers is not being followed and that the children of child-headed households might be supervised and monitored by the odd neighbour or community member, but that they were still living alone and were still expected to execute parental responsibilities that are mostly overwhelming for children of their age which violated the rights of children to care and protection because appropriate procedures as prescribed in section 150(3) of the Children's Act and section 137(2)(a) to (b) of the Children's Amendment Act, were not abided by.

This finding is further confirmed by Diago (2020) who indicated that the procedures stipulated in legislation to care and protect child-headed households were not adhered to because, from the findings of this study, no adult caregiver who could live with children in child-headed households and ensure that they were cared for and protected, was designated by a children's

court or an organ of state or a non-governmental organisation determined by the provincial head of Social Development.

6.3.6.2 Subtheme 4.2: Social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the meso-level

Subtheme 4.2 pertained to social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the meso-level. Two categories namely, children needed a parental figure to take responsibility for the management of households and that increased community support was required, emerged from this subtheme, and are analysed below.

6.3.6.2.1 Category 4.2.1: Children need a parental figure to take responsibility for management of household

The first category which was identified was that children needed a parental figure to take responsibility for the management of their households. Most participants from both groups indicated that children living in child-headed households needed to be cared for by an adult who could assume parental roles, provide guidance to these children, and ensure that their needs were responded to. Participants shared the following narratives:

It is important to ensure that they are taken care of first by an adult. It is important for these children to be cared for by an adult caregiver who stays with them and can respond to their needs. (PH1-P1)

I think they need someone to look after them because some of them are just kids who need discipline and a stable home with an adult caregiver. They need someone who can be a parent to them in their own house, guide and take good care of them because at the end of the day they are just children who need care. (PH1-P2)

One of the participants from the social workers participant group acknowledged the challenge that most of the community members were not interested in being parental figures to these children. The participant also mentioned that safe houses were full and could not accommodate these children, thus they were left in their households without care and protection and subsequently without an adult caregiver. The participants mentioned:

All the children in child-headed households must be accommodated within their community, why is it that we have people in the community who do not want to care for these children, we are unable to help because we are struggling to find adult caregivers and safe houses are full resulting in these children left without adult caregivers in their households. (PH1-P7)

Participants from the social workers group confirmed that it was difficult to find individuals who were willing to be caregivers. They indicated that the lack of resources in terms of vehicles affected the investigation of potential caregivers for these children because some extended families lived in different and distant areas, where the social workers had to travel to in search of extended families who could provide care to the children of child-headed households. One participant mentioned:

We need to keep the family together, but it is challenging to find someone who can help these children. It takes time yes, even for the children to remember their relatives but this process is important, and we prioritise it, but this service requires resources because sometimes it will need you to drive to different areas, call a lot of people and without resources we are doomed. We cannot even get to the middle of that process. I can tell you it is difficult, one can say it's us who are not working, but we are under-resourced. (PH1-P13)

The finding is that children living in child-headed households had to be cared for by an adult who could assume parental roles, provide guidance to these children, and ensure that their needs were responded to, but due to structural constraints in their NPOs and communities, it was not possible to implement legislative requirements. The Children's Amendment Act (RSA, 2007) states that child-headed households must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court. Thus, to implement the Children's Amendment Act, it seems that sufficient resources as well as caring community members and extended families are required to ensure that child-headed households are provided with adult caregivers who can manage their households and respond to their needs.

The advantages of having an adult caregiver who could assume parental roles are noticed in literature which indicates that adult caregivers would normally assume responsibilities such as caring for the children, ensuring that their needs are met, being a decision-maker in important matters concerning the household as well as providing the necessary material support to the children (Phillips, 2011; Ngconjana et al., 2017). When looking at the results of this study group, the implementation of the legislative directives to ensure the care and protection of child-headed households seems not to be feasible in practice.

6.3.6.2.2 Category 4.2.2: Increase community support

The second category which was derived from subtheme 4.2 was that community support should be increased. Both groups of participants mentioned that different members of the community should support children in child-headed households to avoid situations where these children were vulnerable in their own communities since they had to live without adult

caregivers. The participants added that food items could be provided to these children as a form of support. Participants indicated the following:

Different families within the community should support these children when they realise that they are in need, especially with items like food instead of just ignoring them. Community support goes a long way because these children stay in the community.
(PH2-P2)

Community members as a whole should ensure that these children are not vulnerable while they stay in the same community, they must support these children, we cannot leave them alone, community members, everyone must be involved in the spirit of ubuntu. (PH1-P5)

The finding is that communities and community members should be involved to support children living in child-headed households in the spirit of togetherness within the community whereby no child is left behind or left to be vulnerable and without any support. However, in this study group this form of support was not available to the child-headed households. The advantages of community support are identified in literature which indicates that community support should buffer stressful life events because the community could be seen as a stable resource in the provision of permanent solutions and as it has structures such as churches, and, in some cases, political leaders that may assist children in child-headed households (Skobi & Makofane, 2017).

As was mentioned earlier, it seems that on the meso-level, the only available groups were educational groups, and that therapeutic and peer groups were not available nor were they seen as being able to provide significant support, despite their potential impact on the wellbeing and development of child-headed households. Furthermore, groups such as therapeutic and peer groups could give children of child-headed households the opportunity to relate to one another in a group setting and to communicate their experiences and also teach them skills that could aid them in gaining increased control over life challenges that might have been overwhelming or unmanageable (Boshoff & Strydom, 2017). Thus, therapeutic and peer groups must be recognised as significant services which should be delivered as they could significantly contribute to the development and optimal functioning of child-headed households.

6.3.7 Nature of child-headed households and social services on the macro-level

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Forenza and Eckert (2018) the macro-level, which is the broadest level of the ecological perspective, focuses on understanding people in the

context of their environment and addresses issues in meso or micro social work practice. For the purposes of this study, the macro-level consists of children's cultural patterns and values, specifically their dominant beliefs. As discussed in Chapter 4, children living in child-headed households needed food, income, educational support, and adequate shelter because of the circumstances they are exposed to, such as poverty, inadequate income, and poor school attendance. The identified circumstances and needs of children of child-headed households fall within the macro-level and are thus explored alongside the types of social work services that are rendered and that should be rendered on this level to address the specific circumstances and needs of such children. The themes, subthemes and categories on the macro-level are discussed in the following section.

6.3.8 Theme 5: Nature of child-headed households on the macro-level

Theme 5 pertains to the nature of child-headed households on the macro-level. Two subthemes, namely child-headed households are exposed to poverty and food deprivation, and children in child-headed households have material needs as well as the categories that emerged out of these subthemes, are discussed below.

6.3.8.1 Subtheme 5.1: Child-headed households are exposed to poverty and food deprivation

The first subtheme which emerged from theme 5 was that child-headed households were exposed to poverty and food deprivation. Most participants from both groups indicated that children living in child-headed households did not have support and experienced food deprivation. This led to children begging on the streets for food. Participants indicated the following:

They are exposed to poverty; they do not have support and struggle with food. (PH1-P2)

Remember these children have nothing, no food, they are exposed to poverty. (PH1-P7)

Participants mentioned that because the children had no food, they ended up begging on the streets for food and money and would thus spend most of their time on the streets. These participants indicated:

We find them in difficult circumstances whereby they do not have food, they tend to be on the streets, even if they do not live there but they spend most of their time on the streets begging for money and food. (PH1-P3)

...and sometimes because they are vulnerable, they end up begging on the streets.
(PH1-P7)

Participants from the supervisor participant group confirmed that children from child-headed households were exposed to poverty and lacked basic food items. One participant linked this outcome to the lack of adult caregivers. Participants indicated the following:

These children live in poverty and struggle with basic food items hence why sometimes you will find some of them begging other people for food. (PH2-P1)

They struggle to obtain food because they have no one who is responsible for satisfying their basic needs. (PH2-P3)

One participant from this group mentioned that some of the children got involved in petty crimes as a means to obtain money. This participant said:

... in most cases they are forced by their circumstance to find other ways to generate money and they even engage in petty crimes. (PH2-P2)

The finding that children living in child-headed households were exposed to poverty, and food deprivation and would often beg on the streets for food and money while some of them engaged in petty crimes as a means to obtain money, is confirmed in literature. Zhang (2016) indicates that poverty and food deprivation was worse in child-headed households because children left behind in child-headed households were prone to nutrition and health risks. Furthermore, literature confirms that children from child-headed households suffered the worst outcome of exposure to poverty because it was not unusual for these children to acquire insufficient food forcing them to beg for food from neighbouring households (Blaauw et al., 2011; Diago, 2020).

Although, most of the participants mentioned that children from child-headed households were exposed to poverty, the specific outcomes were explored as well as other circumstances. The analysis of this data resulted in the identification of four categories, namely, live without sufficient income, live in inadequate shelter, exposure to child labour and vulnerable to sexual abuse and prostitution. These categories are discussed next.

6.3.8.1.1 Category 5.1.1: Live without sufficient income

The first category identified from this subtheme was that children in child-headed households lived without sufficient income. Both groups of participants indicated that children had financial challenges because they did not benefit from any social security grant or other grants in terms

of the Social Assistance Act (13 of 2004) or other assistance that the household was entitled to. Participants indicated the following:

Challenges of these children include financial constraints because their parents left with their grant money (referring to the children's grant) leaving them without income.
(PH1-P1)

We normally hear about these children who are reported by their neighbours because of the challenges they have such as lack of finance. (PH2-P3).

It was also mentioned that the lack of money was a challenge because most of the children were not recipients of social grants or foster care grants because they had no adult caregivers to apply for social security on their behalf. The narratives are:

Lack of money is a challenge and most of these children do not have social grants or foster care grants since they don't have someone who can acquire the grant for them. This results in instances whereby you see them asking for money, asking for food and that really explains their circumstances. (PH1-P16)

Another reason for not being recipients of the children's grant or the foster grant is that their documentation (birth certificates) was not in order. A participant mentioned:

Income is a challenge for these children, especially considering that for most of them the process to acquire grants is normally extended because of lack of documents.
(PH2-P3)

One of the social worker participants added that some of the children who lived without sufficient income in child-headed households came from countries such as Zimbabwe and were forced to beg on the streets to acquire income. The participant said:

They do not have money; they are struggling because of this because they cannot afford to buy food. It is unfortunate that most of them are foreign nationals. You will find them on the side of the traffic lights begging for money to take care of their siblings.
(PH1-P9)

The finding that children who lived in child-headed households were living without income, specifically social grants for reasons such as a lack of required documentation and because adult caregivers or supervisors were not appointed to acquire social security grants or other grants in terms of the Social Assistance Act (RSA, 2004) on their behalf and in terms of to the Children's Amendment Act is confirmed in literature. South African authors, Blaauw et al.

(2011) and Pillay (2016) indicate that children from child-headed households had limited means of generating income and did not acquire social grants because it was impossible for children under 16, who had assumed the role of family caregivers, to collect the monthly grant on their own, which caused them to struggle to survive and to effectively sustain their households. Thus, for children from child-headed households to acquire a social grant that they are entitled to according to section 137(9) of the Children's Amendment Act, an adult caregiver must be appointed who could collect such a grant on behalf of these children. As mentioned previously, legislative requirements put in place to ensure the care and protection of child-headed households as a family form were not implemented, due to constraints in practice.

6.3.8.1.2 Category 5.1.2: Live in inadequate shelter

The second category identified in this subtheme was that children from child-headed households lived in inadequate shelters. Both groups of participants indicated that acquiring adequate housing was problematic for these children and as a result they ended up living in shacks or mud houses which were not favourable to their safety. Participants mentioned:

These children live in shacks; housing is a huge problem for them because of a long waiting list to obtain government houses. (PH1-P4)

...especially those who are in the in the rural areas have a huge housing challenge because some of these children still live-in mud houses which could easily fall at any time. Now with the winter rains it is terrible. (PH2-P1)

The finding that children from child-headed households lived in inadequate shelters which were mostly shacks or mud houses because it was challenging for them to acquire adequate housing, is in line with literature, which indicates that children from child-headed households lived in inadequate shelters because of a lack of proper available housing (Collins et al., 2016; Phillips, 2011). In South Africa the delivery of houses has dropped drastically across all provinces and the government has consistently failed to meet its own housing targets (Mpfungu-Walsh, 2017). Children living in child-headed households are affected the most by this challenge because they are vulnerable by virtue of being children on their own, thus when they are not provided with adequate housing, their vulnerability is extended.

6.3.8.1.3 Category 5.1.3: Exposure to child labour

The third category identified in this subtheme was that children from child-headed households were exposed to child labour. Both groups of participants indicated that children in child-headed households had very little and inconsistent income and because of these challenges,

they were forced to work from a young age to earn some money to buy basic food and other items. Examples of where they were able to find part-time employment are car washes, hardware shops and as farm workers. The narratives provided are as follows:

There are a lot of children in the village who do not go to school, they must work at car washes for example since they can't get formal jobs, they also help at Indian hardware shops to deliver building material as part of their jobs to earn some money. (PH1-P6)

Another thing is for children in farming community's child labour is common, I mean they work on the farms when they don't go to school. Now we are in the orange season, and you know that they are working there in the farms looking to make money for bread, milk. It is common. (PH1-P14)

One of the participants from the social workers participant group added that these children, especially the heads of child-headed households were forced to leave school to work and earn money to be able to take care of their siblings. The participant stated:

They end up dropping out of school because to them it is useless to be in school. From leaving school, they will start cleaning people's yards in the area as a job to earn money. They do these because they have huge responsibilities and must take care of their siblings. (PH1-P10)

Furthermore, one of the participants from the supervisor group confirmed that children living in child-headed households were exposed to child labour because they had to find temporary jobs to earn an income to take care of their siblings. The participant mentioned:

They partake in a variety of piece jobs in the area so that they can earn the income that they need to support their siblings and themselves. (PH2-P1)

The finding that children from child-headed households, especially heads of child-headed households, were exposed to child labour in order to earn an income to be able to take care of their siblings, is in line with literature of Van Dijk and Van Driel (2012) and Metsing (2020) who state that often, girl heads of child-headed households would be forced to engage as maids in domestic employment to earn money to take care of themselves and their siblings because they had no adult caregiver or support.

