

**PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON THE ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE OF THE GIRL CHILD IN ZIMBABWE**

by

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# DECLARATION

**STUDENT NUMBER: 47300140**

I, **Chinyoka Kudzai**, declare that the thesis entitled PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF THE GIRL CHILD IN ZIMBABWE is my own work, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

*Chinyoka*

.....

05. 06. 2013

Mrs K. Chinyoka

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## DEDICATION

*This work is dedicated to my beloved husband Andrias, my two daughters Tanaka Audrey and Tatendaishe, my only son Tawananyasha, and to my late mother, Makanganwa.*

*I cherish the values and ethos I learnt from my late mother. Mother, you have always been my fortress, my hero, and my pillar of strength. Thank you for always encouraging me to work hard.*

## ABSTRACT

Poverty has and will continue to precipitate enormous suffering for countless children in Zimbabwe.

This study examines how the psychosocial effects of poverty affect the academic performance of the girl child. At the same time it identifies various policies and programmes designed to attenuate the negative effects of poverty on children. It is estimated that about seven out of ten families in Zimbabwe live in dire poverty because of political unrest, socioeconomic instability, economic and political sanctions, drought, environmental degradation, and HIV/AIDS.

This study is informed by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, and the humanistic perspective. A qualitative phenomenological design was used with focus group discussions, interviews and observations as data-collection instruments, with fifteen (15) Form 2 girls, six (6) teachers, and three (3) headmasters in three secondary schools in Masvingo Province. The use of the phenomenological design helped to bring to the surface deep issues, and to make the voices of the girl children heard. The Tesch's open coding method of data analysis was used to identify themes and categories.

Findings from this study revealed that the majority of the families in Zimbabwe cannot afford even the basic human needs (food and non-food items) which are necessary to sustain life, thus adversely affecting the children's health, and their emotional, physical, moral, social and academic achievements. This study also established that the girls' academic performance is affected by household chores/child labour, financial constraints, a lack of motivation, early marriages, and the lack of food, as well as health issues and sanitation, delinquent behaviour, child abuse, prostitution, the long distances to and from school, stigmatisation and marginalisation.

This study recommends early intervention programmes for children, and the sustainable development of mining, rural and urban communities. The government, and the families, should make basic education affordable to all children, irrespective of their gender.

This study also recommends that the problems be addressed by the microsystems of the school, and of the families, and the neighbourhood mesosystems (linkages) and exosystems, as well as by the macro-systems (political, ideology). Collaborative work is also needed among Zimbabweans and all stakeholders to revisit the root causes of poverty.

## **KEY TERMS**

- academic performance
- cognition
- ecological
- girl child
- phenomenological
- poverty
- psychosocial

## **ABBREVIATIONS/ACROYNMS**

HIV/AIDS	Human Immune Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
PASS	Poverty Assessment Study Survey
BEAM	Basic Education Assistance Module
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women
EFA	Education for All
FTLRP	Fast Track Land Reform Programmes
ICRC	International Convention on the Rights of the Child
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOEASC	Ministry of Education Art, Sport and Culture
MOHCW	Ministry of Health and Child Welfare
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PDL	Poverty Datum Line
SES	Social Economic Status
SPS	Schools Psychological Services
TCPL	Total Consumption Poverty Line
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
USAIDS	United States Agency for International Development
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
ZIMSEC	Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council
ZNOCP	Zimbabwe National Orphan Care Programme



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# CHAPTER ONE

## ORIENTATION AND OVERVIEW TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 Background to the study

The relationship between poverty, the psychosocial development, and the academic performance of the girl child is far from simple and direct, and is much more complicated than merely the effects of poverty alone. Poverty has and will continue to precipitate enormous suffering for countless children in Zimbabwe.

This subject has attracted widespread attention because of the effects of drought, the land issue, political unrest, socio-economic instability, economic and political sanctions, and also the scourge of HIV/AIDS, which exacerbates poverty in Zimbabwe. These aspects were noted to increase poverty, thus the inequalities at every household, community and regional level, undermining all efforts at poverty reduction, income and asset distribution, productivity and economic growth (Moyo & Yeros, 2007). Even though the Zimbabwe Millennium Development Goal no. 1 aims to eradicate poverty and hunger by 2015, some girl children continue to be faced with many psychosocial challenges that are somehow perpetuated by the rising Total Consumption Poverty Line (TCPL) or Poverty Datum Line for most people in Zimbabwe (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010:189). According to the World Bank Development Report (2012), more than 350 million people, over half of Africa's population, are living below the poverty line of one dollar a day. This implies that poverty, to a larger extent, excludes many children from school.

It is against this background that this study is carried out.

The number of girl children living in poverty in Zimbabwe and in the rest of the world is continually increasing. Of the total world population of about 6.8 billion, 925 million people are living in poverty; about 98% of these people are from developing countries (United Nations, 2012). The United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAIDS) (2006) report that current estimates indicate that more

than 300 million children in developing countries are at risk of not realising their full potential because of poverty and HIV/AIDS. It is estimated that an average of seven out of ten girls in Zimbabwe live in dire poverty and drop out of school because of poverty-related reasons (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011; Nyamukapa & Gregson, 2005). The majority of Zimbabwe's poor (88%) live in the rural areas; communal farming areas make up 76% of the poor and 82% of the very poor in Zimbabwe (Robertson, 2011).

In Zimbabwe the increased cost of living has an adverse impact on the education of girls. A study conducted in 2008 showed a decline in the number of girl students registering for the O-level examinations for the number of subjects for which they registered (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011:145). Their families do not have the means to sustain life, thus adversely affecting the children's health, intellectual capabilities, academic achievements, and their emotional, physical, and moral behaviour, and social development. Understanding the scope and severity of poverty in Zimbabwe is critical to develop intervention measures and social policies to protect the children at risk.

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), meant to address the problem of urban and rural poverty, led to political unrest, and to socio and economic instability (Moyo, 2012; Mutasa, 2010). Investors withdrew from the country, and many people lost their jobs. This led to a standstill in the country's economy; the government found itself facing budget deficits, and having to make supplementary budgets because of inflation (Frame, 2008). All the above have a bearing on the psychosocial development of girl children.

Zimbabwe also has primarily an agrarian and mining economy. With bad climate changes and negative land reform policies, as well as poor economic and political decisions, and also economic sanctions imposed on the country, the nation has lost its export earnings. Centrally, food insecurity was closely linked to changing activities on the farms, and the FTLRP became a key factor towards a complex humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe (Frame, 2008:31). Moyo and Yeros (2007:104) remark that as a result, by 2007, the state of affairs was "...evident in the statistics of high infant mortality, chronic malnutrition, vulnerability to preventable diseases, low life expectancy and high illiteracy among the girl child".

Moyo (2012), Abebe and Aase (2007:1063) contend that economic and political transformations affect the girl child in multifaceted ways. Research has shown that many girl children do not have access to secondary education, despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward. Hlupo and Tsikira (2012); Acosta (2011); Chitiga and Chinoona (2011); Kaba and Musonda (2011); Saito (2011); and Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku (2012) identified child labour, poverty and the lack of sponsorship, malnutrition, culture and religion, truancy, broken homes, and the engagement of children as house helps, as the factors, or the clog in the wheel, of children's access to secondary education.

Thus, most of the hurdles faced by the girl child are poverty-related. These factors include the lack of food, education, medical care, sanitation, abuse, stress, violence, early pregnancy, intergenerational sex, diseases, stigmatisation, and societal discrimination (Rusinga & Moyo, 2012; Chitiga & Chinoona, 2011; Chireshe, 2010; Chireshe, Jadezweni, Cekiso, & Maphosa, 2010; Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010; Manwa, Ndamba, & Manwa, 2010; Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2009; Abebe & Aase, 2007). All of the above impact heavily on the psychosocial development of children, especially of the girl child.

Poverty affects girl children's psychosocial development across multiple contexts, including the family, home, neighbourhood, and school (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Chireshe, 2010; Chilton, Chyatte, & Breaux, 2007:263), and have detrimental effects on their socio-emotional and cognitive functioning, and their academic achievement (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan 2007:8; Conger & Donellan, 2007:24). Children living in poverty are much more prone to the health and safety risks associated with malnutrition, disease, infection, and injury than are children who are not so poor (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2010:156; Jensen, 2007; Lacour & Tissington, 2011:552). These health and safety risks cause a myriad of problems for the learner.

Poverty is also associated with the high rates of academic failure or grade retention (Stevens, Finucane, Paciorek, Flaxman, White, Donner & Ezzati, 2012; Chabaya, et al., 2009; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 2007), and the higher incidences of school drop-out (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Connell, 2010). Adolescent parenthood is higher among poor teenagers (Chabaya, et al., 2009, and girl children raised in poverty have poorer employment records as adults (Abebe, 2009). Furthermore, an increased likelihood of smoking, prostitution, teenage pregnancies, and

illegal drug use is associated with poverty among children (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012; Brantlinger, 2011; Chireshe, et al., 2010; Chireshe, 2010; Kapungu, 2007).

More research is essential for educators charged with making informed decisions on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl learners in Zimbabwe.

UNICEF (2011:13) states that girls are disproportionately victims of intolerance, discrimination and violence in the education system in Africa, despite the countries being signatories to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1990 World Summit for Children, and the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien; all of which affirm the right of every human being to education and universal primary education by 2015. The Millennium Development Goals also advocate equal education for all by 2015. Despite heightened international efforts to bring more attention to poverty and human development, the most vulnerable children, the girls, are still the most invisible (Chilton, et al., 2007:263). This perpetuates the cycle of poverty and poor human development (Cameron, 2012; Engle & Black, 2008).

To date, associations between poverty and the academic performance of the girl child have not been robustly demonstrated in Zimbabwe. Limited research has been conducted thus far to understand the relationship between poverty and the psychological development of the girl child. In Zimbabwe and the world over not much research has been done on this subject. There is also a heated debate on the policies, programmes and inventions to attenuate poverty's negative influence on child development and academic performance. Most research that has been carried out to date only emphasise the physical and health effects of poverty (Abebe, 2009:42). Less has been written on the intellectual, behavioural and socio-emotional effects on the girl child (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011).

The research that has been done adopted the quantitative design, while this researcher aims to close the gap in the research by making use of only qualitative methods to establish the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl children in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

## **1.2 Literature review**

### **1.2.1 The theoretical framework**

The study is grounded in Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the humanistic perspective.

#### **1.2.1.1 The ecological theory**

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory examines major theories of the processes by which economic deprivation results in children's psychosocial problems. Chilton, et al. (2007) indicate that the theory provides a useful framework for examining the theories on the effects of economic deprivation on the children's holistic development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory suggests that people's surroundings, including their home, school, work, church, neighbourhood, culture and government all have an influence on the way the child develops (Donald, et al., 2010; Berk, 2007). Bronfenbrenner (2008) suggests that the development of the individual is a culmination of many direct and indirect influences, which either facilitate or impede the individual's potential, consisting of five nested structures, namely the microsystems, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.

Children's microsystems include any immediate relationships or organisations they interact with, such as their immediate family, school, peers, neighbours, and caregivers. Within the microsystems of the home, the stress-coping theory and family process models are frequently used to explain the socio-emotional development effects of poverty. The stressful life events or chronic strains caused by economic deprivation appear to affect the children's cognitive functioning by eroding the parent's coping behaviour, creating psychological distress and marital discord, and resulting in parenting practices that are uninvolved, inconsistent, emotionally unresponsive and harsh (Moore, Redd, Burkhouer, Mbwana, & Collins, 2009; Bronfenbrenner, 2008).

Bronfenbrenner's next level, the mesosystem, describes how the different aspects of a child's microsystem work together for the child (Cole, Cole & Lightfoot, 2009; O'Neil, 2011). The level of the exosystem includes the other people and places that the child may not interact with

directly, but who still have a large effect on her/him, such as the parents' workplaces, the extended family members, and the neighbourhood. Bronfenbrenner (2008) describes the macrosystem as the one that involves the dominant socioeconomic structures, as well as the values, beliefs and practices that influence all the other social systems. The chronosystem involves development over time that affects the interactions between these systems. Understanding the interactions of these systems is therefore important in understanding how the girl child develops and what factors may lead to her failure.

Closely related to Bronfenbrenner's model, is Rutter's Pathway Model (Rutter, 2008:16), which endeavours to explain that children born in poverty may have self-righting tendencies, making them much more resilient to pressures of poverty. On the other hand, the De Lones Situational Theory indicates that children do survive in overlapping settings or circles; hence we find that once born of poor parents, you may become poorer, especially if a girl (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010). Because of the self-righting tendencies, some girl children end up believing that they are to remain poor, and can thus become accustomed to poverty, and learn to live with it. However, if somebody comes and casts a lifeline, then the path can change to positive outcomes. There is therefore the possibility of a girl child becoming rich, if capacitated.

### **1.2.1.2 The humanistic theory**

The humanist school of thought also informed this study, especially the contributions of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Basically, humanists believe in the goodness of the individual, his/her ability to make choices, and purposefully work towards being the best he/she can be (becoming a fully-functioning individual, or self-actualisation). The key concepts underlying Rogers' theory are unconditional positive regard, empathy, congruency/genuineness, freedom of expression and self-concept. They are necessary and sufficient conditions for the promotion of the learning of girl children.

Abraham Maslow proposed a theory of 'needs' based on a hierarchical model, with the basic needs at the bottom, and the higher needs at the top (the physiological, safety, love, esteem, cognitive, and aesthetic needs, and the needs for self-actualisation and transcendence). The central point in Maslow's theory is that people tend to satisfy their needs systematically, starting



with the basic physiological needs, and then moving up the hierarchy. He believed that the higher-level needs can only be achieved if the lower-order needs have been satisfied first. For example, a hungry girl child is not likely to be motivated to self-actualisation until her hunger is satisfied.

### **1.2.2 The psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of children**

Despite the efforts being made by the governments of developing countries to combat all poverty by 2015, the number of children exposed to it continues to increase. Poor children face a higher risk of developing a variety of psychosocial problems. These include depression (Nova, Andrews & Carlson, 2006:12), internalising and externalising symptoms, lower levels of sociability and initiative (United States of America Census Bureau, 2009:7), problematic peer relations, disruptive classroom behaviour, and developmental delay (Cataldi, Laird, & Ramani, 2009).

Research by Hlupo and Tsikira (2012), Chireshe, et al. (2010), Chilton, et al. (2007), and Pleiss and Conley (2009:56) demonstrated that living in poverty has a wide range of negative effects on the physical and mental health and the wellbeing of children. Poverty impacts on children within their various contexts, namely at home, in the school, in their neighbourhoods, and in their communities (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010:192). Thus, poverty is linked with negative conditions such as sub-standard housing, homelessness, inadequate nutrition and food insecurity, a lack of access to health care, unsafe neighbourhoods, and under-resourced schools, all of which adversely impact on the holistic development of children (Abebe, 2009:21).

Poor girl children are also at a greater risk of several negative outcomes, such as poor academic achievement, school drop-out, abuse, neglect, behavioural and socio-emotional problems, physical health problems, and developmental delays (Kent, 2006:96; Moore, et al, 2009; Chilton, et al., 2007:40-44). These effects are compounded by the barriers children and their families encounter when trying to access physical and mental health care (Abebe, 2009, Pleiss & Conley, 2009:55).

Because of the high prevalence of poverty, many young girls from the ages of 11 to 16 years engage in risky sexual behaviour, which makes them vulnerable to HIV, STDs, and unplanned

pregnancies. Early marriages may be a consequence of poverty, because the parents did not have the financial ability to pay the girl child's school fees. A study by UNICEF (2009:6) established that women and girls suffer the most from food insecurity and poverty. When women experience food insecurity, their mental and emotional states are altered, which can negatively affect their psychosocial development (Ecker & Nene, 2012; Ecker & Breisinger, 2012; Nabarro, Menon, Ruel, & Yosef, 2012). According to UNAIDS (2008), four out of five new infections in Zimbabwe in the 13 to 18 years age group in 2005 were among girls, as evidenced also by the report of the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare (2008), as cited in a UNICEF (2010) study in which it was stated that girls in the 15 to 19 years age group had an infection-rate about five times that of males in the same age group.

Women and the girl children are especially vulnerable to the effects of poverty and socio-economic processes that may cause poverty and food insecurity. Thus, the right to food is also related to the ensuring and the full realisation of the rights of women (United Nations, 2012). These rights, as indicated at the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1996), include the demand for equal pay and the protection against discrimination, as well as for the highest attainable standard of health and education. If women's rights are not protected by the State, and cultural attitudes towards women are not shifted as a result, gender discrimination will continue to undermine the girl child's academic performance, leading to widening the academic gap between boys and girls (Grimm, 2012).

In this respect there exists the desire with this researcher to explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl children in Zimbabwe.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (United Nations, 2012), as signed and ratified by Zimbabwe, pronounced several articles that assert the right to health, nutrition and child development. Article 27, for example, asserts, "States Parties should recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development" (Connell, 2010:132). It also asserts that parents and other caregivers have the primary responsibility of caring for the child, and state parties should assist the parents to implement this right, including by providing assistance such as nutrition, clothing and housing.

Despite the literature available that addresses the relationship between poverty and the psychosocial development of the child, not much has been written on the girl child, especially in respect of her socio-emotional and intellectual development. Most of the studies were carried out in developed countries where not so many children are affected by abject poverty (Manwa, et al., 2010:2148). Also, a person who may be referred to as poor in a developed country may not be referred to as such in a developing country. Research has not explained how language and academic performance were affected by poverty, and also did not agree on interventions, policies and programmes to attenuate the negative effects of poverty (Kent 2006:8, Cataldi, et al., 2009 and UNICEF, 2010).

### **1.3 The problem statement**

Although the Zimbabwe Millennium Development Goal no. 1 aims at eradicating poverty and hunger by 2015, some children continue to be faced with psychosocial challenges as a result of the rising Poverty Datum Line (PDL).

To date the plight of the girl child has been underestimated by researchers.

This study aims to explore how poverty affects the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe. It also investigate the teachers' views and perceptions on the academic performance of girl learners affected by poverty.