6.3.8.1.4 Category 5.1.4: Vulnerable to sexual abuse and prostitution

The fourth category which emerged from this subtheme was that children living in child-headed households were vulnerable to sexual abuse and prostitution. Both groups of participants

indicated that children who lived alone without adult caregivers' care and protection would often be vulnerable to perpetrators of sexual abuse. Participants indicated the following:

Sad thing is that these children in the village are sexually exploited. The young girls are exploited sexually because someone will take advantage of their situation, promise to buy them some food to engage in sexual intercourse with them, and when the child gets pregnant then they run away. They do this knowing well that no one is going to challenge them. I mean the children are already vulnerable and have no one. (PH1-P10)

These children are neglected, they have no one who is taking care of them. Sometimes we will get a call from the police station that this child has been sexually abused. (PH1-P12)

One of the supervisor participants confirmed that children living in child-headed households were sexually abused because they were living alone and were easy targets for perpetrators. The participant mentioned:

Sexual assault is common amongst these children because they are not cared for and protected, and it is easy for perpetrators to violate their rights and get away with it. Perpetrators are aware that these children live alone, and they take advantage of that. Further, remember these children also don't have food at home and you find someone who promises them food or money in exchange for sex. That is statutory rape. (PH2-P4)

Other participants from the social workers group added that, because children from child-headed households were not supervised or monitored by adult caregivers and as they were materially deprived in terms of food and clothes, they would often partake in child prostitution to earn an income. The participants mentioned:

On Fridays they will go to taverns and sell their bodies to older men to make money. Cases like the one I am talking about are common here. It is normalised, this is what happens. (PH1-P15)

It is worse for the girls as they are vulnerable to different diseases because they end up dating older men to acquire some money from them and take care of their family. Remember these girls date these older men for purpose, they cannot date their age mates because they don't have money to take care of them. For them they do this to survive. (PH1-P16)

The finding that children living in child-headed households were vulnerable to perpetrators of sexual abuse because of a lack of adult caregivers and because they were exposed to child prostitution due to material deprivation in terms of food and clothes, is confirmed in literature. Literature indicates that children from child-headed households were easy targets for predators since they lived without adult caregivers and were exposed to illicit activities such as sexual exploitation whereby they would exchange sexual favours for money to make ends meet and to generate an income (Van Breda, 2010; Ngconjana et al., 2017; Rugwiji, 2017). It is clear that sexually exploited and neglected children are in need of care and protection in terms of section 150(1) of the Children's Act, which states that a child was in need of care and protection if the child had been abandoned, was being abused, had deliberately been neglected, or lived in or was exposed to circumstances which could seriously harm their physical, mental or social wellbeing.

6.3.8.2 Subtheme 5.2: Children in child-headed households have material needs

The second subtheme that was identified was that child-headed households have material needs. Two categories emerged from this subtheme namely, that they need adequate food and sufficient income.

6.3.8.2.1 Category 5.2.1: Need adequate food

The first category identified in this subtheme was that children in child-headed households needed adequate food because of their exposure to food insecurity. All participants from both groups indicated that children from child-headed households were struggling with food and did not have money to acquire basic food items. Participants shared the following narratives:

They also need food because you find out that some of them do not have money to buy food. (PH1-P2)

The need for food is of great importance, food is scarce in these households and even though we try with food donations, it is not enough, these children need adequate food.
(PH2-P1)

The finding that children living in child-headed households needed adequate food because they were struggling to acquire food and did not have money to buy basic food items, is confirmed by literature which indicates that children living in child-headed households needed sufficient food because they were repeatedly subjected to hunger at home and sometimes must go to bed hungry because they were poor (Ntuli et al., 2020; Nxumalo, 2015). This finding is a clear indication that the rights of children living in child-headed households to access food

and to basic nutrition as entrenched in sections 27(1)(b) and 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution, were not being adhered to (RSA, 1996).

6.3.8.2.2 *Category 5.2.2: Need sufficient income*

The second category that came to the fore was that children living in child-headed households needed sufficient income. All participants indicated that children living in child-headed households needed sufficient income to satisfy their multiple needs such as the need for food. Participants shared the following narratives:

Children need adequate income because they have multiple needs which are not satisfied such as a need for food. (PH1-P1)

They also need money to buy food because they are exposed to extreme levels of poverty. (PH2-P3)

One of the participants from the social workers group added that the need for income forced children from child-headed households to find employment, which, because they were young, caused them to end up being exploited as child labourers. The participant mentioned:

They will tell you that “if you can just help me get a job so that I can have money and take care of my siblings you would have helped me.” Even if the job is not favourable to their health and development and it is hard labour, they will do it. (PH1-P11)

The finding that children living in child-headed households needed sufficient income to be able to satisfy their multiple needs such as the need for food, is in line with literature which indicates that children living in child-headed households needed income to improve their lives and to satisfy their basic needs. Literature also indicates that, without adult caregivers and in search of some form of income, children were forced to fend for themselves and partake in jobs that exposed them to exploitation and dangerous conditions (Muyomi, 2012; Zhao, 2013; Lwandiso, 2020). Although child-headed households may thus not be excluded from any grant, subsidy, aid, relief, or other monetary assistance or programmes provided by an organ of state, children of child-headed households struggled to find sufficient income because not having appointed adult caregivers made it extremely difficult for these children to access specific social grants.

6.3.9 Theme 6: Social services to support child-headed households on the macro-level.

Theme 6 pertains to the social services to support child-headed households on the macro-level. Three subthemes and categories which emerged out of this theme will be discussed in detail below.

6.3.9.1 Subtheme 6.1: Provision of food parcels

The first subtheme that came to the fore was provision of food parcels. Both groups of participants indicated that to alleviate poverty which was a huge challenge in child-headed households, food parcels were provided. The participants provided the following narratives:

We have established poverty relief programmes whereby we provide them with food parcels including maize meal and other basic food items because these children are often living in poor conditions and lack food. (PH1-P1)

We also provide food parcels, the food parcel programme was huge during COVID, because times were difficult during that period for these children, and we have continued assisting them with food considering their exposure to food insecurity. (PH1-P2)

Participants from the supervisor participant group confirmed that food parcels were provided to children living in child-headed households to help them cope with food insecurity. The participants mentioned:

We also provide them with food vouchers because we have realised that they live in poverty and do not have enough food. (PH2-P1)

Food parcels are provided to them to minimise their exposure to poverty. (PH2-P2)

One of the participants from the social workers participant group added that providing food parcels to children living in child-headed households had been difficult because the government had reduced funding for programmes meant to provide food parcels to vulnerable children such as children from child-headed households. The participant mentioned:

During COVID we used to provide them with food parcels as part of support services. Those are the services that we provided the most. Now we have reduced distribution of food parcels because the state has reduced the funding for these programmes and we find it difficult to provide food parcels to these children, we rely on donations which are not adequate. (PH1-P10)

The narratives seem to suggest that food parcels were provided to some children living in child-headed households to address their exposure to poverty while other children did not benefit from food parcels. This suggests that, in this study, the provision of food parcels was not consistent because children living in child-headed households in some regions were provided with food parcels whereas children in other regions were not provided with food parcels. South African literature indicates that children in child-headed households faced hunger in their respective families and urged the government to consider providing them with food (Geldenhuys, 2016; Thwala et al., 2021).

It is significant to point out that due to reduced government funding for food parcel programmes, less food parcels were being distributed to children of child-headed households, thus children are left to face hunger and poverty. This then translates to literature which indicates that child-headed households experienced low-quality life as they endured poverty in their respective homes and were deprived of some of their basic needs such as food. Thus, the provision of sustainable and adequate food parcels should be provided to all children living in child-headed households to ensure that their right of access to food and their right to basic nutrition as provided for in sections 27(1)(b) and 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution are satisfied, especially if they were not the recipients of a social grant due to the lack of the appointment of adult caregivers.

6.3.9.2 Subtheme 6.2: Community awareness campaigns

The second subtheme that came to the fore was community awareness campaigns. Both groups of participants indicated that they established community awareness campaigns to educate community members about the issues that children were exposed to. Participants added that issues such as teenage pregnancy and substance abuse were addressed through community awareness campaigns. Participants indicated:

Engage in community awareness projects especially through the schools with the idea to address issues that these children are exposed to such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancy and informing them about how we can help them in our organisations. (PH1-P3)

Community work projects are also conducted with community members to raise awareness about issues that are prevalent within the community such as teenage pregnancy because it affects children living in child-headed households. (PH2-P1)

The finding is that community awareness campaigns were established to educate community members about the issues children were exposed to, such as teenage pregnancy and

substance abuse. The advantages of community awareness campaigns are confirmed in literature which indicates that such campaigns assist in preventing children from being exposed to violence and being maltreated, abused, exploited and neglected (UNICEF, 2019).

On the macro-level the only services that are delivered to child-headed households are limited to the provision of food parcels and community awareness campaigns. Although these general services are significant, they are lacking because they do not adequately address the circumstances and needs of child-headed households. Literature indicates that, to address the circumstances of child-headed households and to ensure that their rights to care and protection were upheld, different services, including access to social security and provision of adequate shelter should be delivered (Phillips, 2011; Ngconjana et al., 2017). Thus, looking at the services that were actually being delivered (as per this study) compared to services which should, according to literature, be delivered to realise the rights of these children to care and protection, it is clear that there is a gap between the services that are delivered and those that should be delivered.

6.3.9.3 Subtheme 6.3: Social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the macro-level

The third subtheme that came to the fore was the social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the macro-level. Even though most participants indicated the type of social services they rendered on the macro-level, such as provision of food parcels and community awareness campaigns, most of the participants acknowledged that more services had to be rendered at this level to assist children in child-headed households and to ensure that their rights to care and protection were upheld. Three categories were derived from this subtheme, namely educational assistance to continue school attendance, provision of sufficient income, and provision of adequate shelter.

6.3.9.3.1 Category 6.3.1: Educational assistance to continue school attendance

The first category that came to the fore was educational assistance to continue school attendance. All participants in both groups indicated that educational assistance to enable children in child-headed households to continue with school attendance should be made available considering the challenges that they experienced with school attendance which would often force them to eventually drop out of school. This assistance should cover various needs, such as financial assistance to participate in school activities. Participants shared the following views about the importance of educational assistance to continue school attendance. They mentioned:

We need to also consider taking the children who have dropped out of school back to school and supporting their educational needs. (PH1-P4)

They need to be returned to school. (PH1-P2)

Participants from the social workers group indicated that educational assistance such as school clothes, fees, books, and money for educational trips would enable the children to continue attending school. It was also indicated that the government should assist in this regard. The participants postulated:

We know most of them need basic school items such as shoes and clothes, money to be able to partake in activities at school and we should be able to assist with that but for that to happen we need to also be assisted by the state. (PH1-P4)

All their school needs, for example school clothes, school material such as, books, school fees and educational trips must be covered on their behalf and that will ensure that they stay in school. (PH1-P2)

It is clear that children in child-headed households lack educational assistance such as school shoes, clothes, and money to be able to partake in school activities. In this study the finding that children living in child-headed households lacked educational assistance to continue school attendance, is confirmed in literature which states that children living in child-headed households do not get the necessary educational support. This added to the many other challenges they were confronted with in their daily struggle to survive (Maila & Mabasa, 2023; Gomba, 2018; Goronga & Mampane, 2021). Educational assistance would not only be to the advantage of children of child-headed households; it would also provide them with opportunities and resources to improve their educational success. This would further ensure that children in child-headed households could exercise their right to basic education as stipulated in section 28(1) of the South African Constitution. However, it was made clear that this type of support should come from the government as the child welfare NPOs in this study group did not have the financial capacity to provide in the comprehensive educational support of children from child-headed households.

6.3.9.3.2 Category 6.3.2: Provision of sufficient income

The second category that was identified was the provision of sufficient income for children living in child-headed households. Participants from both groups indicated that children living in child-headed households should be provided with income because they needed money and because most of them did not benefit from social grants due to various reasons, such as not having the necessary documents to apply for social grants. Narratives are:

They should be provided with adequate income in terms of grants because the first thing you hear from them during assessments is that they need income, and they cannot apply for social grants since they don't have documents and do not have an adult caregiver. (PH1-P10)

These children do not have birth certificates and as a result cannot even acquire social grants. Therefore, social grants should be provided to these children because they need money. (PH2-P1)

It seems children living in child-headed households struggled to acquire income, especially in terms of social grants. Their struggle to be allocated social grants is because of a lack of documentation such as birth certificates, which are required to apply for any grants, and due to them not having adult caregivers who could apply for a grant on their behalf. Therefore, the finding is that children living in child-headed households should be provided with an income in the form of a grant. The fact that these children were living without an income in the form of a grant is confirmed by Hall (2018) who established that children living in child-headed households did not have easy access to state-funded social grants. The advantages of acquiring social grants for child-headed households were identified in literature which indicates that social grants are an important source of income for child-headed households as they played a major role in alleviating poverty in child-headed households and helped children survive (Blaauw et al., 2011; Evans, 2011). In the absence of this important social service, they are left in extremely vulnerable positions.

6.3.9.3.3 Category 6.3.3: Provision of adequate shelter

The third category derived from this subtheme was provision of adequate shelter. All participants in both groups indicated that adequate shelter had to be provided to child-headed households because their living conditions were appalling, and their houses were not conducive to their wellbeing. Both groups of participants agreed on this category and said the following:

They live in abandoned houses putting their safety at risk. Adequate housing must be provided to them because most of them live in houses which are not in good condition, either shacks or mud houses. (PH1-P15)

For most of the children in these households. They live in conditions which are not good, for example they live in shacks, they live in one room houses and require proper houses, (PH1-P7)

One participant from the supervisor participant group mentioned that the government should provide sufficient housing to these children, as their living conditions were unacceptable, this participant indicated:

Adequate housing is a necessity, the state must ensure that houses are provided to these children. You cannot expect children to stay in the conditions we find them in.
(PH2-P1)

It was found that children living in child-headed households had to be provided with adequate shelter considering that the houses they were living in, namely shacks and mud houses, were totally inadequate. This finding is in line with literature which indicates that children from child-headed households lived in houses characterised by poor conditions, such as a leaking roofs, and that these living conditions violated the rights of the children to adequate shelter (Blaauw et al., 2011; Chinyoka, 2014). Therefore, the goal of social services on the macro-level should be to ensure that adequate shelter is provided to children from child-headed households and that social workers could refer affected children to appropriate departments such as the Department of Human Settlement to provide adequate housing to these children and satisfy their right to adequate shelter. If this is not an option, then these children should be removed and placed in foster care according to section 150(1)(f) of the Children's Act, which states that a child is in need of care and protection if the child lives or is exposed to circumstances which may seriously harm the child's physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

6.3.10 Policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households

In this section the findings regarding policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households are presented. The data obtained was analysed and grouped into four themes namely, reflections about policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households, reflections about rights of child-headed households to care and protection, challenges faced in delivering social work services to child-headed households and recommendations for improving social service delivery to children living in child-headed households.

6.3.11 Theme 7: Reflections about policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households

Theme 7 refers to reflections about policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households. Four subthemes emerged, namely that legislation is guiding service rendering, child-headed households are not a protective measure, the best interests of children in child-headed households were not considered, and that adequate resources are required to implement the policies.

6.3.11.1 Subtheme 7.1: Legislation is guiding service rendering

The first subtheme which emerged from theme 7 was legislation is guiding service rendering. Both groups of participants indicated that legislation such as the Children's Act, guided service rendering to child-headed households and enabled them to respond to the needs of these children and ensured that they were protected. The participants mentioned:

The Children's Act guides us in terms of how we can protect the children. (PH1-P3)

The Children's Act guides our social workers and we as supervisors because we do not work in isolation to policies of the country. (PH2-P1)

Furthermore, participants from both groups mentioned that they were guided by the South African Constitution to render social services to child-headed households in order to uphold the rights of these children and ensure that they were protected. The participants mentioned:

The Constitution as well and that is why when cases are reported, we are the first to respond because we want to ensure that the rights of children are protected. (PH2-P1)

The South African Constitution guides us to protect the rights of children and as social workers we are also expected to protect the rights of children, we try to implement the constitution through responding to the needs of these children. (PH1-P4)

Moreover, participants from the social workers group indicated that legislation guided them to consider the needs of child-headed households and that they subsequently provided services in line with such legislation. The participants mentioned:

The Children's Act informs us about the children who are in need of care and protection, and from then we investigate and if we find that children are not cared for, we write a report and take it to the court. We are guided by the Act in all that we do. (PH1-P11)

We try by all means to ensure that all children go to school, when we go to local schools, and they are giving us problems and do not want to help the children. The main thing for us is to uphold the Act and to engage with the school to help the children attend in consideration of their challenges. (PH1-P10)

Participants from both groups added that, although they were guided by legislation which stated that children in child-headed households should be under the care of an adult caregiver, the process of finding adult caregivers was challenging because there was a lack of adult caregivers who were willing to care for these children and because investigations in search of

suitable individuals normally took too long. Participants also indicated that in these cases, they would leave the children in their household and support them with food parcels and also monitor them to ensure that any challenges they were exposed to were addressed, while they were searching for placements or adult caregivers who could care for them. The participants mentioned:

I think children are supposed to have parents but, in these cases, we cannot control what is happening. Other relatives do not want to take care of these children; they will tell you that the children are naughty. When all of this is happening, the children can see that they are not wanted, and they will prefer to be on their own. It becomes difficult for them to stay alone, yes, but some are able to function accordingly with our support because we check on them to make sure that they are okay and provide them with food assistance because we cannot remove them from their households since we don't have a placement for them. (PH1-P14)

We have another case we are currently working on where these children, their mother has passed on, they live alone with siblings and cannot be fostered because we are looking for their father and they don't know his whereabouts. We are currently investigating, and we are assisting them with food parcels so far. (PH1-P6)

These narratives seem to suggest that legislation, such as the Children's Act and the South African Constitution, served as guides for service rendering to child-headed households. However, it seems that in some cases, service rendering according to legislation was hampered because of challenges, such as the non-availability of adult caregivers. This resulted in the delivery of services which were not guided by legislation, such as monitoring of child-headed households without adult caregivers. The finding is that legislation was not implemented consistently because the majority of children in child-headed households did not benefit from services guided by legislation while other children in child-headed households did. The inconsistent implementation of legislation could be linked to multiple challenges within the social work environment, such as a lack of employed social workers, which could play a role in the prolonged investigations to find adult caregivers, as available social workers were overburdened with cases and could find it difficult to complete all investigations timeously. Thus, evaluating and amending current legislation is also recognised as an important action, especially considering that its implementation was inconsistent and affected service delivery. Such action would also ensure that social workers would, concerning children of child-headed households, assume their role as advocates of the profession's social justice mission by responding more to the unmet needs of these children as indicated in literature (Sloth-Nielsen, 2014; Songca, 2011; Rugwiji, 2017).

6.3.11.2 Subtheme 7.2: Child-headed households are not a protective measure

The second subtheme which emerged from theme 7 was that child-headed households were not regarded as a protective measure as indicated in current policy. Participants mentioned that they did not think child-headed households were a protective measure because these children did not have adult caregivers and could not look after themselves, causing them to be more vulnerable to issues such as teenage pregnancy. The participants added that the normalisation of child-headed households resulted in these households being regarded as a protective measure, which the participants agreed, that they were not, as seen in the narratives below:

I don't think it is a good idea for children to live alone because that is when you get to have problems such as teenage pregnancy, I know the act says they have to live with an adult caregiver, but in other instances that does not happen and leaves the children more vulnerable. (PH1-P6)

Being classified as a family form plays into the idea that they can look after themselves and they can't. In our communities' people are used to the idea of children looking after themselves and it is not even a problem when people see it. You cannot agree with that. (PH1-P12)

The finding that child-headed households was not considered as a protective measure as these children lived with no caregivers and were at risk of being exposed to social issues such as teenage pregnancy, is confirmed in literature. Lwandiso (2020) and Agere and Agere (2020) indicate that child-headed households should not be regarded as a protective measure because they were often dysfunctional and because the children in these households were exposed to poor circumstances, such as girls becoming pregnant and ending up with children of their own.

A further finding is that child-headed households have been overlooked and had become a normalised phenomenon in many communities. This reflects that legislation has not been properly applied and that adequate resources have not been allocated to address this social issue which some are mistakenly calling a protective measure for the children in the absence of their parents.

6.3.11.3 Subtheme 7.3: The best interests of children in child-headed households were not considered

That the best interests of children in child-headed households were not considered has been identified as the third subtheme. Most participants indicated that the best interests of children

in child-headed households were not considered because of the difficult circumstances these children were living in, such as exposure to poverty and dropping out of school. Participants added that although they were trying to consider the best interests of these children, they were struggling because of the high demand for services from different community members and because they needed more social workers to assist with their workloads. Participants indicated the following:

Honestly they are not, look trust me, we try what we can, I cannot tell you now that yes, we are considering their best interest, that will not be the truth, we are trying, yet sometimes it is not enough, there is a lot we can still do, we need help, we need more social workers because if you look at the areas we serve and what we deal with, it is a lot and as much as we do not talk about it often, when you try to help one, there is two more that you could be missing. (PH1-P4)

Their best interests are not considered, they are staying alone, in our situation the young girls fall pregnant and become mothers while they are young and do not have parents who can guide them, no one is taking care of them (PH1-P2)

One participant mentioned that relationships had to develop with the children but that the process was time consuming. As the participants indicated that they did not have the time to follow up, the children were not protected. This participant said:

There are a lot of boys who live alone and are not protected at all. They end up running to live on the streets and we have a lot of them who do that. For you as a social worker to have a breakthrough with them, you will need to build a good relationship with them and that is challenging because you don't always find them when you look for them or try to investigate especially when they are no longer in school. It is difficult to also follow up because we are juggling between different cases. (PH1-P11)

Other participants indicated that they were considering the best interests of children in child-headed households by ensuring that they were placed in proper care such as foster care where their needs were satisfied. These participants mentioned:

Yes, their best interests are considered in a sense that we make sure that they are placed in a proper care, the foster care parents or a safe place is identified for these children, and we make sure that they are housed, they have got food and they are attending school. (PH1-P5)

For the ones who live with foster parents, they are protected, their best interests are considered. (PH1-P15)

The finding is that in some instances the best interest of children from child-headed households were not considered because they were living alone without adult caregivers and that young girls, were vulnerable to teenage pregnancy. This finding is line with literature (Gomba, 2018; Thwala et al., 2021) indicating that the best interests of child-headed households were not considered, due to the challenges they were exposed to, such as living alone, lack of food, being absent or dropping out of school.

The finding is also that, in other instances, the best interests of these children were considered because they were placed in foster where their needs were responded to, which was in line with Articles 25(1) and (3) of the ACRWC (1990) which state that any child who is permanently or temporarily deprived of his family environment for any reason, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance and that when considering alternative family care for the child, their best interests must be thoroughly considered. It is clear that when children are placed in foster care, their best interests are considered but when they are left on their own in child-headed households without care and protection, their best interests may not have been considered. The application of the best interest of children living in child-headed households is not consistent because the majority of the children were not placed in foster care where they could be cared for; instead they were left on their own, increasing their vulnerability to multiple social issues.

6.3.11.4 Subtheme 7.4: Adequate resources are required to implement legislation

The fourth subtheme identified was that adequate resources were required to implement legislation. Most participants from both groups indicated that the legislation was clear and guided them on what they had to do but that the resources to execute the legislation were not sufficient. Participants indicated the following:

The constitution and the Act are clear. To implement these policies, we need resources, and we don't have resources. (PH1-P13)

We follow the act in trying to care for and protect children, we are trying our best, but we don't have the resources and that is affecting how we apply the act. It is difficult to implement the act without resources and that is the challenge we have. (PH1-P2)

Participants mentioned that it was impossible to provide the services that were expected in terms of the existing legislation without having access to the necessary resources, such as finances and human capital.

We are expected to provide all kinds of services to vulnerable groups. How do you expect that of us while we don't have resources. Resources are important to implement these policies. (PH1-P13)

The issue of resources either being human resources and financial resources for me, it is a major issue that needs to be addressed to ensure that the policies are implemented and that services are delivered. (PH1-P6)

Participants' reflections referred to the fact that they were not able to respond to the rights of children as indicated in the South African Constitution due to lack of resources. Participants said:

All children have rights to social services according to the Constitution, but we are not able to respond to all children's rights without proper resources. (PH1-P4)

The participant from the provincial Department of Development in the third group, as well as a participant from the social workers group added that the insufficient resources they referred to, were vehicles, laptops, telephones, and that it was impossible for them to initiate community outreach programmes without access to adequate resources. These participants said:

Social workers do not have working tools, such as vehicles, laptops, and other resources, and they are unable to do community outreach programmes and have impact in the communities. (PH3-P1)

There is no car, there is no telephone when you must call, you must give motivation. You spend most of your time looking for resources than you do working. This is why certain programmes are not even done to the fullest because you know that I won't complete that programme due to limited resources. (PH1-P13)

Furthermore, participants from the social workers group indicated that the government failed to provide them with adequate resources in order for them to implement the legislation, such as safe houses where children could be placed when they were removed from their child-headed households. The participants mentioned:

I think our government is failing us because they are not providing us with resources such as safe houses to protect children. I am a social worker; I found a child living alone, I must remove that child, where am I going to place that child, because when I call available CYCCs, they are full, and there are no other resources to help the child. You see the problem is not the policy but resources. (PH1-P7)

It is a challenge in the province because we have lack of safe houses for children who are removed from their households, I don't know because maybe the government is not aware of this, we are trying to render services, and these is our challenges. (PH1-P6)

Participants from the supervisor group confirmed that a lack of resources was a stumbling block in the process of delivering services and implementing legislation and policies. Some participants mentioned that the main issue was financial resources as funding from the government had been cut. Participants indicated the following:

Social workers cannot be expected to render effective services without adequate resources. The government cut our subsidies, so we are unable to provide services because of lack of funding. We don't have enough resources to implement these policies. (PH2-P1)

Everything is stated accordingly in the policy. This is a not a ground-level problem but an upper-level problem. Social workers want to render services, they want to make changes in the communities, but the lack of financial resources hinders them to do that. (PH2-P5)

A participant from the supervisor group indicated the following:

Policy is straightforward, it is guiding us on what we need to do. The main challenge is a lack of resources. We need resources to implement the policy. It is like theory without practical. The theory is good, the problem is practical. (PH2-P4)

The finding is that the legislation was clear in guiding service rendering, however that resources such as vehicles, laptops, telephones, and funding, were totally insufficient and did not allow the participants to successfully implement legislation and policy or to ensure that services were rendered to children living in child-headed households. Resources, such as safe houses or child and youth care centres, were also lacking, and adult caregivers were difficult to find. This means that participants could not provide alternative care for children outside of the child-headed households and could not appoint adult caregivers that were willing to take care of the children.

The finding that government funding was a problem in designated child welfare NPOs which resulted in them not being able to execute certain programmes is confirmed in literature, which conveys that the money the state paid to NPOs did not cover the full cost of providing their services and hampered service delivery (Schmid, 2010; Department of Social Development,

2016; Skhosana, 2020). Moreover, the finding that resources, such as telephones, vehicles and laptops were insufficient and negatively affected social service delivery, is also confirmed in literature which indicates that a lack of tools of the trade, a shortage of vehicles to transport social workers to remote areas, and very little office space, all affected effective social service delivery (Department of Social Development, 2016). Literature (Skhosana, 2013; Sibanda & Lombard, 2015) is in line with the finding that a lack of resources, such as space in safe houses or child and youth care centres, or a lack of adequate infrastructure, posed serious challenges to the delivery of accommodation to children in need. This claim is supported by local and international studies which indicated that residential care facilities were struggling to provide the needed services to children, owing to a lack of resources (UNICEF, 2020; Thobejane & Muruge, 2022).

6.3.12 Theme 8: Reflections about rights of child-headed households to care and protection

Theme 8 pertained to the reflections about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection. One subtheme emerged from this theme namely, rights of children in child-headed households are infringed upon. This subtheme is discussed below.