#### **1.3.1 Sub-problems**

- What are the psychosocial effects of poverty on the girl child?
- What are the developmental experiences of girl children living in poverty-stricken households?
- What are the views and perceptions of teachers on the academic performance of girl pupils affected by poverty?
- What solutions can be given to attenuate the negative effects of poverty on the girl child?

#### **1.4 The aim/purpose of the study**

This study seeks to assess, examine and evaluate the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe, with the aim of suggesting sound educational policies, measures and solutions to minimize the consequences of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child.

If the root problems of poverty are not addressed, the girl child continues to face more psychosocial challenges than the boy child, increasing the academic gap between the boy and girl child, causing anxiety, depression, school drop-out, an inferiority complex, a low self-esteem, early pregnancies, the high prevalence of child labour, and the poor academic performance of the girl child.

This research also aims to close the gap between the boy child and the girl child in respect of their academic performance. Researchers have struggled to ascertain to which extent the girl child is affected by poverty (Rusinga & Moyo, 2012; Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010; UNICEF, 2009:9). The psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child are not always clear, and often depend on whom you ask, and what learning outcomes are deemed important.

It is against this background that an examination was made at selected schools in Masvingo District to ascertain the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child. The research aims to determine the extent to which the girl child's academic performance is affected by the psychosocial effects of poverty.

#### **1.5 Motivation for the research**

Despite efforts being made by the Government of Zimbabwe to combat poverty by 2015, 70% of the children in Masvingo urban and 80% of them in Masvingo rural are considered to be poor. Poor children face a higher risk of developing a variety of psychosocial problems which may have an impact on their academic performance, the girl child being the most affected. To date, not much research has been done on the girl child in relation to poverty and academic performance in Zimbabwe. The status of women in Zimbabwe, though being continuously

addressed, remains low. There therefore exists a need to adhere to the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) no. 3 which aims to promote gender equality, and to empower women by 2015.

This has motivated the researcher to undertake this study.

This study is significant to many stakeholders including teachers, parents, students, educational officers, government organisations, especially the Ministry of Education, Art, Sports and Culture, non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and the different political components in Zimbabwe.

The study is going to benefit teachers, school headmasters and education officers, because an understanding of the effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child helped to raise the awareness of the plight of the girl child in poverty-stricken households. These were also sensitised to avoid labelling and stigmatising, thus instilling a feeling of self-efficacy and self-esteem among children from a low socio-economic background.

The study is important to the girl children, as it seeks to address issues pertaining to their welfare. There exists a need for girl children to, against all odds, work hard, so as to develop stable personalities.

The study is also important to the government, because it is the organisation most suitable to institute appropriate legislation, measures and policies that govern the education system in the country, so that the negative effects that result from poverty are mitigated, in order to achieve equal education for all. The root problems of poverty should be addressed by the government.

### **1.6 Limitations of the study**

Financial resources are likely to negatively affect the researcher's efforts to undertake a sound and comprehensive research. She thus confined herself to only three secondary schools in Masvingo district. The selection of the three schools and the classes was carefully and purposefully done to ensure that the findings are authentic.

Because of low remuneration the teachers in most schools are not motivated to work hard. Generally they have a negative attitude towards academic research work. The uncooperative

behaviour of some teachers and pupils towards academic research may negatively influence the quality of the responses which are obtained. The researcher, however, tried to persuade the respondents to give reliable and valid replies. The respondents were assured that the purpose of the study is educational and that any norms, values, beliefs and responses within the instruments were to be kept confidential.

Time constraints are bound to militate against the researcher's operations. Because of this, and the limitation of resources, the study focused on primary schools, and also not on some secondary schools in the Masvingo district.

### **1.7 Research method(s) and design**

According to Smith (2007:14), McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a *research design* refers to the plan and structure of the investigation used to obtain evidence to answer the research questions. Good research is therefore not accidental. A qualitative phenomenological design was adopted for use in this study to describe the girl child's individual experiences of the phenomenon, that is, the psychosocial effects of poverty on her academic performance. The phenomenological research design entails a descriptive study of how individuals experience a specific phenomenon. The researcher tried to gain access to the girls' life-worlds, which is their worlds of experience (Creswell, 2008).

The goal of qualitative phenomenological research is to describe the lived experience of a phenomenon. Phenomenological research is good at surfacing deep issues, and of making voices heard. The research design exposes taken-for-granted assumptions, or challenges a comfortable status quo. It helps to gather information and perceptions by means of inductive, qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus group discussions, and participation observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participants (Punch, 2011; Groenewald, 2004:19).

Based on the work by Bell (2012) and Smith (2007), this research design is considered the best for this type of study, because the researcher cannot be detached from his/her presumptions, and should not pretend otherwise. This research design was also used because it is consistent with

ethnographic field studies. The researcher entered the natural setting of the school environment to probe the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of a girl child.

The above points applaud the phenomenological design as very important. Creswell (2008:110), however, insists that, specifically in this study, it generated a large quantity of interview notes, tape recordings, jottings and other records, all of which have to be analysed.

The study minimised the problem of ambiguous terms and questions by conducting a pilot study beforehand.

### **1.7.1 Data-gathering methods**

The researcher made use of structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and field notes. Interviews continued to be done until the topic is exhausted or saturated, that is, when the interviewees introduce no new perspectives on the topic.

### **1.7.2 Population, sample, sampling methods**

The target population comprised of girl students doing Form 2, aged between 13 and 16 years, at the three secondary schools, three headmasters, and also teachers teaching nine different subjects. About twenty four teachers (24) teach form two (2) students. The total number of girl students doing form two in the three selected schools is one hundred and seventy (170). The target population was therefore one hundred and ninety seven (197). From a total population of about one hundred ninety seven, a sample of fifteen girls, five from each school, six teachers, two from each school and three headmasters (administrative staff), one from each school was to be drawn. This was enough triangulation for the participants and places where data was to be drawn.

A sample of twenty four participants drawn from the teachers, headmasters and pupils, using the purposive sampling method comprised this study. The girls from poor backgrounds were judged on their appearances, the resources they bring to school, their homes (for those coming from rural areas), and the location/area they live in (for those coming from the mining and urban areas), and the teachers' and headmasters' knowledge of them.

Creswell (2008) asserts that determining an adequate sample size in qualitative research is ultimately a matter of using one's own judgement and experience in evaluating the quality of the information collected against the use to which it is to be put, the particular research method, the purposeful sampling strategy employed, and the research product intended. Boyd (2010:103) regards two to ten participants as sufficient to reach saturation, while Creswell (2008:65,113) recommends ten people in a phenomenological research study. With regard to the use of focus group discussions, Morgan (2010); Kruger (2010); Creswell (2008) and Sandelowski (2007) recommend 6 to 9 participants. In general, as noted by Creswell (2010), as well as by Groenewald (2004), the sample size in qualitative research should not be so small that it is difficult to achieve data saturation. At the same time, the sample should not be so big that it is difficult to undertake a deep, case-oriented analysis. It is against this background that a sample of twenty four is considered ample for this study.

Purposive sampling is considered by Creswell (2008:113) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling to identify the primary participants. In this study the sample was selected on the researcher's judgement and the purpose of the research. There is no cap on how many informants should make up a purposive sample, as long as the necessary information is obtained. Bernard (2012) studied different sample sizes of informants selected purposively, and found that at least five informants were needed for the data to be reliable. This method is especially useful when there are not sufficient funds and other resources. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) are of the opinion that purposive sampling can be more realistic than randomisation in terms of the time, the effort and the costs that have to be incurred to find participants.

In order to ensure that the research project meets the ethical considerations, the researcher made use of informed consent.

## **1.8 Ethical considerations**

The purpose of the study was fully explained to the participants before the commencement of the collection of the data. The study is meant for educational purposes only, namely to enhance the development of beneficial policies, programmes and strategies designed to attenuate poverty's negative effects on the girl child. The research findings on the psychosocial effects of poverty on



the girl child's academic performance are to be obtained from interviews, observations and focus group discussions, and were treated with the utmost confidentiality. The participants were assured that any details provided were not going to undergo shared confidentiality without their permission.

Informed consent was sought from the participants to avoid deception. Participation in the study was voluntary, meaning that all were free to withdraw at any given moment, in the event that they feel that they are no longer interested midway through the study. No personal harm was to be inflicted on the participants. Like any other research project, pseudonyms and codes were to be used in the study.

A statement indicating participants' willingness to cooperate in the study was offered to each prospective participant, in order to safeguard both the participant and the researcher. The researcher is aware that all ethical codes depend on what is morally upright rather than legally enforced.

### **1.9 Definition of the terms**

**Child:** A *child* is a person under the age of sixteen years, and includes an infant.

This research will focus only on the girl child doing Form 2, aged between 13 and 16 years. Children younger and older than this age group will not form part of the study.

**Poverty:** *Poverty* is the inability to afford a defined basket of consumption items (food and non-food) which are necessary to sustain life.