6.3.12.1 Subtheme 8.1: Rights of children in child-headed households are infringed upon

The only subtheme under theme 8 was that the rights of children in child-headed households were infringed upon. Both groups of participants indicated that some of the rights of these children, including the right to a name and nationality, as set out in section 28 and the right to have access to social security as entrenched in section 27 of the South African Constitution, were infringed upon in child-headed households where the children were not provided with birth certificates and social grants. Participants mentioned:

We have a problem with children who cannot acquire social grants, because they do not have birth certificates and their parents are not around, meaning that their rights to social security are infringed upon. (PH1-P1)

Their rights are not protected. I mean for example, the child I was just telling you about who is unable to acquire a social grant. (PH1-P6)

Both groups of participants further indicated that the rights of these children to family or parental care as enshrined in section 28 (1)(b) of the South African Constitution was infringed upon because they did not have adult caregivers who provided care to them. The participants said the following:

Their parents do not care for them, they live alone, and their rights are violated because the older siblings under eighteen years of age must care for them. (PH1-P2)

You end up having children who parent themselves without adult caregivers and their rights to parental care are not responded to. (PH1-P3)

The participant from the provincial Department of Social Development confirmed that when parents passed away, these children were left on their own and their right to parental care was infringed upon because the eldest child was expected to care for their siblings. This participant did not indicate the role of the head of provincial Department of Social Development in determining the households' function under the care and protection of an adult caregiver according to section 137 of the Amendment Act. The participant mentioned:

Some of them have lost both parents and you find that the eldest child has to look after their siblings. (PH3-P1)

Both groups of participants indicated that the right of these children to adequate shelter was infringed upon because they did not have proper housing and had to live in shacks. The participant mentioned:

I mean if you look at their living conditions. You will see that it is not good for them because their housing is not stable. These children live in shacks and do not have proper housing and during winter they experience extreme cold and in summer extreme heat. Their rights are totally violated. Their housing for example, it's just a house because there is a roof over their head, but you would not want to find yourself in that situation. (PH1-P10)

Their rights to adequate shelter are not upheld because normally they live in shacks due to limited adequate shelter. In fact, shacks are quite normal in the township. Most of the houses are shacks. (PH2-P3)

The narratives suggest that the rights of children in child-headed households were violated because the children had to live without adult caregivers, in houses which were not adequate for their safety and protection and without sufficient income. This finding, that the rights of children of child-headed households, such as the right to a name and nationality, social security, family or parental care, and adequate shelter, were all infringed upon is confirmed in literature. Kotze (2011), Pillay (2011), Nziyane and Alpaslan (2012) and Diago (2020) all found that the rights of children of child-headed households to family or parental care, adequate shelter, and social security were violated because they lived in inadequate housing without

income and adult care and because there was a normalised expectation that the head of the household, who themselves were children under the age of 18, should assume the responsibility and provide care and protection to their households.

In such cases, where multiple rights of children of child-headed households were being infringed upon, section 150(1) (a) to (i) of the Children's Act provides adequate grounds for the removal of those children. However, since the interpretation of section 150(2) of the Children's Act allows for children from these households to be classified as children who "might" be in need of care and protection, social workers are not obliged to remove children from child-headed households. This point also links to the lack of provision of an adult caregiver as required in terms of section 137 of the Amendment Act. If these households are not provided with adult caregivers who would assume the responsibilities of a parent, then the children's basic rights are infringed upon. It is possible that there is acknowledgment that the rights of these children are violated, however it is not mentioned how section 137 of the Amendment Act and section 150(1) of the Children's Act are implemented to uphold these rights. It can also be said that policies might not be adhered to in upholding the rights of these children due to challenges, such as a lack of resources which hinders effective policy implementation and social service delivery to vulnerable families.

6.3.13 Theme 9: Challenges faced in delivering social services to child-headed households.

Theme 9 refers to the challenges faced in delivering social services to child-headed households. Four subthemes emerged from this theme, namely high caseloads, staff shortage, transportation challenges and limited funding.

6.3.13.1 Subtheme 9.1: High caseloads

The first subtheme that emerged was high caseloads. Both groups of participants indicated that they were exposed to a high number of cases which made it difficult for them to deliver effective social services to children living in child-headed households. They also indicated that their workloads were overwhelming. Participants indicated the following:

We have so many cases and now we are target based. The caseloads are high, it becomes challenging to work like this. (PH1-P2)

The caseload is high. I am responsible for twelve social workers and twelve social auxiliary workers. I have a target of over 1000. The high caseloads are stressful. (PH2-P4)

The participant from the provincial Department of Social Development confirmed that high caseloads were overwhelming and that it resulted in social workers being overworked. The participant mentioned:

.... social workers are over worked. (PH3-P1)

One of the participants in the supervisors group added that alongside high caseloads, they also had to face administration challenges. The participant mentioned:

The caseload is high. It is demanding, it is difficult to get through all the cases. One of the biggest challenges these days is administration, it's all the statistics that you must compile, there are not enough hours in the day to be able to service your client. (PH2-P5)

The finding is that both participant groups were exposed to a high number of cases which they found overwhelming and which made it difficult for participants to deliver effective social services to children living in child-headed households. This finding is confirmed in literature which indicates that social workers and their supervisors were affected by high caseloads and that they did not have sufficient time to complete their day-to-day work in the child protection sector which negatively affected their delivery of quality services to vulnerable groups (Ngwenya & Botha, 2012; Calitz et al., 2014; Skhosana, 2020). In addition to having to deal with high caseloads, social workers must also complete various administrative tasks, which further affected their service delivery and wellbeing. Studies have found that South African social workers experienced heavy workloads in demanding working environments and that having to function under these less-than-optimal working conditions, they were often overworked. This could result in burnout, impaired performance, and poor mental health (Sibanda & Lombard, 2015; Skhosana, 2020).

6.3.13.2 Subtheme 9.2: Staff shortage

The second subtheme that emerged from the theme of challenges faced in delivering social services to child-headed households was staff shortage. Both groups of participants indicated that they had a shortage of staff and that they sometimes had to cover huge areas to visit clients. Not having enough staff also impacted their high caseloads. The participants provided the following narratives:

We are unable to reach everyone because we are short staffed; I am the only one responsible for this area and it is a huge area. I think if we had a lot of social workers who are available to take some of the workload, it will be better but as you know we

have a high unemployment rate of social workers and this issue does not only affect our organisation, but it is also a national issue. (PH1-P2)

Our challenges are lack of resources, we have shortage of social workers and available social workers are struggling with high caseloads. (PH2-P1)

The participant from the provincial Department of Social Development mentioned that there were many social workers who were qualified but unemployed due to a lack of finances to create employment opportunities for them. The participant mentioned:

We have a lot of social workers who are qualified, but it is only a minimum number of them who are employed because of a lack of finances. (PH3-P1)

The finding that there was shortage of staff due to high unemployment of social workers is confirmed in literature. Van Bruwaene et al. (2020) and Opperman (2022) state that there is a shortage of social workers due to limited funding being available for the Department of Social Development to create employment opportunities for qualified social workers. Thus, there are not enough social workers to render social services, which impedes the ability of child welfare NPOs to meet the increasing demands for social services. Not having enough employed social workers has further resulted in a lack in capacity to implement policies and programmes dealing with social issues, such as chronic poverty. The same applies to designated child welfare NPOs. This confirms the view of Strydom (2010) who indicated in 2010 that if adequate funding was not provided to NPOs to address staff shortages then those NPOs could not be held accountable for the lack of implementation of policy and legislation, and the rights of child-headed households to care and protection would then not be realised.

6.3.13.3 Subtheme 9.3: Transportation challenges

The third subtheme that emerged from the theme of challenges faced in delivering social services to child-headed households was transportation challenges. Most participants in both groups indicated that transport challenges affected proper service delivery because they had to serve a high number of people in different communities with very little access to vehicles. These participants indicated the following:

The resource issue is a problem as well in terms of lack of vehicles within the organisation because if you want to do a home visit and you find that a child lives 10km away, that affects you and the child because of a lack of vehicles. (PH2-P1)

If you look at the communities that we serve, it's so many people and we only have three vehicles which are not enough to move us to everyone who need help, especially the vulnerable children in the communities. (PH1-P10)

Participants specifically mentioned the effect that the lack of vehicles had on service rendering to their client systems, especially to perform home visits and complete investigations. These participants mentioned:

It is difficult to get to certain areas because there is no public transport, we struggle to get to the clients, and they also struggle to get to us and that affects how we render social work services. (PH1-P6)

Transport is a main challenge; we are unable to reach many of these children. We are unable to execute the different projects whether group or community, even family intervention, because of lack of transport. (PH1-P15)

The participant from the provincial Department of Social Development also confirmed that the availability of transport was a huge challenge that affected effective social service delivery. The participant mentioned:

The issue of transport is a challenge because you will find that about 60 social workers are dependent on two cars as result social workers are unable to monitor children, they have placed in foster care accordingly due to the issue of transport. (PH3-P1)

This participant added that some social workers used their private vehicles, knowing that they would not be remunerated, in an effort to render social services. The participant mentioned:

Some social workers even sacrifice their cars at times even though they will not be remunerated because they can see that the case of these children is really urgent and they intervene, so social workers are interested in helping, but what more can they do with limited resources such as vehicles. (PH3-P1)

The finding that transport challenges affected proper service delivery such as conducting home visits and completing investigations, is confirmed in literature which indicates that inadequate transport was one of the obstacles experienced in the field of child and family welfare in South Africa and that there was little social workers could do to help people who suffered from a lack of food or finance because organisations did not always have vehicles at their disposal to visit communities. This ultimately meant that programmes and other services provided by social workers were not always accessible (Strydom, 2010; Strydom, 2012).

These transport challenges also forced some social workers to utilise their own vehicles in order to render social services to vulnerable children. This links with the literature of Skhosana et al. (2014) and Skhosana (2020), who indicated that the shortage of vehicles has left some social workers with no transport and forced them to use their own private vehicles to perform their duties. Since social workers are contracted by the government to render statutory services, the government is under an obligation to ensure that the basic resources required by NPOs were delivered in order for the NPOs to ensure the protection of children as indicated in the UNCRC, the ACRWC, the South African Constitution and the Children's Act of South Africa.

6.3.13.4 Subtheme 9.4: Limited funding

The fourth subtheme that emerged from the theme of challenges faced in delivering social services to child-headed households was limited funding. All participants indicated that one of the challenges they face within their organisations was limited funding. Having limited funds made it difficult for the participants to be visible in communities, to conduct home visits and to be of effective assistance to children and families in need. Participants indicated the following:

I think limited funding is also an issue because some of the programmes are not fully executed due to limited funding, we hardly go into communities as much as we would like to, our reach is not as deep as it is supposed to be, I believe. (PH1-P4)

The challenge is lack of funds to establish more programmes that could be helpful to these children and to reach the larger society because the areas we work in are consistently expanding. The programmes currently are not able to reach everyone, and our funding is limited to expand. (PH1-P5)

Participants from the supervisors group confirmed that lack of funding was a major obstacle in their organisations and affected effective rendering of services to vulnerable groups such as child-headed households. Participants indicated the following:

We have a challenge with lack of funding to enable us to effectively render services. Our funding is not adequate. There are a lot of services we are unable to provide due to lack of funding and it seems at some point all funding will be cut and we won't be able to render any services at all. (PH2-P1)

We are in a bad situation. We don't have adequate funding. We cannot do anything without proper funding. We can speak about what we need to do, what services we need to provide, what rights to protect but without proper funding, it is just talk and this is what we are faced with. (PH2-P2)

The participant from the provincial Department of Social Development mentioned that child welfare NPOs were funded by the Department. However, that the provided funding was not enough for these NPOs to operate and render effective services. The participant mentioned:

These organisations get funding from the Department of Social Development, it is just that money is not enough especially with the current inflation, we mostly encourage them to do fundraising, but we also hear that fundraising is a huge challenge in this economy. (PH3-P1)

The finding that limited funding is a challenge that makes it difficult for social workers to be visible in communities, to conduct home visits and to deliver effective assistance to children and families in need, is evident. This finding is confirmed in literature which indicates that South African child welfare NPOs are under-funded and under-resourced and that this lack of funding effectively causes NPOs not to be able to deliver much-needed social welfare services (Strydom et al., 2020; Sibanda & Lombard, 2015; Van Niekerk & Matthias, 2019).

South African literature (Skhosana, 2020) states that, although child welfare NPOs were delivering services mandated by the Children's Act and the Children's Amendment Act, the money paid to these NPOs does not cover the full cost of providing their services. The Department's role in the outsourcing process is to financially support such crucial services through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the enlisted NPOs (Maqhina, 2021). Thus, when child welfare NPOs do not have sufficient funds, they are compelled to establish fund raising programmes or find suitable donors (Budlender & Proudlock, 2011; Skhosana, 2013; Schmid, 2010; Department of Social Development, 2016). Nevertheless, the state-funded NPOs often end up with limited funding, causing them not to be able to provide services to vulnerable children and families, such as child-headed households.

6.3.14 Theme 10: Recommendations for improving social service delivery to children living in child-headed households

Theme 10 refers to the recommendations for improving social service delivery to children living in child-headed households. Two subthemes emerged from this theme, namely provision of sufficient funding for child welfare organisations to render effective social work services and employment of more social workers.

6.3.14.1 Subtheme 10.1: Provision of sufficient funding for child welfare organisations to render effective social services

The first subtheme that emerged from the theme of recommendations for improving social service delivery to children living in child-headed households was that sufficient funding should

be provided for child welfare NPOs to render effective social services. All the participants recommended that sufficient funding should be provided to their organisations for them to be able to render effective social services to children living in child-headed households. Participants indicated the following:

Additional funding must be prioritised to make it less challenging for us to provide services to children, for us to establish other community programmes and group projects that can benefit these children. (PH1-P4)

Those who are leading us at provincial and national Department of Social Development should provide us with adequate funding. When we are not provided with adequate funding our hands are tied, this affects everything from the provided cars, airtime to make calls and other resources we need to render services. They expect us to tick all the boxes in terms of service delivery with limited funding and resources. When you ask them how you are supposed to do your work with limited resources, they say, you must work out the resources to your advantage. (PH1-P10)

One of the participants from the social workers group added that adequate funding must be provided to child welfare NPOs because they rendered most of the child protection services, however that these NPOs had limited funding and resources compared to social workers working for the government. The participant indicated:

Our organisations must be financed fully for us to render services to all vulnerable families without challenges. I mean why is it that our experiences must be different to those of social workers at the Department of Social Development? Why is it that we are not supported like other social workers working for the state while we do more of the work? There is nothing we don't do but we don't even have half of their resources because of a lack of funding. (PH1-P13)

Participants from the supervisors group confirmed that organisations must be provided with sufficient funding to enable them to render effective services. Participants indicated the following:

Proper and sustainable funding needs to be provided to child welfare organisations to be able to render services. (PH2-P3)

Sufficient funding must be provided, this will help address multiple challenges and improve effective social service delivery. (PH2-P1)

The participant from the provincial Department of Social Development mentioned that the provision of funding was important for effective rendering of services and added that this provision of funding depended on the individuals who headed the Department of Social Development. The participant mentioned:

It depends on those who are on top, we will say it will be much better if in the top management there was a social worker who understand the plight of social workers. Everything really depends on those who are in charge, if they provide funding, services will be delivered effectively, but at this point funding is not sufficient. (PH3-P1)

The finding that sufficient funding must be provided to child welfare NPOs for them to deliver effective social work services to vulnerable groups such as child-headed households, is in line with literature which indicates that if child welfare NPOs were inadequately funded, they would find it increasingly difficult to sustain their service output. These organisations should also be funded in such a way that the full costs of providing social services are covered, as a lack of funding would create a major stumbling block, not only for the NPOs, but also for social workers who had to render social services to vulnerable groups (Schmid, 2010; Strydom, 2010; Skhosana, 2020). Thus, if child welfare NPOs are not sufficiently funded, they will not be able to deliver critical services which government departments alone are unable to deliver and would vulnerable children such as child-headed households, be affected and their rights to care and protection, not be realised.