**Psychosocial:** Entails the physical, cognitive, moral, emotional and social development. Merriam-Webster (2012) defines *psychosocial* as a term used to underline the close relationship between the psychological and social aspects of one's life, thus relating social conditions to mental and emotional factors. The *psychosocial process* is the process whereby a person's sense of self emerges as a result of the interaction between his/her social and personal side, meaning that individual development takes place in a social context (Tuckman & Monetti, 2011:91). The

psychosocial, therefore, has to do with a situation in which social and cultural variables are considered relative to the extent to which they influence the development of an individual.

**Academic performance:** Refers to the ability one displays in relation to one's achievement at school, or the level of achievement one reaches after official or formal education. Considine and Zappala (2002:92), and Seshamani and Mwamba (2010:3) define *academic performance* as the educational achievement attained over a specific time at a school or college. In this study *academic performance* will mean the level of achievement one attains during and after formal education.

**Cognitive development:** Indicates the development of a wide variety of thought processes and intellectual abilities, including attention, memory, academic and everyday knowledge, problem-solving, imagination, creativity, and the uniquely human capacity to represent the world through language (Santrock, 2009).

**School grades:** Zimbabwe's education system consists of 7 years of primary schooling, 4 years of secondary schooling, and 2 years spent at high school before the students can enter university, in this country or abroad. The academic year in Zimbabwe runs from January to December, with three-month terms, with one month holidays, thus a total of 40 weeks of school per year.

Primary school (Grade 1) starts at age six. Children applying for the Grade 1-intake are supposed to be turning six before August of the previous year. The secondary school-intake (Form 1) is on the basis of the successful completion of Grade 7. Thus, most children starting Form 1 are in the school when they turn 13. After the completion of Form 1, a learner proceeds to Form 2. Form 2-learners were therefore between 13 and 16 years old.

## **1.10 Chapter division**

This research study is reported in six chapters.

The following is the outline of these chapters, namely:

### **Chapter 1**

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter, which contains a general orientation, the analysis of the problem, introduction or background, problem-statement, sub-problems, the aim/purpose of the study, motivation for the research, limitations of the study, the scope of the study, a definition of the terms/concepts, and the summary.

### **Chapter 2**

In chapter 2 the theoretical framework that explains the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe is explored. The study is informed mainly by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the humanistic perspective, especially the ideas of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow.

### **Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 consists of a review of the literature available on the psychosocial effects of poverty on pupils' academic performance. A number of authorities and research studies were consulted to explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of specifically, girl children in Zimbabwe and the world over, thus establishing the relationship between low socio-economic status and the academic achievement of girl children.

### **Chapter 4**

In this chapter an outline of the research methodology and design was given. This includes specifying the research design, the population and the sample, sampling procedures, research instruments, data-collection procedures, presentation of the data, and the analysis procedures, as well as a summary.

## **Chapter 5**

Chapter 5 consists of the presentation of the data, the analysis and a discussion.

## **Chapter 6**

The chapter presents a general summary, the conclusions from the study, and recommendations related to the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

It is hoped that this study is going to provoke further research. Thus the chapter includes recommendations for further research in those areas outside the scope of the current study which arose from the study.

### **1.11 Summary**

In this chapter the introduction, the background to the study, and the orientation to the study were described. The analysis and description of the problem, the aims of the research, the research methods, the limitations, and the demarcation of the study were outlined.

The next chapter focuses on the theories that inform the study. The theoretical framework helped to interpret the relationships between the theory, the girl children in poverty-stricken households, and their academic performance.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

The study is informed mainly by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the humanistic perspective, specifically the ideas of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Both perspectives are discussed to help explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

#### 2.2 The ecological perspective

Various development theories place the emphasis on the nature and nurture interaction in the development of children. But Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory looks at a girl child's environment in terms of its quality and context (Witt, 2012, 2008; Donald, et al., 2010:34). Bronfenbrenner's Theory suggests that a person's surroundings, including his/her home, school, work, church, neighbourhood, culture and government, all have an influence on the way one develops (Donald, et al., 2010:34; Woolley & Kaylor, 2006:96).

This study looks at the girl child's development within the context of the system of relationships that forms her environment.

The *ecological perspective* can be defined as an interaction between an individual and the environment. The Ecological Systems Theory views the girl child's development in terms of the reciprocal influences between the child and the multiple levels of the surrounding environment (Donald, et al., 2010:34; Berk, 2007:24; Berk, 2006:26; Rathus, 2006:23). Donald, et al. (2010:36) indicates that the ecological theory is based on the interdependence between different organisms and their physical environment. The ecological perspective, as espoused by Bronfenbrenner (2005, 2008), provides a framework from which multiple contextual factors affecting the academic performance of girl children can be viewed. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci

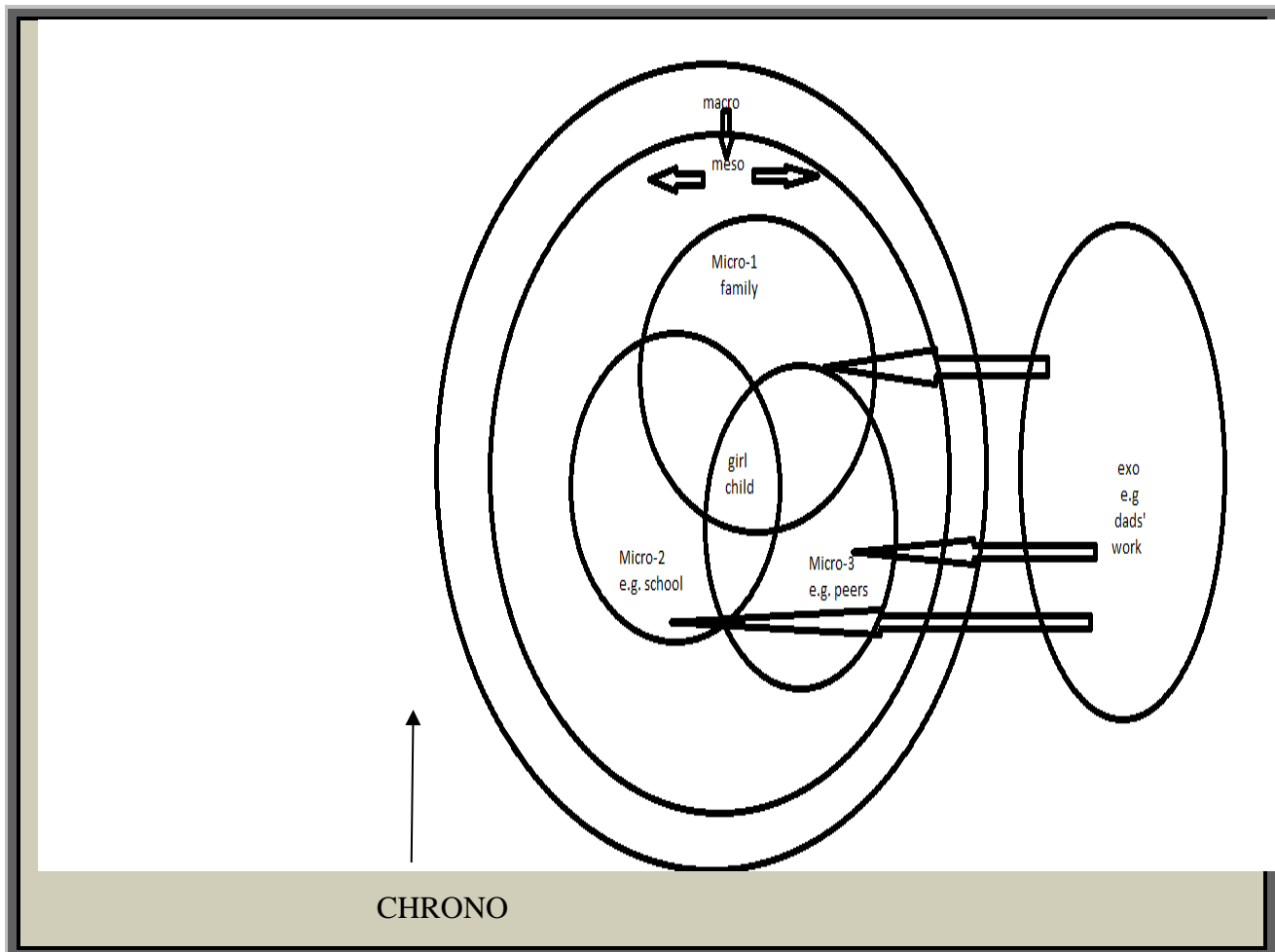
(1994:572) suggest that *individual development* is a culmination of many direct and an indirect influence, which either facilitate or impede the individual's potential.

In the ecological theory the relationships between organisms and their environment are seen holistically; therefore, all parts affect the system as a whole. According to Bray, Gooskens, Khan, Moses and Seekings (2010), the system is greater than the sum of its parts. So, how the girl children think, feel, behave and develop as persons is inevitably linked to the social grouping, forces and relationships that make up their environment, for example families, peer groups, the school and other social groupings, the socio-economic forces, and the interpersonal, cultural, political and power relationships. Thus, things that happen in one part of the system can affect the other parts, and ultimately the ecological system as a whole. Changes or conflict in any one layer will ripple throughout the other layers (Bray, et al., 2010; Witt, 2012:6).