6.3.14.2 Subtheme 10.2: Employment of more social workers

The second subtheme that emerged from the theme of recommendations for improving social service delivery to children living in child-headed households was the employment of more social workers. Participants from all groups recommended that more social workers had to be employed to improve social service delivery to children living in child-headed households since available social workers were overwhelmed by high caseloads. Participants indicated the following:

More social workers should be brought in to assist with the high caseloads we are exposed to because I believe we are overworked, and we tend to struggle with some of the cases and end up not properly following up. (PH1-P2)

We also need more social workers to assist with the high caseloads, social auxiliary workers as well to be hands on in communities and group projects. (PH2-P4)

We need to employ more social workers because currently social workers are overworked. (PH3-P1)

Moreover, participants from the supervisors group also recommended that more social workers should be employed to assist currently employed social workers with the high caseloads they were exposed to. Participants indicated the following:

More social workers should be employed to help with the workload, we need more social auxiliary workers to play a supportive role to our social workers. (PH2-P3)

I recommend that more social workers be employed in the government sector as well as within our organisations so that we can have more hands and those social workers can take on the cases and we can minimise the high workload we are currently exposed to. (PH2-P2)

The narratives suggest that more social workers were needed to deliver effective services to children living in child-headed households, due to high caseloads of the current workforce. This finding is confirmed in literature which indicates that the unemployment of social workers was a huge challenge in South Africa, especially when the current high workloads of employed social workers and the demand for social services were considered. A high number of social workers must thus be employed to respond to the increasing demands for social services from South African's most vulnerable groups (Van Niekerk & Matthias, 2019; Thwala et al., 2021; Opperman, 2022). The employment of social workers should be seen as a priority since social workers formed the cornerstone of the South African child protection system and, if enough social workers were employed, they could ensure that the needs and rights of vulnerable groups such as children of child-headed households, to be cared for and to be protected, were upheld.

6.4 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Participants were asked if they had anything to add after the conclusion of each of their interviews. Participants mainly made comments related to the financial situation of child welfare organisations and stated that the financing of these organisations had to change and that sufficient resources must be available to respond effectively to child-headed households. Sufficient funding was also related to the employment of more social workers which would enable role players to protect the rights of children living in child-headed households. Narratives of some of the participants were:

Organisations should be financed and provided with enough resources to respond to the challenges of child-headed households. (PH1-P2)

Finance is the key, social workers are qualified and ready to work but they are not employed because there is no funding, so funding should be made available. (PH3-P1)

The services we need to provide, the rights of these children that we need to protect, we cannot do that without proper funding. (PH2-P2)

6.5 CONCLUSION

An empirical investigation into the rights of child-headed households to care and protection with specific focus on social service delivery from the perspective of role players was conducted and the empirical findings as gathered by means of semi-structured interviews, were analysed. The fourth objective of this study, which was to investigate the reflections of role players on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection from a human rights-based perspective and the implementation of legislation and social services rendered to the households, have thus been achieved. Participants reflected on their professional views regarding the circumstances and outcomes of child-headed households, the social services they rendered to them, as well as social services that should be rendered to eradicate their circumstances within the different levels of the ecological systems perspective to ensure that their rights to care and protection were responded to.

The reflections of participants regarding the rights of child-headed households to care and protection indicated that some of the circumstances these children were exposed to on the different levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective theory included emotional difficulties on the micro-level, assuming adult responsibilities and poor school attendance on the meso-level, and exposure to poverty and inadequate income on the macro-level. Furthermore, social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the different levels of the ecological systems perspective include early intervention services such as counselling on the micro-level, adult supervision, support networks, educational support and group intervention on the meso-level, and preventative services such as provision of adequate shelter and income and establishing awareness campaigns about the rights of these children to care and protection on the macro-level.

It was established through the role players' viewpoints, that the effective delivery of social services to child-headed households depended on addressing the challenges that role players were exposed to, such as a lack of funding of their child welfare NPOs and a shortage of employed social workers. Furthermore, it was recognised that policy and legislation were inconsistent because while some children's best interests might be considered, the majority of them remained with unmet needs and were exposed to extreme vulnerability. Inconsistent

policy and legislation implementation results in social services indicated in section 150(3) of the Children's Act not being delivered and further results in the right of these children to social services as enshrined in section 28 of the South African Constitution to be infringed upon.

The conclusions and recommendations of this study are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the reflections of role players regarding social service delivery to children living in child-headed households and their rights to care and protection from a human rights-based perspective. This chapter stems from the fifth objective of this research study, namely, to make recommendations and conclusions about the reflections of role players on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection, on social services rendered to the households and the implementation of policy and legislation in the South African context. This study made use of a literature review, research methodology, and empirical study findings.

The first objective of this study was met in Chapter 2, when an analysis of international, regional, and local child and family welfare policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households and the rights of child-headed households to care and protection from a human rights-based perspective, was provided. The second objective of this study was addressed in Chapter 3, which explored the circumstances of child-headed households within the South African child protection system. Chapter 4 aimed to attain the third objective by dissecting the delivery of social services to child-headed households within the ecological systems perspective of Bronfenbrenner. Chapter 5 covered the exposition of the research methodology and research approaches utilised in the implementation of the empirical study. Finally, Chapter 6 presented the results of the empirical investigation on the reflections of role players about social service delivery to children from child-headed households and their rights to care and protection. These chapters paved the way for the concluding remarks and recommendations, not only to address the research topic, but also for future studies. The focus of this chapter is thus on the recommendations and conclusions about the reflections of role players on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and social services rendered in the South African context. The following conclusions will be structured according to the themes of the empirical study.

7.2 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The research project was done in three phases with three groups of participants. The first group consisted of seventeen (17) social workers. The criteria for inclusion in the first phase of this study were that participants had to be employed as registered social workers at registered designated child welfare NPOs in Limpopo (Capricorn), Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni), and the Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan). The participants also had to be rendering child and family welfare services for at least a year and be conversant in English. The

seventeen (17) participant social workers could provide information about the services they rendered to child-headed households, the needs of such a group, as well as ideas about policy implementation. It was established that all the participants had a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and that no one in the group obtained postgraduate qualifications. All of the first group had more than one year working experience within the field of social work practice, specifically with regards to the field of child and family welfare. This made them eligible and knowledgeable participants for this study. It can thus be concluded that participants had sufficient working experience of rendering social services to children living in child-headed households.

The second group consisted of five (5) social worker supervisors. The criteria for inclusion in the second phase of this study were that participants had to be employed as registered social worker supervisors at registered child welfare NPOs in Limpopo (Capricorn), Mpumalanga (Ehhlazeni), or the Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Metropolitan), and that they had to be rendering supervision and child and family welfare services for at least two years and be conversant in English. Social worker supervisors, due to their managerial position in the NPOs, had holistic views about the extent of child-headed households registered at the NPOs, social services rendered, policy implementation, as well as the challenges that organisations were experiencing in service delivery to these households. It was established that all the participants had a Bachelor's degree in Social Work, with two of the participants who obtained postgraduate qualifications. Most of the participants had between 1 and 10 years of working experience which was an indication that the average years of work experience was relatively high. It can therefore be concluded that the participants were eligible and knowledgeable to be part of the study because they had working experience, skills, and knowledge, both as social workers and as social worker supervisors. They also had significant understanding within the field of social work practice, specifically with regards to the field of child protection, from a managerial point of view, as well as the challenges that organisations were experiencing.

The third group consisted of one (1) head or deputy head or designated person of a provincial Department of Social Development. The criteria for inclusion in the third phase of this study expressed that the participant had to be employed as a head/deputy head or designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, or Eastern Cape province for at least a year and be conversant in English. The head/deputy head or designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development included in this study was responsible for services to children and families, specifically children living in child-headed households, and reflected about the social services delivered to child-headed

households and challenges in service rendering. It was established that the participant had a Bachelor's degree in Social Work without a postgraduate qualification and had more than one year working experience as a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development and had significant understanding of the field of social work practice, specifically with regards to the field of child protection, social services rendered, and challenges experienced in social service delivery. It can therefore be concluded that the participant had working experience as a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development and was therefore qualified to share reflections of social services delivered to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection.

7.3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions and recommendations are consequently presented based on the eleven themes derived from the empirical findings.

7.3.1 Theme 1: Nature of child-headed households on the micro-level

The first theme that came to the fore in this study was the nature of child-headed households on the micro-level. Findings were divided into two subthemes, namely circumstances of child-headed households, and needs of child-headed households.

Four categories emerged from the first subtheme, namely that children living in child-headed households experienced emotional difficulties, assumed adult responsibility, and experienced depression, anger, and frustration. Participants stated that children living in child-headed households were exposed to emotional difficulties as they had to assume adult responsibilities which were stressful. This challenge specifically affected the heads of these households because they were forced to provide care to their siblings in the absence of adult caregivers or parents. They also agreed that children living in child-headed households were struggling to cope with the loss of their parents, and that they had nobody that was taking care of them. Under these circumstances, the heads of these households who were themselves children under the age of 18, had to assume difficult adult responsibilities and provide care to their siblings. Participants also expressed their concern regarding children living in child-headed households and stated that these children lived in depressive environments because of their overwhelming circumstances such as not being cared for and not being supported due to the absence of their parents. Participants also indicated that these children tended to be frustrated and angry, because of the absence of their parents and as a result would engage in fights at school or criminal acts.

The second subtheme that came to the fore was the needs of child-headed households. Two categories emerged from the second subtheme, namely that children needed emotional

support and a nurturing household and that they required counselling services. Participants indicated that these children needed emotional support and a nurturing household because their emotional needs were overlooked due to the absence of adult caregivers. Living alone, going through life without adult caregivers and someone who could listen to them, were amongst the reasons why children living in child-headed households needed emotional support. The need for counselling services in these households were also mentioned due to the children being exposed to traumatic situations such as sexual abuse which could affect their emotional wellbeing.

It can therefore be concluded that:

- Children living in child-headed households experience emotional difficulties.
- Assuming adult responsibilities could affect the emotional wellbeing of children and could lead to them experience anger and frustration.
- Living without adult caregivers exposed children to depression because of traumatic situations they could have faced in the absence of their parents.
- Children living in child-headed households needed support to address their emotional difficulties and a nurturing household which would not force them into adulthood to assume adult responsibilities.
- Counselling services are required to address the traumatic situations these children could be exposed to, such as sexual abuse.

It is recommended that:

- Children from child-headed households be provided with emotional support and a nurturing household so that their needs can be responded to.
- To ensure the above-mentioned recommendation, adult caregivers should be appointed who should assume adult responsibilities and care for children in child-headed households according to section 137(2) of the Children's Amendment Act.

7.3.2 Theme 2: Social services to child-headed households on the micro-level

Social services to child-headed households on the micro-level was the second theme derived from the collected data. Two subthemes emerged from this theme namely, social services delivered to child-headed households and social services that should be delivered to child-headed households. Four categories emerged from this subtheme namely, home visits, assess circumstances to determine the need for care and protection, individual counselling services, and placement into kinship and non-kinship foster care.

Participants confirmed that, after child-headed households were reported to their NPOs, they conducted home visits to comprehensively assess the circumstances and needs of the

children as well as the services that should be rendered to them. Participants also expressed that because individual counselling to children in child-headed households were regarded as significant, they would apply it as it gave them the opportunity to understand the children's thoughts and feelings. With individual counselling, participants could assist the children in dealing with their traumatic situations. Some participants mentioned that they had placed children living in child-headed households into kinship and non-kinship foster care after establishing that they were living without adult caregivers and that they were in need of care and protection. The participants further clarified that they considered kinship and non-kinship foster care because it was difficult to identify suitable adult caregivers who could live with the children and because kinship and non-kinship foster care were the best options for the children as their needs would be responded to. Furthermore, the participants explained that with kinship foster care, children could be placed with extended family members because of the strong emphasis on keeping children within the family set-up if they had to be removed, which was in line with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).

The second subtheme was about social services that should be delivered to child-headed households. One category emerged from this subtheme namely, family counselling services. Participants mentioned that family counselling services should be delivered to build the capacity of these children, to nurture their relationships within their families, and to ensure that they addressed the challenges they were exposed to such as loss of their parents. Participants further clarified that they would like to deliver family counselling services on a long-term basis but cautioned that issues such as their high caseloads and a lack of resources had to be addressed as they were stumbling blocks in the delivery of such services.

It can therefore be concluded that:

- Home visits are conducted to comprehensively assess the circumstances and needs of children living in child-headed households in line with section 150(1) to (3) of the Children's Act.
- Individual counselling services are offered to give children in child-headed households the opportunity to understand their thoughts and feelings.
- Other services indicated in section 150(3) of Children's Act, such as early intervention services that should be rendered on the micro-level to child-headed households were not mentioned at all.
- Kinship and non-kinship foster care are utilised as options to provide children living in child-headed households with alternative care when they are found to be in need of care and protection.

- Family counselling services should be available to child-headed households but the delivery of these services is affected by structural challenges such as high caseloads and a lack of resources.

It is recommended that:

- Home visits should be utilised to investigate the circumstances of child-headed households to determine if they are in need of care and protection according to section 150(1) of the Children's Act.
- Counselling services should be offered to child-headed households if they were to be found not in need of care and protection according to section 150(1) of the Children's Act.
- The placement of children of child-headed households into alternative care such as kinship and non-kinship foster care should be recognised as a viable option when children in child-headed households are found to be in need of care and protection as indicated in section 150(1) of the Children's Act.
- The state should acknowledge operational challenges, such as a shortage of social workers and a lack of resources, because these challenges may affect the constitutional right of children according to section 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution to social services.

7.3.3 Theme 3: Nature of child-headed households on the meso-level

The nature of child-headed households on the meso-level was the third theme derived from the collected data. Three subthemes emerged from this theme namely, that child-headed households were isolated within the community, experienced challenges to manage their households, and needed adult caregivers or parental care.