To study a child's development, then, one must look not only at the child and his/her immediate environment, but also at the interaction of the larger environment as well. It is therefore plausible to note that the impact of poverty among girl children is complex, and transacts across multiple contexts, including the family, the home, the neighbourhood, the school, and the larger community. It is important to understand the influence of one context on the other in order to identify strategies to counteract, for example, the adverse effects of poverty. Research examining the link between the girl child's development and these factors is critical, because this understanding is necessary to inform policy development and the social, educational, and other services (Witt, 2012; 2008).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model posits that girl child development occurs within an interactive system of nested influences between the child and the environment. While multiple environments and mechanisms exist, this researcher is interested only in examining how poverty acts on families to influence the academic achievement, by focusing on five environments, which are, the family/home, the neighbourhood, peers, the school, and the government. This chapter will describe and apply the bio-ecological model as a general framework for the study.

Bronfenbrenner contends that a girl child develops within a complex system of relationships, affected by multiple levels of the surrounding community. He (2008) proposed an ecological systems model of the lifelong progressive accommodations individuals make to the changing environments in which they develop. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (2008) conceptualised the ecological environment, or the context in which human development occurs, as a set of nested structures. Bronfenbrenner (in Rathus, 2006:23; Berk 2007:24; Berk 2006:27; Donald, et al., 2010:41) describes an ecological environment as consisting of the following five nested structures (figure 2.1 below), namely the microsystems, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.



**Figure 2.1** Bronfenbrenner's nested system (Donald, et al. (2010))

The above diagram is an illustration of the five nested structures of the ecological system which may be used in studying the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Donald et al. (2010:37) indicate that things that happen in one part of the system can affect the other parts, and ultimately the ecological system as a whole, as shown by the above diagram. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory therefore suggests that development is explained in terms of relationships, for example, between a girl child and her environment (Boyd & Bee, 2006). Understanding the interactions of these systems is the key to understanding how a child develops, and what factors lead to his/her failure. Studying multiple levels of influence, developmental processes and outcomes from a life-course perspective, is challenging from a methodological and resource perspective, and thus, limited research using this model exists (Witt, 2012:7; Bray, et al., 2010). Shonkoff and Phillips (2000:39) assert that it is necessary to understand the multiple and interactive social, economic, cultural, and community-level factors, which alone and in combination influence the processes of development, and the child's academic performance.

Given the above, the development and academic performance of the girl child was discussed from a varied perspective, taking into consideration the influence of everything surrounding her, and also the direct and indirect factors affecting her academic performance.

The nested structures of the ecological environment proposed by Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time model are of paramount importance, since they provide a useful theoretical framework for examining the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

### **2.2.1 The microsystem**

According to Rathus (2006:23), a *microsystem* is an innermost structure, which involves the interaction of the child and other people in the immediate setting, such as the home, the school, the neighbouring community or peer group (Berk, 2007:24; Berk, 2006:27). Donald, et al.



(2010:37) indicate that *microsystems* are systems in which children are closely involved in proximal interactions with other familiar people, such as the family.

Microsystems involve roles, relationships and patterns of daily activities that shape many aspects of the cognitive, social, emotional, moral and spiritual development. Structures in the microsystem include the family, the school, the neighbourhood or child-care environments (Boyd & Bee, 2006; Cole, et al., 2009; Engle & Black, 2008). Boyd and Bee (2006:34) suggest another part of the microsystem as the biological content of a child, which can also be described as the genetic make-up and development stage of a child. Berk (2007:24) maintains that all relationships must be kept in mind as being bi-directional, for example, a girl child from a poverty-stricken household will be affected by parenting styles, the type of school she goes to, and peers, thus affecting her cognitive performance. According to Santrock (2009), the learner is not a passive recipient of experiences in these settings, but is someone who reciprocally interacts with others, and helps to construct the setting. Therefore, the more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to develop academically. Furthermore, how a girl child acts or reacts to these people in the microsystem will affect how they treat her in return.

Genetically-determined child characteristics, such as sex, temperament and health risks, for example, chronic medical problems and under-nutrition, are examined in assessing the relationship between poverty and the child's psychosocial development (Bray et al., 2010; Witt, 2008, 2012). These characteristics may compromise the child's development, because they affect the regularity or quality of the proximal processes that operate within the microsystems (Donald, et al., 2010:36). The characteristics of the child do not appear to explain the relationship between poverty and the child's academic performance. Nonetheless, assessing the child's temperament, the different parenting practices of boys versus girls, the child's nutrition, and the health status of the child living in poverty, may uncover factors that intensify the effects of poverty, or independently contribute to psychosocial problems (Bee & Boyd, 2007:38).

Children living in poverty may be living in small houses, which are not conducive to study. Donald, et al. (2010:34-35) indicated a case study of a girl child (Nomsa) who lived in the Eastern Cape with her grandfather, her parents and her siblings in a small house. This state of affairs hindered her to do her homework. Often difficult situations of poverty in the family lead parents to abandon their children, as they try to fend for food and other basic necessities. This girl child did not have time to study, which affected her academic performance negatively. The study also established that poor parents do not have the time for their children. Trawick-Smith (1997, as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 2008) asserts that parents under the stress of poverty may be less effective, more punitive and less warm with their children. These parents usually practise the authoritarian type of parenting, which negatively impact on the psychosocial development of their young children.

Parental support on homework and general home environmental factors should be conducive in order for children to perform well at school. Eamon (Santrock, 2007) conducted a study with 1 200 adolescents aged between 12 and 14, to examine the role played by poverty in Maths and reading. The study established that poverty was related to lower Maths and reading scores, through its association with less cognitively stimulating and unsupportive home environments. Parent-child interactions do not always account for the relationship between poverty and child's psychosocial functioning. Poverty may result in the child's social-emotional problems by impeding or influencing peer relations, by them attending low-quality schools, or by being exposed to unsupportive school environments (Donald, et al., 2010:40). Poor children are more likely to attend schools with few resources, and low-achieving and poor-behaviour classroom environments can worsen the children's behaviour patterns (Bowen & Bowen, 2008:482). Girl children who perceive their school environments as less supportive are also more likely to exhibit psychological distress (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010:191).

The school as a sub-system in the microsystem plays an important role in the academic performances of children. Teachers tend to favour children from affluent families because they will be presentable, healthy, and supportive, and brought learning resources to school (Chinyoka, 2011:147). A child from a poor background is more likely to experience peer rejection, an

inferiority complex, a low popularity rate, and conflicting peer relations than a child who is not poor (Fraser, 2004:12; Luthar, 2006:745-746). Fewer family resources would likely constrain the purchasing of acceptable clothing, and textbooks, the paying of school fees, and buying basic commodities like food. Children who are perceived as 'different' may be stigmatised and isolated. They less frequently participate in peer-group activities, thus encouraging behaviour such as aggression (Bray, et al., 2010; Witt, 2008:8).

Within the microsystem of the home, stress-coping theory (as purported by Rutter, 2008) and family process models are frequently used to explain the socio-emotional developmental effects of poverty. The stressful life events caused by poverty appear to affect the child's academic performance, and his or her socio-emotional functioning, by eroding parental-coping behaviour, and creating psychological distress and marital discord, thus resulting in parenting practices that are uninvolved, inconsistent, emotionally unresponsive, and harsh (Cole, et al., 2009:22; Donald, et al., 2010:41). If the home environment, for example, is not supportive, if there are no television sets or magazines, the children suffer from a restricted code of language, and therefore will not perform well (Bernstein, 1990, as cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2010). According to the ecological theory, if the relationships in the immediate microsystem break down, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of his/her environment. This notion is supported by Bronfenbrenner (2008), who asserts that the instability and unpredictability of family life is the most destructive force in a child's development. This, therefore, has a bearing on the psychosocial development of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

The neighbourhood as a sub-system in the microsystem plays an important role in the academic performances of children. Parents from disadvantaged neighbourhoods are more apt to warn their children about community dangers, to encourage them to remain home, and to restrict their autonomy, as a means of protection (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan & Aber, 2007:18). Poor parents are constrained in their choice of neighbourhood, which may lead to them residing in poor neighbourhoods, characterised by deteriorating buildings, and violence, and poor neighbourhood resources, such as libraries, parks, and grocery stores, and which directly influence the child's development (McLoyd, 2008:190; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000:28). A poor neighbourhood

exposes the child to physical danger and to criminal activities, and environmental hazards, and limits the access to learning enrichment activities (McLoyd, 2008:190; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000:29). While neighbourhoods can exert a non-supportive or negative influence, this is not the case for all families living in poverty.

The effect of a neighbourhood for families living in poverty can be supportive. Friends and neighbours who reside in the same community may exert an influence as role models, and in establishing a sense of cohesion, where the neighbours look out for each other (Donald, et al., 2010:42; Hernandez, 2007). For example, if a neighbour notices that a girl child is skipping school, he may intercede directly, or inform the parents. The characteristics of families residing in the same neighbourhood, such as income, education and occupation influence the child's development through the availability of financial and social capital or the resources available to children living in that neighbourhood.