Two categories emerged from the first subtheme namely, children experienced minimal support from extended family and community members, and they engaged in underage drinking and smoking. Participants indicated that receiving minimal support from extended families left child-headed households socially burdened and denied them their sense of childhood. Engagement in underage drinking and smoking have also been identified as a challenge for children living in child-headed households because of a lack of guidance and supervision from caregivers.

The second subtheme was challenges experienced in managing the household. One category emerged from this subtheme namely, that children would drop out of school. Participants indicated that children in child-headed households found it challenging to manage their households. The participants added that the heads of these households were forced to

assume adult responsibilities. These children then struggled to manage their school and household tasks, often causing them to drop out of school. Participants mentioned that children would also drop out of school if young girls became pregnant or if the children engaged in illegal activities. It has also been indicated that even though some children in child-headed households attended school, they had challenges in obtaining certain school resources, such as school clothes, shoes, and books.

The third subtheme that emerged was that children needed an adult caregiver/parental care. Two categories emerged from this subtheme namely, a lack of response to the needs of the children and the need for assistance from family and community members. Most of the participants indicated that there was lack of response to these children's needs, and that they needed somebody to fulfil the parenting role as the head of the household was forced to assume adult responsibilities and satisfy the needs of their siblings but would often not be able to meet such needs. Participants also indicated that due to the difficult circumstances of children living in child-headed households, they required assistance from family and community members, however, this was often not available.

It can therefore be concluded that:

- Children living in child-headed households are isolated because they receive very little support from extended family and community members, leaving them socially burdened and without a sense of childhood.
- Children, especially heads of the households, find it challenging to assume adult responsibilities, such as managing the household, resulting in dropping out of school.
- Children drop out of school due to a lack of certain school resources, such as school clothes, shoes and books.
- Girls living in child-headed households are vulnerable to teenage pregnancy.
- Children living in child-headed households can become involved in illegal activities.
- Heads of child-headed households are children under the age of 18 years and do not have proper parenting skills to care for themselves and their siblings.
- Children need an adult caregiver to assume the parenting role.
- When children of child-headed households drop out of school their right to education is infringed upon because they are not able to continue with their schooling and acquire education according to section 29(1) of the Constitution
- When children in child-headed households have to care for themselves, their constitutional right to parental or alternative care, is infringed upon.

It is recommended that:

- Communities should be made aware of the plight of children living in child-headed households to improve their support from extended family and community members to diminish their social isolation within the community.
- An adult caregiver should be appointed to assume adult responsibilities, such as managing the household so that the children can continue with their education without having to assume adult responsibilities, as well as to supervise the household and prevent the children from acting irresponsible.
- Children in child-headed households should be provided with proper supervision and guidance to prevent them from consuming alcohol, early pregnancy and partaking in other illegal activities.
- Social workers should utilise section 150(1) of the Children's Act in situations where children are involved in illegal activities and without an adult caregiver to ensure their care and protection.
- In the absence of an adult caregiver that can apply for social security, the government should be responsible for the provision of school resources, such as school clothes, shoes and books to avoid challenges whereby the children of child-headed households have to drop out of school due to a lack of resources. The rights of children to parental care and education should be restored through appointing an adult caregiver who can care for them and ensuring that they stay in school and acquire education.

7.3.4 Theme 4: Social services to child-headed households on the meso-level

In the fourth theme that emerged on social services delivered to child-headed households on the meso-level, two subthemes were identified, namely that different group interventions were offered and social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the meso-level.

Two categories emerged from the first subtheme namely, educational groups and neighbours who would informally assist to monitor and supervise households. The participants indicated that educational groups were used to educate children in child-headed households and to raise their awareness about issues such as teenage pregnancy and substance abuse. However, some of the participants indicated that due to a lack of social workers or social auxiliary workers, educational groups were not established, hence the children could not benefit from them. Participants also expressed that some neighbours would informally (and often inconsistently) assist to monitor and supervise child-headed households because they were concerned about the children's wellbeing in the absence of their caregivers, however the participants emphasised that the children were still living alone.

The second subtheme that came to the fore in this study was the social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the meso-level. Two categories emerged from the second subtheme namely, children needed a parental figure to take responsibility for the management of households and there should be increased community support. Participants indicated that children living in child-headed households needed an adult caregiver who could manage their households and take care of the children. They also mentioned that it was difficult to find willing individuals to take care of these children, because caring for these children was a huge responsibility. Participants commented that due to transportation challenges of social workers, it was difficult to find caregivers as social workers had to travel far and wide in search of potential caregivers. This was especially the case where extended families who could take care of the children, lived far from them. Under these circumstances, participants mentioned that community members should support children in child-headed households in their communities to avoid them from getting more vulnerable than they already were since they had to live without adult caregivers. Participants emphasised the provision of community support on the meso-level as well as educational groups despite that these interventions were inconsistent and not benefiting all children in child-headed households. Participants did not refer to other intervention programmes, such as therapeutic and peer groups, despite the potential positive impact such groups could have on child-headed households.

It can therefore be concluded that:

- Educational groups assist children of child-headed households in sharing information and raising awareness about teenage pregnancy and substance abuse.
- Educational groups could not always be established due to a scarcity of social service professionals.
- Different types of group interventions such as therapeutic and peer groups are not utilised in meso-level interventions.
- Neighbours would inconsistently provide assistance to child-headed households through informal monitoring and supervision.
- Children living in child-headed households need adult caregivers who can help manage their households.
- Participants found it difficult to find adult caregivers to supervise the children, as it is a huge responsibility. Transportation problems inhibit the utilisation of extended family members to care for the children, as they would often live far away.

It is recommended that:

- Educational groups should be established to benefit all children living in child-headed households. The employment of additional social service professionals (social and social auxiliary workers) should be prioritised to improve service delivery on the meso-level.
- Therapeutic and peer groups should be made available to children living in child-headed households. Social workers should be educated about the advantages of utilising these types of groups when rendering services to child-headed households.
- Adult caregivers should be appointed to ensure that children of child-headed households are supervised and monitored.
- Operational resources such as vehicles should be made available to social workers to ensure they can travel to different areas to investigate potential caregivers and to implement the stipulations in legislation pertaining to the care and protection of children.
- If adult caregivers are not appointed, children should be seen as in need of care and protection in terms of section 150(1) of the Children's Act and placed in alternative care.
- Community support should be encouraged to assist in the care of the children when adult caregivers are not available.

7.3.5 Theme 5: Nature of child-headed households on the macro-level

The fifth theme that was identified was the nature of child-headed households on the macro-level. Two subthemes with their respective categories emerged from this theme namely, child-headed households were exposed to poverty and food deprivation and children in child-headed households had material needs.

Four categories emerged from the first subtheme, namely that children were living without sufficient income, that they had inadequate shelters, that they were exposed to child labour and that they were vulnerable to sexual abuse and prostitution. Participants stated that children living in child-headed households were exposed to poverty as they did not receive any income. These children also did not have access to social security or other grants in terms of the Social Assistance Act, which was often because they did not have the required documentation such as birth certificates, and not having an adult caregiver who could obtain the grant on their behalf. Participants also confirmed that because children of child-headed households were living without adult caregivers, the children did not have sufficient income and had to start begging for money or would become child labourers to be able to buy basic food items. Participants concluded that children in child-headed households were vulnerable

to perpetrators of sexual abuse or were practising prostitution because they had no adult supervision and very little or no food and clothes.

The second subtheme that came to the fore was that children in child-headed households had material needs. Two categories emerged from this subtheme namely, that they required adequate food and sufficient income. Participants reported that children from child-headed households needed food because they generally struggled to acquire basic food items and often had to beg for food from neighbours or on the streets. Participants also indicated that children living in child-headed households required sufficient income to satisfy their basic needs for food. Participants mentioned that the majority of children from child-headed households did not benefit from social grants.

It can therefore be concluded that:

- Children of child-headed households are exposed to poverty and subsequently suffer from a lack of food and income; they are also exposed to child labour and sexual abuse and child prostitution, thus their rights to care and protection are infringed upon.
- Children of child-headed households mostly do not obtain social grants that they are entitled to because they do not have the required documentation (birth certificates) or adult caregivers to receive the grants on their behalf.

The following are recommended:

- Children of child-headed households should be provided with adult caregivers as stipulated in section 137 of the Children's Amendment Act who can monitor and supervise them to ensure that they are not vulnerable to perpetrators of sexual abuse and child prostitution and to ensure care and protection according to international, regional and local policy directives.
- If adult caregivers are not appointed, child-headed households should be seen as children in need of care and protection in terms of section 150 of the Children's Act and should be provided with alternative care options as stipulated in section 28 of the South African Constitution.
- Section 137(5)(a) in the Children's Amendment Act that stipulates that an adult caregiver should apply for social security should be adapted to include that child welfare NPOs may apply for social security on behalf of child-headed households to ensure that such children will have access to financial resources.

7.3.6 Theme 6: Social services to support child-headed households on the macro-level

Social services to support child-headed households on the macro-level emerged as a theme in this study, three subthemes were identified from the data collected namely, provision of food parcels, community awareness campaigns and social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the macro-level.

The first subtheme indicated that children living in child-headed households were provided with food parcels. Participants from both study groups indicated that food parcels were provided to alleviate the huge challenge of poverty experienced in child-headed households. However, it was established that providing food parcels to children living in child-headed households had been difficult due to the reduction of government funding. The second subtheme highlighted that community awareness campaigns to educate community members about the issues children are exposed to, such as substance abuse and teenage pregnancy, were established. Participants indicated that community awareness campaigns were established to raise awareness about issues that affected child-headed households. These campaigns were expected to help community members understand the difficult situation of child-headed households so that they could assist these households.

The third subtheme that came to fore was the social services that should be rendered to child-headed households on the macro-level. Three categories emerged from this subtheme namely, educational assistance to continue school attendance, provision of sufficient income, and provision of adequate shelter. Participants expressed their views that children of child-headed households were experiencing various challenges with school attendance which often caused them to drop out of school. Participants agreed that educational assistance was required to assure that these children could continue attending school, such as providing them with school uniforms and books. In the absence of adult caregivers, the administrative requirements of schools, such as the permission of guardians to partake in school trips were not obtainable, thus excluding the children from access to equal opportunities. The services that were mentioned by participants and delivered to child-headed households were limited because they only included provision of food parcels and community awareness campaigns. There were other significant services that should be rendered to child-headed households to address their circumstances; however these were not mentioned, including provision of sufficient income, provision of adequate shelter and educational assistance to help continue school attendance. These services are crucial and should be rendered to ensure that their rights to care and protection are upheld. It can therefore be concluded that:

- Food parcels and community awareness programmes are the services that are delivered to child-headed households, but due to the reduction in government funding the food parcel service had become difficult to sustain.
- When children of child-headed households are not provided with food parcels in the absence of an adult caregiver to apply for social security, their rights of access to food and basic nutrition as entrenched in sections 27(1)(b) and 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution, are violated.
- Children living in child-headed households need educational assistance to achieve their educational goals, as well as adult caregivers to ensure equal opportunities.
- The conditions in which children of child-headed households live, such as shacks and mud huts, are not sufficient and not favourable to their growth, development, or safety.
- Services such as provision of sufficient income, provision of adequate shelter and educational assistance to help continue school attendance are significant to address the circumstances of child-headed households, however these services were not mentioned.

The following are recommended:

- Sustainable food parcels should be provided to address food deprivation in child-headed households in the absence of social security and the absence of an adult caregiver.
- The government should uphold the rights of child-headed households to adequate shelter by providing them with adequate housing. If this is not financially feasible, the children should be seen as children in need of care and protection with a constitutional right to alternative care.
- Services such as provision of sufficient income, provision of adequate shelter and educational assistance to help continue school attendance should be delivered to child-headed households. If these services are not available due to lack of people power and resources, the children should be removed and placed in alternative care.

7.3.7 Theme 7: Reflections about policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households

Reflections about policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households emerged as a theme in this study. Four subthemes emerged, namely that legislation is guiding service rendering, child-headed households are not a protective measure, the best interests of children in child-headed households were not considered, and that adequate resources are required to implement the policies

Within the first subtheme, participants indicated that legislation such as the Children's Act, guided their service rendering to child-headed households and enabled them to respond to the needs of these children to ensure they were protected. Participants indicated that, although they were guided by legislation which provided that children in child-headed households must be under the care of an adult caregiver, the process of finding an adult caregiver was challenging as there was a lack of adult caregivers willing to take care of the children in their households, often resulting in children continuing to live on their own while social workers searched for suitable adult caregivers or potential placements.

The second subtheme was that child-headed households were not a protective measure as indicated in policy. Participants mentioned that they did not consider child-headed households to be a protective measure because the children of child-headed households did not have adult caregivers and could not look after themselves, thus being on their own made them more vulnerable to issues such as teenage pregnancy. The participants further reported that the normalisation of child-headed households resulted in the households to be regarded as a protective measure which was a predicament for the children that resided in them.

The third subtheme was that the best interests of children in child-headed households were not considered. Most participants indicated that the best interests of children in child-headed households were not being considered. This statement was based on the difficult circumstances the children were living in, such as being exposed to poverty and dropping out of school. Participants emphasised that they were struggling to consider the best interests of these children because of the high demand for services from communities. The participants emphasised that there was a dire need for more social workers to be employed to assist them and their child-welfare NPOs with their workload. Some of the participants did however indicate that they considered the best interests of these children by ensuring that the children were placed in foster care where their needs were satisfied.

The fourth subtheme identified that adequate resources were required to implement existing legislation and policies. Participants from both groups indicated that resources to execute legislation were insufficient making it impossible to provide the services that were expected from them in terms of legislation. Participants indicated that they required human, financial and operational resources, such as vehicles, laptops, and telephones to function. In addition, participants indicated that the state failed to provide resources such as safe houses where vulnerable children could be placed had they been removed from their child-headed households.

It can therefore be concluded that:

- Although legislation is utilised to uphold the rights of child-headed households to care and protection, the implementation of the appointment of adult caregivers according to section 137 of the Children's Amendment Act is problematic as it is difficult to find family and community members who are willing to accept this role due to the responsibility that goes with it. Therefore, service rendering was often not guided by legislation.
- Child-headed households could not be regarded as a protective measure as was the intention with acknowledging it as a separate family form in legislation, as adult caregivers were not appointed, resulting in the expectation that the children should take care of themselves, which they were not able to do and made them vulnerable to different social issues such as teenage pregnancy.
- Legislation and policy are clear and it guided service rendering. However, legislation and policy could not be implemented as the social services required by children of child-headed households could often not be rendered sufficiently, due to lack of social workers as well as a shortage of resources and infrastructure such as vehicles, laptops and telephones.
- The normalisation of child-headed households was a predicament for the children of child-headed households.
- The best interest of the child principle that should be considered when taking decisions about children as indicated in the UNCRC, the ACRWC, the South African Constitution and the Children's Act was not adhered to, as the circumstances that child-headed households are exposed to are not in their best interest.
- The utilisation of section 150(1) of the Children's Act in terms whereof children of child-headed households were seen as children in need of care and protection and thus placed in foster care was seen as upholding the best interest of the child principle and the right to care and protection.
- The implementation of legislation to protect children in need of care and protection was hampered by limited resources, such as safe houses where vulnerable children could be placed had they been removed from their households.

The following are recommended:

- Section 137 in the Children's Amendment Act should be evaluated, as it is not possible to implement, leaving child-headed households without the right to parental care as indicated in the Constitution.
- The assumption in policy and legislation that child-headed households is a protective measure should be re-visited as it creates a predicament for these children. Section

150(2) in the Children's Act should be adapted to include child-headed households under section 150(1), to ensure that they are seen as children in need of care and protection and be placed in alternative care, if need be, to adhere to the rights of children to care and protection, as well as the right to alternative care when removed from the family environment according to section 28 in the Constitution.

- The resources needed to care and protect all children in South Africa should be prioritised by the government to ensure that services are rendered in line with the ratified UNCRC.
- More social workers, and adequate funding for child protection organisations should be provided to enable effective service rendering.

7.3.8 Theme 8: Reflections about rights of child-headed households to care and protection

Reflections about rights of child-headed households to care and protection emerged as a theme in this study, one subtheme was identified from the data collected namely, that rights of children of child-headed households were infringed upon.

Within this subtheme, participants indicated that various rights of children of child-headed households as established in the South African Constitution were infringed upon. These include the right to have access to social security, to have a name and nationality, to family or parental care, and to have access to adequate housing as set out in sections 26, 27 and 28 of the South African Constitution.

It can therefore be concluded that:

- The rights of children in child-headed households according to section 28 of the Constitution, such as the right to a name and nationality, social security, family or parental care, and adequate shelter, are infringed upon.

The following are recommended:

- The South African government, should, through the Department of Human Settlements, ensure that the children of child-headed households are provided with adequate housing.
- The Department of Home Affairs should ensure that children of child-headed households are able to obtain their birth certificates timeously considering their unique circumstances.
- The South African government should establish a special grant for children living in child-headed households to ensure that they have sufficient income to afford the basic items they need, such as food and clothes, in the absence of adult caregivers.

- Policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households should be evaluated to determine if it is in their best interest to live on their own, since implementation problems are experienced in practice.
- The case of child-headed households should become a matter for the Constitutional court as their rights are infringed upon.

7.3.9 Theme 9: Challenges faced in delivering social services to child-headed households

Theme 10 refers to the challenges that social workers faced in delivering social services to child-headed households. Four subthemes emerged from this theme, namely high caseloads, staff shortage, transportation challenges and limited funding.

Within the first subtheme, participants indicated that they had high caseloads which made it difficult for them to deliver effective social services to all children living in child-headed households. Additionally, participants indicated that, due to a lack of support and increased administrative tasks, some of their cases remained unfinished or unattended.

Within the second subtheme, participants from all study groups mentioned that they experienced a serious shortage of staff in the NPOs where they worked. This had a detrimental effect on their services rendering to vulnerable people, such as children of child-headed households, as they had to attend to high caseloads without any assistance. Participants added that there were many qualified but unemployed social workers who could be employed.

The third subtheme concluded that transportation challenges were a major hinderance in the effective delivery of social services. Most participants in all groups indicated that rendering social services and doing home visits were challenging due to transportation challenges. A few participants added that they were unable to intervene immediately or could not conduct regular home visits to check on the functioning of vulnerable children of child-headed households, due to operational challenges. This caused children to be exposed to extreme vulnerability without having access to social services.

The fourth subtheme indicated that limited funding was a major challenge for child and family NPOs making it difficult to render effective social services. Participants indicated that limited funding was one of the major challenges they experienced within their organisations. Participants also confirmed that child welfare NPOs were inadequately funded by the Department of Social Development, causing them not to be able to operate effectively or to render adequate social services.

It can therefore be concluded that:

- High caseloads are a major challenge for social workers and supervisors which affected their delivery of effective social services.
- A lack of employed social workers in child and family welfare NPOs impacts their delivery of effective social services.
- Challenges such as a lack of transportation to conduct home visits (operational challenges) and limited funding for child and family welfare organisations (financial challenges) impacted effective intervention especially for vulnerable groups such as child-headed households.

The following are recommended:

- Child and family welfare NPOs should be provided with sufficient funding through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and be provided with adequate transportation or vehicles for them to access clients, especially in the rural areas of South Africa, to render effective services and implement policies and legislation such as the Children's Act.
- The implementation of the Children's Act should be nationally evaluated as it is not viable to implement legislation without adequate resources.

7.3.10 Theme 10: Recommendations for improving social service delivery to children living in child-headed households

In the final theme of recommendations for improving social service delivery to children living in child-headed households, two subthemes emerged, namely, provision of sufficient funding for child welfare organisations to render effective social services and employment of more social workers.

In the first subtheme of provision of sufficient funding for child welfare NPOs to render effective social services, participants of all study groups strongly expressed the need for sufficient funding to be provided to designated child welfare NPOs to enable them to render effective social services to children living in child-headed households. Participants continued that, as they were responsible for rendering the bulk of services in the child protection system in South Africa, it was even more important that they should be sufficiently funded so that they could afford to render more effective services to vulnerable groups.

The second subtheme refers to the employment of more social workers. Participants from all study groups indicated that more social workers had to be employed to improve social service delivery to children living in child-headed households. A lack of social workers was identified as a major challenge in the delivery of effective social services because the population of

vulnerable children and families was increasing and because the available social workers struggled to render social services to those who required it, causing some children, such as those in child-headed households, not to be afforded proper social services. Due to too little staff, current employed social workers were also struggling with high caseloads and increased administrative tasks, causing them to render even fewer social services.

It can therefore be concluded that:

- The serious shortage of employed social workers was detrimental to the effective service delivery to vulnerable groups, such as children of child-headed households.
- Limited funding negatively affects the operation of child and family welfare NPOs as well as the execution of their intervention plans.
- The above-mentioned structural challenges, together with an increase in administrative tasks, cause child and family welfare NPOs to render even fewer social services.

The following are recommended:

- The South African government must evaluate their expectation that a limited number of social workers should be responsible for service delivery to protect all children.
- Designated child welfare NPOs should be adequately funded to be able to employ more social workers and render effective social services.
- Policy documents should recognise children in child-headed households as children in difficult circumstances and in need of care and protection, amend legislation, and devote special attention and resources to address their circumstances.
- The lack of social workers, especially in the rural areas of South Africa and in informal settlements where many of the child-headed households are located must be acknowledged by the State, as services are limited in these areas and a variety of social issues are prevalent.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Considering that there is a lack of adequate research on the rights of child-headed households to care and protection as well social services rendered to these children, the following recommendations are made in terms of future research:

- Similar studies should be conducted in all districts in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape province as the present study only focused on one district in each of the mentioned provinces to determine the rights of these children as well as the services that are rendered to them in the absence of their adult caregivers.

- Similar studies should also be conducted in other provinces such as KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng as these are some of the provinces in South Africa where child-headed households are also prevalent.
- A national study should be conducted with social workers and social worker supervisors employed by the Department of Social Development about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection because in the current study designated child welfare NPOs were the focus of the study and it would be interesting to establish how the Department manages its service provision to these children.

7.5 CONCLUSION

This study found that children living in child-headed households on the micro-level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems perspective were exposed to challenging circumstances, such as emotional difficulties as they had to go through life without the care and protection of their parents or adult caregivers. It was also found that these children experienced anger, frustration, and depression as a result of their circumstances. The findings, furthermore, showed that under these circumstances' children of child-headed households needed emotional support and nurturing households as well as counselling services. The research demonstrated that, to eradicate the circumstances of these children on the meso-level, social services, such as home visits, assessment of circumstances to determine the need for care and protection, individual counselling services and placement into foster care, must be delivered. The study highlighted that family counselling services must also be rendered on the micro-level as they assisted greatly in family reconstruction, even though the study showed that these services were currently not prioritised.

This study also revealed that on the meso-level, children living in child-headed households were isolated within their communities, that they had very little support from their extended families and community members and that they tended to engage in underage drinking and smoking. Alongside this challenge, it was revealed that the children often dropped out of school, especially the heads of the households. It was found that the children needed a parental figure to take responsibility for the management of the household. On the macro-level, the study revealed that children from child-headed households were affected by poverty and food deprivation causing them to become exposed to multiple challenges such as child labour, in an effort to earn money for food. Furthermore, the findings clearly indicated that at this level, food parcels were sometimes provided to such households and that community awareness campaigns were established. However, there is still a need that social services, such as family support services and educational assistance be rendered to these children. Although it was found that existing legislation served as a guide to social services delivery,

the overarching issue of not having enough resources to successfully implement such legislation, was always present. Due to lack of resources such as transport and working tools such as laptops to implement the legislation and render social services, the study also found that the rights of children in child-headed households, such as the right parental care and social services amongst other, were violated.

The study found that social workers and social worker supervisors faced multiple challenges in their attempt to deliver social services to child-headed households, such as high caseloads, staff shortages, limited funding, and transportation challenges. It was thus recommended that the provision of sufficient funding and employment of social workers would significantly contribute to the effective delivery of social services to vulnerable groups, such as children of child-headed households. Therefore, the delivery of social services to child-headed households was limited due to a lack of resources and finances and as a result the rights of children of child-headed households to care and protection are not upheld despite their difficult circumstances and needs in the South African context.

In this concluding chapter, the findings of the research were summarised, and recommendations were made to address the reflections of role players about social delivery to child-headed households and their rights to care and protection. Finally, recommendations have been made for future research in the field.

The research was successful in that it contributed to rich findings gathered and distilled from the views, thoughts, professional opinions, observations, and analyses of role players, such as social workers, social worker supervisors and a designated person of the provincial Department of Social Development. The research thus provided insight into the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and social services from a human rights-based perspective because the recommendations of the research could contribute to the improvement of the delivery of social services to child-headed households and could ensure that their rights to care and protection are upheld, especially in the absence of their adult caregivers or parents. Such service improvements would ultimately benefit the children of child-headed households, who have been overlooked in South Africa.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to take part in a research project. Please take some time to read the information below which will explain the details of this research project.

Please feel free to contact the researcher about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are completely satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you could be involved. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to decline to participate. In other words, you may choose to take part, or not. Saying no will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever.

You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part initially. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so, for example if you influence other participants in the completion of their questionnaires. Furthermore, if you decide to withdraw from the study once data has already been collected, the researcher will discontinue the participant's research activities and obliterate the collected data.

The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research at Stellenbosch University has approved this study (Project ID #: 24331). We commit to conduct the study according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the South African Department of Health Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Studies (2015), Department of Social Work Ethical Screening Committee (DESC) of the University of Stellenbosch and Ethical Code of the South African Council for Social Service Professions (1986).

1. WHO IS CONDUCTING THIS STUDY?

This research study is conducted by Niccoh Diago

The researcher is from the Department of Social Work at Stellenbosch University.

2. WHY DO WE INVITE YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

You were invited as a possible participant in this study because you are a social worker/social worker supervisor/designated personnel of the Department of Social Development and you could have information about the services rendered to child-headed households, the needs of this group, as well as ideas about policy implementation.

3. WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT?

The research is about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection, with the purpose to gain an in-depth understanding about the reflections of role players on children living in child-headed households' rights to care and protection and the nature of the social welfare services rendered to the households.

4. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to partake in a semi-structured online/virtual interview. You will be asked to select a day and time based on your convenience to conduct the interview. The interview will be recorded to allow the researcher to concentrate on the interview rather than taking notes which can act as

a distraction. The interview will be conducted for a duration of 45 minutes to 1 hour to ensure that all the necessary information that will contribute to the study is acquired.

5. ARE THERE ANY RISKS IN MY TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

There are no perceived risks to this study as the focus is on professional views and reflections about the rights of child-headed households to care and protection. A probable discomfort may be setting aside time from one's work schedule to participate in the interviews. Time slots and a schedule for both the participant and researcher will be negotiated in this regard. Any reservations on any of the aspects of the schedule you may experience during the interview can be discussed and clarified at any time.

6. WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

The results of this study will allow insight into the rights of child-headed households to care and protection and the implementation of policy and legislation, through the reflections of role players. The findings of this study can be used to understand role players' viewpoints about the rights of child-headed households to social services and ultimately address their plight as role players are expected to provide support to these households. Furthermore, the new knowledge obtained through this study could assist the organisations in developing strategies that would focus on responding to the needs of child-headed households, thereby ensuring that the rights of these children to care and protection are protected.

7. WILL I BE PAID TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY AND ARE THERE ANY COSTS INVOLVED?

No payment in any form will be received for participating in this study.

8. WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO MY INFORMATION?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as

required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained in that only the researcher will be aware of the identity of participants and completed interview schedules will not be linked to any specific participants. All completed interview schedules will be managed, analysed, and processed by the researcher and will be kept in a safe place in a locked cabinet accessible to the researcher only, as well as in Microsoft Cloud. The interview will be recorded. The participant can at any time ask to review the recording. The recording will be kept in the researcher's room, in a locked cabinet accessible to the researcher only. Transcriptions will be safeguarded on the personal computer of the researcher with a password that is known only to the researcher as well as on the Microsoft cloud. The study will be released by Stellenbosch University in the form of a thesis that is available for viewing to those who have access to the University's library website.

9. HOW DO I MAKE CONTACT WITH THE RESEARCHERS?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the supervisor or student-researcher.

Supervisor: Dr M Strydom, Department of Social Work, University of Stellenbosch,

Researcher: Niccoh Diago

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions, concerns, or a complaint regarding your rights as a research participant in this research project, please contact Mrs Clarissa Robertson [] at the Division for Research Development.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant, I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form, or it was read to me, and it is written in a language in which I am fluent and with which I am comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and I am satisfied that all my questions have been answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary, and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and nothing bad will come of it – I will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I agree that the interview with me can be [video-recorded / audio-recorded].

By signing below, I _____ (*name of participant*) agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by _____ (*name of principal investigator*).