From the above analysis one can conclude that the microsystem involves roles, relationships and patterns of daily activities that shape many aspects of the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, moral and spiritual development of the child negatively or positively (Donald, et al., 2010:42). Bronfenbrenner's theory is therefore an eye-opener for teachers, parents, members of the community, and the children themselves, since they are encouraged to make use of the interwoven relationships between the girl child and the immediate environment.

### **2.2.2 The mesosystem**

The second level in Bronfenbrenner's theory is called the *mesosystem*. Bronfenbrenner (2008) defines the *mesosystem* as a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person becomes an active participant. Donald et al. (2010:40) indicate that the *mesosystem* is a set of microsystems that continuously interact with one another. So, what happens in the family or peer group can influence how children respond at school, and vice versa. For example, a girl child who is not supported by her family may experience care and understanding from a neighbour, peer or teacher. In this way, although the lack of support from

her family may make her anxious and insecure, interactions with the neighbours, the peer group or the teacher may, over time, change her sense of insecurity (Tope, 2012; Mufanechiya, Mandiudza, Mufanechiya & Jinga, 2012; Swenson, 2004:247). In turn, this may change the interactions she has at home. The mesosystem is also said to be a relationship within the microsystem. For example, a girl child's scholastic performance is influenced by the involvement of the parents at home, with the peers, the neighbours, and the educators at school (Berk, 2007:25). Robinson and Reed (2008:29-130) conclude that researchers may study the strengths and weaknesses of family mesosystems in relation to primary school child-care programmes, and how they can be strengthened.

The linkages between the systems play a fundamental role in explaining the academic performance of the child. According to O'Neil (2011), the coordination and collaboration between the home and the school improve the learners' achievements and attitudes towards school. The parents from poverty-stricken families have problems in establishing these linkages due to inferiority complexes, and the fact that they may be working long hours in order to buy food (Grimm, 2012; Abebe, 2009:12). If the parents are isolated, or divorce themselves from school activities, their children are also labelled and isolated by the teachers and their peers, which in turn, may lower their self-esteem, and affect their academic performance (Witt, 2012). Bourdieu (2001, as cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2010) are of the opinion that the culture at the school is usually that of the dominant group, and that the culture of education is similar to the culture of the dominant classes, which defines the criteria by which the learners are labelled 'good' or 'bad'. Haralambos and Holborn (2010) also confirm that middle-class pupils succeed in education because the culture of the dominant class is taught and examined in the school. So, the culture of the child from a poverty-stricken family was shunned, thus reducing his or her self-esteem, leading to isolation and underachievement.

Poverty may affect the girl child's socio-emotional development in the mesosystem, such as the linkages between the home and the school (Keagan, 2001, as cited in Bee & Boyd, 2007:28). The effect of poverty on parenting practices within the home, for example, may result in the child's behaviour problems, which in turn are responsible for problematic peer relations.

Likewise, poor children may experience unsupportive school environments, which may adversely affect their psychosocial adjustment, making it more difficult for the parents to promote nurturing, or to be involved and supportive parents in the home, as has been espoused by Bronfenbrenner (2008).

Bee (2007:44), and Sprinthall, Sprinthall and Oja (2006:113) indicate that the child's behaviour in school or at home is not only a product of his/her own psychological development, but also of the demands and forces operating within the systems of which the child is a member. Against this background, it is therefore fundamentally important to forge positive dyads or linkages within the microsystem, in order to enhance the academic performance of the child in the school.

To substantiate these views, Leler (Bee, 2007:45) reviewed 18 studies designed to examine the effects of family-school linkage programmes in home-tutoring and parenting skills. The results revealed that 13 of the programmes showed positive gains in reading vocabulary and comprehension, as a result of the parents' establishment of homework routines, reading to their children, and asking the teachers about their child's learning progress. Thus Bronfenbrenner (2008) urges educators to establish and maintain family-school dyadic relationships in order to enhance the child's learning. If the parents are not interested in and supportive of their children, the children's relationships may be negatively affected (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:342). It is clear that such children will likely experience behavioural and emotional problems, such as delinquency, academic failure, drug and alcohol abuse, rejection, isolation, and anxiety (Zirpoli, 2008:142).

In a related study, Epstein and Henderson (1989, as cited in Trawick-Smith, 2007) found that teachers who emphasised parental involvement as information receivers and decision-makers at school had learners with better attitudes towards school, improved punctuality and school attendance, with higher educational inspirations on the part of the learners. In this view, therefore, schools should hold termly parent-consultation days and general meetings, whereby they will have a shared responsibility for the academic benefit of their child.

### 2.2.3 The exosystem

*Exosystems* refer to one or more settings that do not involve the child as an active participant, but that can affect the child's immediate setting (Cole, et al., 2009; Bray, et al., 2010; Donald, et al., 2010:45). These settings have an effect on the child's life, but the child does not participate, as shown by the diagram in figure 2.1. They include school boards, the parents' workplaces, and community agencies. The home and the parents' workplaces are examples of common settings for the child; events that occur in the parents' workplaces can have consequences for the child in the home. The exosystem plays a vital role in the development of the child. For example, if a parent loses his/her job or is frustrated by the working conditions, the parent can transfer the frustration onto the family (Bronfenbrenner, 2008:20), and this also affected their economic status and living conditions. This has a tremendous effect on a child who is bound to have to change schools, on his/her peers, and on the teachers. Bee (2007:46) observed that when the father is unemployed, he puts enormous stress on the family, and marital conflicts may arise, resulting in symptoms of stress, anxiety, aggression, depression, and delinquency among children. This may negatively affect the academic performance of the child.

A case study was carried out by Santrock, Marini, Gallagher and Pelter (2010) which indicated that Sam, aged 35, lost his job as a mechanic, while his wife, Edith, was still employed. Sam blamed himself for his lack of education, and indicated that it was a man's job to support his family. The study established that he spent most of his time drinking beer, slept less, and argued more with Edith. The kids also felt the change, not only in the things they could no longer buy, but in the whole atmosphere at home. Sam often snapped at them, and was much stricter with them. Sometimes he seemed to pay no attention to the kids at all. The children complained that their father was no longer friendly. David, who was 13 years old, started yelling back. Jennifer, who was 9 years old, became quiet, withdrawn and depressed. Both children suffered more colds and sickness than usual. The children were heavily affected by their father's loss of his job. Given the above, teachers often need to consider, not only what happens in the classroom, but also what happens within their learners' families, the neighbourhood, peer groups, and factors not directly linked to the child, like his/her father's workplace.

#### 2.2.4 The macrosystem

According to Berk (2007:25), the macrosystem is the outermost level of Bronfenbrenner's model, consisting of the cultural and sub-cultural values, laws, beliefs, expectations, and lifestyles. Donald et al. (2010:43) indicate that the macrosystem involves dominant social and economic structures, as well as the values, beliefs, and practices that influence all the other social systems. For example, a cultural value will influence the proximal interactions in the child's microsystems, and probably his/her whole mesosystem too. Equally, how the state distributes resources in society affects every level of the system. The macrosystem is equivalent to what we refer to as *two systems*, the wider community, and the whole social system (Boyd & Bee, 2006:34). Given the above, *macrosystems* refer to the consistencies in the other three systems (micro-, meso- and exo-) which could have positive implications for society as a whole, and they form the basis on which individuals and families structure their lives. This means that the laws and values of the parents' workplace might be made to affect the child's immediate settings, and the child is not spared.

Berk (2007:28) conducted a study on the impact of government funding on the education of impoverished children. The first child grew up in abject poverty in the 1960s, but due to government funding in education through the Headstart programmes, the child and the family received financial and educational support, and the child adjusted, and performed well at school. Alternatively, the second poor child of the 1990s did not get government funding, due to legislative reforms that suspended Headstart budgets. He suffered stress, anxiety, and depression, and subsequently failed in his academic performance. Santrock (2009) indicated that poverty can overwhelm a child's development, and impair his or her ability to learn, although some children in impoverished circumstances are remarkably resilient.

In 2005 the Zimbabwean government launched operation 'Murambatsvina' (a clean-up campaign), which led to the demolishing of all unapproved structures; and vendors were not allowed in the streets. Many families were left homeless, and others whose sources of income were by means of vending, were left without jobs. Most of the affected families had to relocate



to the rural areas where they became squatters. The government's policy had a great effect on the development of the children.

The introduction and announcement of incentives for teachers by the Minister of Education, David Coltart in 2009, has put children from poor backgrounds at risk by being sent away to fetch school fees that will, in turn, be converted to incentives. In rural areas, where most parents could not raise enough funds for the teachers' incentives, the teachers were demoralised, as a result; they did not teach, thereby affecting the academic performance of the children. Kozol (1991, as cited in Santrock, 2009) described the problems that children from poverty-stricken areas faced in their homes, the neighbourhood and the schools. The children had to study in dilapidated houses and skeletal school blocks, with poor sporting facilities. In most of the cases the teachers were new and inexperienced, with poor resources.