Signature of Participant

Date

DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER

As the **researcher**, I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
--	---

	I did/did not use an interpreter. (If an interpreter is used then the interpreter must sign the declaration below.)
--	---

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Signature of Interpreter (if applicable)

Date

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



FIRST PHASE (SOCIAL WORKERS)

The rights of child-headed households to care and protection: Reflections of role-players on social service delivery.

Researcher: Niccoh Diago

1. IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS OF PARTICIPANT

What is your position in the organisation?

Years of experience in the position?

Number of families on caseload?

Degree obtained?

Year Graduated?

2. NATURE OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

2.1 Explain the circumstances of child-headed households in the area where you are rendering services?

2.2 Discuss the needs of children living in child-headed households in this area?

2.3 Section 281(b) to (c) of the South African Constitution clearly states that every child has the right to education, family care or parental care. The Amendment Act in its section 137(2)(a) to (b) further requires that a child-headed household must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court, or an organ of state, or a non-governmental organisation determined by the provincial head of social development. In your opinion, who provides care and protection for the children in the absence of their parents?

3. POLICY AND LEGISLATION RELATED TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

3.1 (Section 28 (1b) of the South African Constitution provides for the right to family care, parental care, or appropriate alternative care to a child who is removed from family life, share with me how the Constitution guides your services to children living in child-headed households). How does the legislation and policies that you are familiar with guide your service provision to children living in child-headed households and address their rights to care and protection?

3.2 (The South African Children's Act (No:38 of 2005) in its section 150 (2-3) for instance endorse and formally recognises child-headed households as an independent family form, if this is in the best interests of all the children living in the household) Share your reflections regarding children in child-headed households being classified as a protective measure?

3.3 South African children have a special place in the Constitution as their rights are provided extensive protection, with section 28 specifically devoted to children's rights, such as the right to family care, parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment as enshrined in section 28 (1b) as well as the right to social services as stipulated in section 28 (1c)

In your view how are the rights of children in child-headed households to care and protection upheld? Would you say the best interests of these children are considered?

4. SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

4.1 Section 150(2) states that child-headed households should be referred for investigation by a social worker, meaning that in the first instance the social worker as the main professional implementing the Act should visit children living in child-headed households and conduct an investigation to determine their need for care and protection. Explain the procedure that you follow when a child-headed household is reported to the organisation?

4.2 What types of social services does your organisation render to children living in child-headed households?

4.3 What types of social services should be rendered to children living in child-headed households?

4.4 What challenges do you face as social workers in implementing social service delivery to children living in child-headed households?

5. POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATIONS IN SERVICE DELIVERY

5.1 What are your recommendations for improving social service delivery to children living in child-headed households in South Africa?

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



SECOND PHASE (SUPERVISORS)

The rights of child-headed households to care and protection: Reflections of role-players on social service delivery.

Researcher: Nicco Diago

1. IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS OF PARTICIPANT

What is your position in the organisation?

Years of experience in the position?

Qualification obtained?

Year Graduated?

2. NATURE OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

2.1 Explain the circumstances of child-headed households in the area where you are rendering services?

2.2 Discuss the needs of children living in child-headed households in this area?

2.3 Section 28 1(b-c) of the South African Constitution clearly states that every child has the right to education, family care or parental care. The Amendment Act in its section 137 (2a-b) further requires that a child-headed household must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court, or an organ of state, or a non-governmental organisation determined by the provincial head of social development. In your opinion, who provides care and protection for the children in the absence of their parents?

3. POLICY AND LEGISLATION RELATED TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

3.1 (Section 28 (1b) of the South African Constitution provides for the right to family care, parental care, or appropriate alternative care to a child who is removed from

family life, share with me how the Constitution guides your services to children living in child-headed households) How does the legislation and policies that you are familiar with guide your service provision to children living in child-headed households and address their rights to care and protection?

3.2 (The South African Children's Act (No:38 of 2005) in its section 150 (2-3) for instance endorse and formally recognises child-headed households as an independent family form, if this is in the best interests of all the children living in the household) Share your reflections regarding children in child-headed households being classified as a protective measure?

3.3 Since South African children have a special place in the Constitution as their rights are provided extensive protection, with section 28 specifically devoted to children's rights. Right to family care, parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment as enshrined in section 28 (1b) as well as the right to social services as stipulated in section 28 (1c)

In your view how are the rights of children in child-headed households to care and protection upheld? Would you say the best interests of these children are considered?

4. SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

4.1 Section 150(2) states that child-headed households should be referred for investigation by a social worker, meaning that in the first instance the social worker as the main professional implementing the Act should visit children living in child-headed households and conduct an investigation to determine their need for care and protection. Explain the procedure that you follow when a child-headed household is reported to the organisation?

4.2 What types of social services does your organisation render to children living in child-headed households?

4.3 What types of social services should be rendered to children living in child-headed households?

4.4 What challenges do organisations experience in delivering social services to children in child-headed households?

5. POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATIONS IN SERVICE DELIVERY

5.1 What are your recommendations for improving social service delivery to children living in child-headed households in South Africa?

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



THIRD PHASE – DESIGNATED PERSONNEL OF PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENT SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The rights of child-headed households to care and protection: Reflections of role-players on social service delivery.

Researcher: Niccoh Diago

1. IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS OF PARTICIPANT

What is your position in the department?

Years of experience in the position?

Degree obtained?

Year Graduated?

2. POLICY AND LEGISLATION RELATED TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

2.1 Describe your views regarding children in child-headed households being classified as a separate family form?

2.2 How are the rights of children living in child-headed households to care and protection upheld?

2.3 Describe the obstacles in the implementation of policy and legislation?

3. SOCIAL SERVICES TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

3.1 Discuss the social services that should be rendered to support child-headed households in this area?

4. POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATIONS IN SERVICE DELIVERY

4.1 What are your recommendations for improving social service delivery to children living in child-headed households in South Africa?

APPENDIX E – REC APPROVAL LETTER



CONFIRMATION OF RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

30 March 2022

Project number: 24331

Project Title: The rights of child-headed households to care and protection: Reflections of role-players on social service delivery.

Dear Mr N Diago

Identified supervisor(s) and/or co-investigator(s):

Dr M Strydom

Your REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form submitted on 02/02/2022 17:07 was reviewed and approved by the Social, Behavioural and Education Research Ethics Committee (REC: SBE).

Your research ethics approval is valid for the following period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
30 March 2022	29 March 2025

GENERAL COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:

The researcher has indicated in section 8.1 that no gatekeeper permissions are required, yet a number of organizations are identified in the proposal. The researcher should please ensure that access to participants is properly negotiated and that necessary permissions to contact participants are in place; providing the REC with some record of approvals is suggested. [ACTION REQUIRED]

INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.
2. Your approval is based on the information you provided in your online research ethics application form. If you are required to make amendments to or deviate from the proposal approved by the REC, please contact the REC: SBE office for advice: applyethics@sun.ac.za
3. Always use this project ID number (24331) in all communications with the REC: SBE concerning your project.
4. Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, and monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process, where required.

RENEWAL OF RESEARCH BEYOND THE EXPIRATION DATE

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the project approval period expires if renewal of ethics approval is required.

If you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE to close the active REC record for this project.

Project documents approved by the REC:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Budget	Research Budget 2022	10/01/2022	Word
Investigator CV (PI)	NICCOH DIAGO CV 2022	10/01/2022	Word
Data collection tool	Interview schedule (3)	10/01/2022	Word
Research Protocol/Proposal	Diago Proposal 10 January 2022	02/02/2022	word
Informed Consent Form	SUHUMANITIES Consent form template_Written 2022	02/02/2022	word
Default	TEMPLATE FOR RESPONSE LETTER	02/02/2022	word

APPENDIX F



Dear Sir/Madam,

Permission to conduct research for a PhD in Social Work

I am a doctoral student at the Department of Social Work: Stellenbosch University and am currently doing research on the **“Rights of child-headed households to care and protection. Reflections of role-players on social service delivery”**. I am interested in gathering the views and reflections of **three** social workers and **one** social worker supervisor about this phenomenon. The research study has already been approved by Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee, with project ID number (24331). I am now also seeking permission to do research with **three** social workers and **one** social worker supervisor from the organization. For this research I would have to conduct online/virtual interviews with the participants via Zoom or Microsoft teams. Each interview should last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and will be done at a time that is convenient for each participant. Any participation will be subject to participants’ informed consent. The participants will also be informed that they could withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. The participants will not be paid for partaking in this study.

You are welcome to request more information about the study by contacting me or my supervisor at the contact details provided below. Please find attached, for your convenience, a draft permission letter that you could sign and send to me should you award me permission to conduct the study in your organization.

I look forward to your response.

Kind regards

Nicco Diago

Supervisor:
Professor Marianne Strydom

APPENDIX G – INDEPENDENT CODER DECLARATION

INDEPENDENT CODER DECLARATION

I, Tirelo Mtombeni, hereby declare that I read through the researcher (Nicco Diago)'s interview transcriptions independently and met with the researcher to discuss the themes, subthemes, and categories. After the discussion, the themes, subthemes, and categories were confirmed and used as findings of the research.

T Mtombeni

25/08/2023

M of Social Work

The signatures of participants in member checking forms were included for examination purposes and were removed in the final document in order to adhere to the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality agreement that the researcher established with the organisations.

APPENDIX H: MEMBER CHECKING FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS



FIRST PHASE INTERVIEW

Participant Number PH1-P4

I hereby declare that I have read the themes, subthemes and categories done for this study:

Mark correct one with "x"

Yes

No

I hereby declare that I agree with the content of the themes, subthemes and categories:

Mark correct one with "x"

Yes

No

Signature of Participant

APPENDIX I: MEMBER CHECKING FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS



SECOND PHASE INTERVIEW

Participant Number PH2-P5

I hereby declare that I have read the themes, subthemes and categories done for this study:

Mark correct one with "x"

Yes

No

I hereby declare that that I agree with the content of the themes, subthemes and categories:

Mark correct one with "x"

Yes

No

Signature of Participant

The names of organisations in permission letters were included for examination purposes and were removed in the final document to adhere to the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality agreement that the researcher established with the organisations.

APPENDIX J: APPROVAL LETTER

10 February 2023

Permission to conduct research for PhD in Social Work

Thank you for your application for permission to conduct research for your PhD in Social Work.

After reviewing your request, we have decided to offer you the opportunity to conduct your research at the organisation. Therefore, this letter serves to give **Mr. Niccoho Diago**, doctoral student at the Department of Social Work: Stellenbosch University, permission to conduct his research at our organisation for a PhD dissertation titled **“Rights of child-headed households to care and protection. Reflections of role-players on social service delivery”**.

If you have any concerns or require additional information, you are welcome to contact us.

19 January 2023

Permission to conduct research for PhD in Social Work

Thank you for your application for permission to conduct research for your PhD in Social Work.

After reviewing your request, we have decided to offer you the opportunity to conduct your research at our organization. Therefore, this letter serves to give **Mr. Nicco Diago**, doctoral student at the Department of Social Work: Stellenbosch University, permission to conduct his research at our organization for a PhD dissertation titled **“Rights of child-headed households to care and protection. Reflections of role-players on social service delivery”**.

If you have any concerns or require additional information, you are welcome to contact us.

Kind regards

12 May 2023

Permission to conduct research for PhD in Social Work

Thank you for your application for permission to conduct research for your PhD in Social Work.

After reviewing your request, we have decided to offer you the opportunity to conduct your research at the department. Therefore, this letter serves to give **Mr. Nicco Diago**, doctoral student at the Department of Social Work: Stellenbosch University, permission to conduct his research at our department for a PhD dissertation titled **“Rights of child-headed households to care and protection. Reflections of role-players on social service delivery”**.

If you have any concerns or require additional information, you are welcome to contact us.

10 April 2023

Permission to conduct research for PhD in Social Work

Thank you for your application for permission to conduct research for your PhD in Social Work.

After reviewing your request, we have decided to offer you the opportunity to conduct your research at the department. Therefore, this letter serves to give **Mr. Nicco Diago**, doctoral student at the Department of Social Work: Stellenbosch University, permission to conduct his research at our department for a PhD dissertation titled **“Rights of child-headed households to care and protection. Reflections of role-players on social service delivery”**.

If you have any concerns or require additional information, you are welcome to contact us.

13 March 2023

Permission to conduct research for PhD in Social Work

Thank you for your application for permission to conduct research for your PhD in Social Work.

After reviewing your request, we have decided to offer you the opportunity to conduct your research at the department. Therefore, this letter serves to give **Mr. Nicco Diago**, doctoral student at the Department of Social Work: Stellenbosch University, permission to conduct his research at our department for a PhD dissertation titled **“Rights of child-headed households to care and protection. Reflections of role-players on social service delivery”**.

If you have any concerns or require additional information, you are welcome to contact us.

12 June 2023

Permission to conduct research for PhD in Social Work

Thank you for your application for permission to conduct research for your PhD in Social Work.

After reviewing your request, we have decided to offer you the opportunity to conduct your research at the department. Therefore, this letter serves to give **Mr. Nicco Diago**, doctoral student at the Department of Social Work: Stellenbosch University, permission to conduct his research at our department for a PhD dissertation titled **“Rights of child-headed households to care and protection. Reflections of role-players on social service delivery”**.

If you have any concerns or require additional information, you are welcome to contact us.

APPENDIX K: PERMISSION LETTER



24 January 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

Permission to conduct research for a PhD in Social Work

I am a doctoral student at the Department of Social Work: Stellenbosch University and am currently doing research on the **“Rights of child-headed households to care and protection. Reflections of role-players on social service delivery”**. I am interested in gathering the views and reflections of the provincial head/deputy head or designated person of the department of Social Development about this phenomenon. The research study has already been approved by Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee, with project ID number (24331). I am now also seeking permission from the Provincial Department of Social Development to do research with **one** provincial head/deputy head or designated person of the department of Social Development.

For this research I would have to conduct online/virtual interviews with the participant via Zoom or Microsoft teams. Each interview should last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and will be done at a time that is convenient for each participant. Any participation will be subject to participants’ informed consent. The Participant will also be informed that they could withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. The participant will not be paid for partaking in this study.

You are welcome to request more information about the study by contacting me or my supervisor at the contact details provided below. Please find attached, for your convenience, a draft permission letter that you could sign and send to me should you award me permission to conduct the study in your department.

I look forward to your response.

Kind regards

Nicco Diago

Supervisor:

Professor Marianne Strydom