### **2.2.5 The chronosystem**

Chronosystems incorporate the time-dimension of Bronfenbrenner's model, including consistency or change over the life-course. Changes such as parental divorce, historical events, or social conditions occur within the environment, and also changes, such as life transitions, within the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, 2008). Rathus (2006:23) described the *chronosystem* as the change in the environment that occurs over time, and that has an effect on the child. Berk (2006:29) calls the *chronosystem* an ever-changing system, and says, "This pays special attention to the dimension of time where developmental changes are triggered by life events or experiences such as the birth of a child, entering school, marriage, divorce, gain or loss of employment or the onset of menarche" (Swenson, 2004:249; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn & Smith, 2008). The changes modify the existing relationships between the children and their environment, and create new ways of development. The focus is on how the environmental changes affect the academic performance of the child. Rathus (2006:25) cites the example of the effects of divorce and poverty. Divorce contributes to single-parent families. All the other systems in which developing children are involved, continuously change and develop themselves and all these interact with a girl child's progressive stages of development. The environment

does not simply influence the child; children are also active participants in their own development. For example, if a girl child perceives his or her environment as threatening, he or she will be less likely to explore it, and to engage in interactions that might promote his/her development. However, children who feel secure and confident in their ability to engage in new situations, help to develop themselves (Donald, et al., 2010:48).

As Bronfenbrenner observed, the processes by which poverty affects the girl child's psychosocial development are multiple and complex. Given the complexities and multiple paths by which poverty can affect the academic performance of the child, an ecological systems model provides an appropriate framework to guide research and the selection of appropriate interventions for poor families, and for children experiencing psychosocial problems. Understanding the interactions of these systems is the key to understanding how a child develops and what factors lead to his or her failure. The ecological model incorporates all areas of influence on the development of the child to assess the causes, and also the solutions to some of the increasing behavioural, academic and emotional problems seen today.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory has been proven beneficial in providing insight into all the factors that play a role in the psychosocial growth of the child. It also shows how all factors are intertwined and impact the development cycle. This model has provided the ability to see how the children's lives are balanced between every aspect of their environment. The ecological model can help in developing government policies and programmes that can benefit the teaching and learning of children, thus benefiting the society as well. Educators can therefore use this model to assess the problems in the child's life, and aid the rebalancing with his/her environment.

Although it is important to understand the underlying issues that worsen the plight of the child, it is equally important to look at why and how many children exposed to such risks may rise above them (the resilience perspective). Despite the issues within and between all the levels of the system presented above, it is also true that there are proximal systems that may foster resilience in any social context (Unger, 2008:359).

This study is also informed by the humanistic perspective, especially by the work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow.

### **2.3 The humanistic perspective**

The humanistic approach is a school of thought that emerged in the 1950s in reaction to both psychoanalysis and behaviourism (O'Neil, 2011; Snowman & Biehler, 2011). Bowen and Bowen (2008:478) define *humanism* as an approach to psychology in which the emphasis is on studying human experiences, both private and public behaviour, and the uniqueness and wholeness of individuals. It focuses on personal development. Basically, humanists believe in the goodness of the individual, his or her ability to make choices, and purposefully work towards being the best he/she can be (being a fully functioning or self-actualising individual). With the whole world being virtually vocal about human rights, this research is therefore governed by the dictates of the humanistic approach.

The two major humanists whose work was discussed in this research are Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow.

### **2.4 Carl Rogers' Person-centred Theory**

Carl Rogers' Person-centred Theory stresses the importance of interpersonal relationships and how people relate to one another as human beings. The key concepts underlying Rogers' theory are unconditional positive regard, empathy, genuineness, freedom of expression, and self-concept. Sprinshall, et al. (2006:34), and O'Neil (2011) indicate that three necessary and sufficient conditions for the promotion of learning are empathy, congruency/genuineness, and unconditional positive regard. Furthermore, Santrock, et al. (2010) mention that the Rogerian principles of education include freedom of self-expression, the teacher's unconditional positive regard, and the use of the discovery learning method. Snowman and Biehler (2011) also indicate that Rogers claims that human beings have two basic needs, namely the need for positive regard, and the need for self-actualisation. Rogers (1998, as cited in O'Neil, 2011) viewed *self-*

*actualisation* as the internally-embedded and active striving for development. He believed that children are curious to learn in an attempt to make use of their potential.

Snowman and Biehler (2011) assert that one crucial Rogerian assumption is that positive regard or loving warmth is a fundamental human need. An individual's self-actualising tendency can be thrown out of order when positive regard is withdrawn. Hayes (2008:43) views *positive regard* as the love, attention, and respect that come from significant others and from those in authority. According to Rogers (in Berth, 2010), individuals naturally value positive self-regard. Positive self-regard is self-esteem and a positive self-image that indicate the values which are attached to a person by him- or herself. Society gives us what we need when we show what is expected in our society, hence an individual comes to regulate his/her behaviour on the basis of what brings about acceptance and positive regard from others, and not what may be satisfying to the individual him/herself (Sprinthall, et al., 2006; Berth, 2010). This leads one to exhibit conditional positive regard, which may result in distortions of one's self-concept and overall personality.

The above is quite relevant when exploring the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe, because the girl child includes the values and needs of significant others into her self-concept.

Positive regard can be conditional or unconditional (O'Neil, 2011:44). *Unconditional* positive regard implies accepting, recognising and respecting an individual regardless of what he/she has achieved or not achieved. Santrock (2007), and Sprinthall, et al. (2006) view *unconditional positive regard* as the acceptance of the person as a worthy being, without any requirements or preconditions. Rogers' unconditional positive regard implies that the teachers should accept the learners as they are, whether boys or girls, and irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds. Many researchers have established that girl children, and also children from a low socio-economic background, are side-lined, discriminated against, and labelled negatively. Consequently they underperform in their studies (Chinyoka, 2011:87; Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010:190; Pleiss & Conley, 2007:56). Hayes (2008:120) asserts that a person with a positive

self-regard is one who has a positive attitude towards himself/herself , and is not dependent on the positive evaluation of significant others. This reflects the necessity to accept pupils unconditionally. Hence this theory provides a rich theoretical framework in exploring the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

*Conditional* positive regard on the other hand, is the love and acceptance given to an individual on behaving in a particular way. Once conditions are set for children from poverty-stricken households, there is conditional positive regard, which is associated with an unfavourable learning environment that negatively impacts on the development of their self-concepts. Teachers should treat children equally, be consistent in what they do, and indicate their love for their learners, regardless of their social status, sex, or academic achievements. Given the above, factors such as socio-economic background, academic achievement, disciplinary behaviour, tribe, gender, and age should not be used to determine the conditions of positive regard.

Closely related to unconditional positive self-regard is self-concept. The *self-concept* is the individual's view of him- or herself, along the lines of thought processes, feelings, and experiencing the individual (Mwamwenda, 2010). The *self-concept* is an organised continuous process of evaluation of the 'I' and 'me' in relation to how others view the 'I' and 'me', and various other aspects of life (Hayes, 2008:120). An individual therefore evaluates oneself according to how that individual perceive own abilities and capabilities and also in relation to what others say about the individual.

Girl children from poverty-stricken households often feel stigmatised and have inferiority complexes. The ideal self, representing what one can best be, the real true self who is what one actually is, and the self-image, which is the person you think you are, may tally (match/congruence) or differ (incongruence) (Chauhan, 2010). The differences between the individual's real self and the ideal self is often the source of problems (Mwamwenda, 2010; Santrock, 2007; Sprinthall, et al., 2006). Schultz (2009:237) posits that psychologically healthy persons are able to perceive themselves and their environment (including other people) as they

really are. The individual is said to be a fully-functioning organism, whose attempts to self-actualise are not being interfered with.

The self-esteem suffers when there is a big difference between one's ideal self and the self-image. Anxiety and defensiveness are common when the self-image does not match the true self (Schultz, 2009:238). While conditional positive regard results in incongruence, leading to denial, frustration, and maladjusted behaviour, unconditional positive regard leads to self-actualisation. The person becomes the real self. When he/she receives unconditional positive regard it means that he or she is accepted as he or she is, with his or her specific needs which are peculiar to him or her, and which are not measured against others (Santrock, 2007).

Educators who are aware of Rogers' concept of conditions of worth, which postulates that people may deny their true selves for the sake of being approved by others, will encourage the pupils to believe in themselves. They will be encouraged to appreciate individual differences, and to note that others will ultimately accept them if they first establish sound self-images. Hayes (2008:184) mentions research studies that have been done to establish the influence of unconditional positive regard in the learning and teaching situation. Evidence exists to support the view that the children whose parents are warm, loving, supportive, and full of respect for their children's opinions, have high self-esteems and a positive self-concepts.

Numerous studies linking the self-concept to academic achievement have been carried out in Africa. In Uganda, Mwamwenda (2010) came to the conclusion that a child who feels more confident and more self-assured will perform better in the primary learning examinations. Mwamwenda (2010) holds the view that in Uganda academic performance will suffer due to the pupils' lack of confidence, and not because of their impoverished backgrounds. Made (1996, in Mwamwenda, 2010) also established that there exists a connection between the self-concept and performance. He discovered that underachievers saw themselves as less adequate and less acceptable to others, and concluded that underachieving but capable high school girls differ significantly from achievers in their perceptions of the self. Yet another study by Masque (in Mwamwenda, 2010) of 80 girls from Nigeria, confirms that a pupil with a positive self-concept

stands a chance of performing better than a pupil with a negative self-concept. It is important, therefore, that educators in Africa, especially of girl children, bear in mind that a positive self-concept is essential in facilitating quality education, and that teachers can play a great role in this area.

Given the above, research studies have shown that positive self-concepts facilitate and enhance positive living in all its aspects, and that realistic self-appraisal, self-knowledge and self-understanding enable children and teachers to learn more, achieve more, enjoy more, care more, relate better, make decisions wisely, and lead happier, more fulfilled, responsible, resourceful lives, also in their future careers (Mwamwenda, 2010). A research study by Robin (1979, as cited in Santrock, 2007) revealed that the self-esteem of girls with a low socio-economic status dropped twice in comparison to that of boys.

The main objective of this research is to develop a fully-functioning girl child who exhibits an unconditional positive self-regard, and maintains a congruent relationship with others. The exploration of the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance, focusing on the self-concept, is important in this study. Knowledge of the self and the self-concept will enable the girl child to express their personality positively.

The concept of empathy remains pivotal, especially when dealing with girl children from a low socioeconomic background, and is quite relevant to this research. Hayes (2008) indicates that *empathy* means "...trying to understand the thoughts, feelings, behaviours and personal meanings from the other's internal frame of reference". O'Neil (2011:128) asserts that to be in a position to help the child, "...one must find a way to stand in the persons' shoes, not for judgement or diagnostic purposes but merely to facilitate the pupils' endeavours to gain congruence". Unlike sympathy, which further paralyses the child, empathy is meant to strengthen the child by enabling him or her to recognise the intrinsic resources at his or her disposal. Ganga and Chinyoka (2010:163) indicate that children who are victims of abject poverty usually come to school without the basic necessities like food, shoes, warm clothing, and uniforms, thus affecting their socio-emotional, physical, behavioural, moral, and cognitive

development. It is against this background that it is important for teachers to seek to understand the socioeconomic backgrounds, gender and challenges of the pupils they teach, to be in a position help them. Mwamwenda (2010) suggests that teachers should look at the problems, or whatever pupils are engaged in, from their perspective. Children from impoverished backgrounds need to be listened to when they talk about their concerns. Having empathy assisted the teacher to understand the areas where the pupils need help so as to develop into fully-functioning human beings.

The teacher must be genuine in the way she/he interacts with the pupils. Sprinthall, et al. (2006) assert that *genuineness* means being real and honest. The teacher must openly and freely convey to the pupils how she/he feels so that they may perceive his/her commitment as authentic.

Despite the strengths highlighted thus far in explaining the plight of the child by using this theory, the theory has also been criticised for failing to prove that all humans beings strive to attain self-fulfilment, and that all possess a free will. The key concepts underlying Rogers' theory, namely unconditional positive regard, empathy, freedom of expression, self-concept, congruency/genuineness, unconditional positive regard, the use of the discovery learning method, the need of a positive self-regard and self-actualisation, all provide a rich theoretical framework when exploring the effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

## **2.5 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

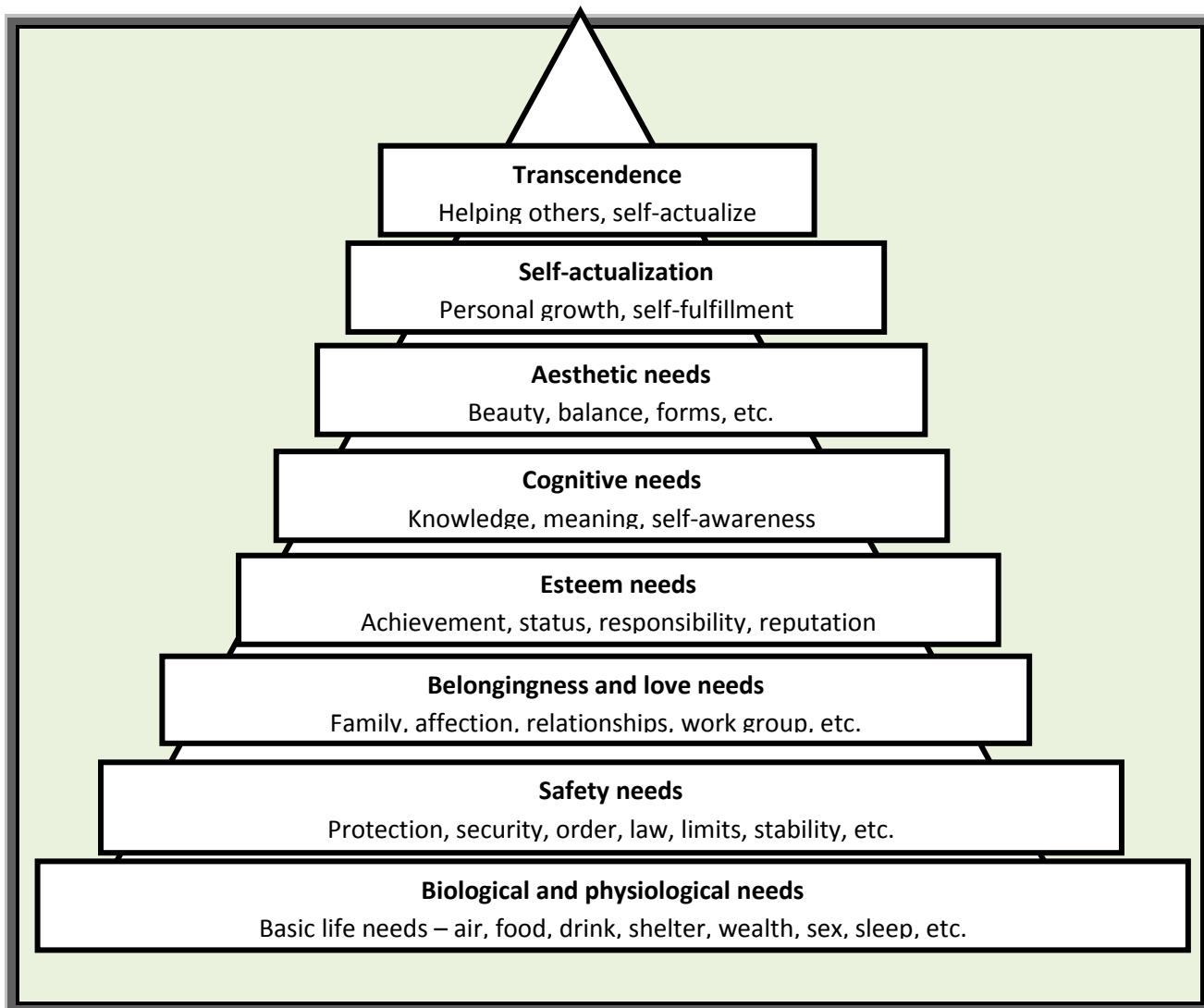
Abraham Maslow developed the Hierarchy of Needs Model between the 1940s and the 1950s in America. The Hierarchy of Needs Theory remains valid even today for understanding human motivation, personal growth, and the academic performance of children in poverty-stricken households. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory has been extended through the interpretation of Maslow's work by other people, thus adapting an eight-stage Hierarchy of Needs Model (Snowman & Biehler, 2011:45). There is some uncertainty as to how and when the additional three stages – stages six, seven and eight (cognitive, aesthetic and transcendence) - came to be



added, and by whom, to the original Hierarchy of Needs Model, and many people consider the original five stages of Maslow's Model to be the definitive ones, and perfectly adequate (Tay & Diener, 2011:359).

This study emphasised the original five stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Maslow proposed a theory of needs, based on a hierarchical model of the basic needs at the bottom, and the higher needs at the top. The most fundamental and basic four layers of the pyramid contain what Maslow called the *deficiency needs* or *d-needs*; the individual does not feel anything if they are met, but feels anxious if they are not (Snowman & Biehler, 2011:79). Needs beyond the d-needs are called *growth needs, being needs* or *b-needs*. When fulfilled, they do not go away, rather they motivate further. Mwamwenda (2010) posited a hierarchy of needs based on two groupings, namely physiological needs and psychological needs. The central point in Maslow's theory is that people tend to satisfy their needs systematically, starting with the basic physiological needs and moving up the hierarchy, as shown in figure 2.3 below, summarising Maslow's hierarchy of needs.



**Figure 2.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1990s Eight-Stage Model) (Tay & Diener, 2011)**

Maslow believed that the higher-level needs can only be achieved if the lower-order needs have been satisfied first, for example, a hungry person is not likely to be motivated to consider safety and affection until his hunger is satisfied. Rathus (2006:66) elaborates by mentioning that, “All the needs in the hierarchy are innate to humans, but those higher in the hierarchy are weaker”. They only direct action when all the earlier needs have been satisfied. Only when people have enough to eat, and their physical safety is assured, will they be motivated by a need to belong or a need for esteem. The most frequent criticism of Maslow's theory is that the systematic

movement up the hierarchy does not seem to be uniform for all people. In practice this hierarchy is only approximate, and you do not have to have your physiological needs fully satisfied before going on to seek the higher needs. In their global survey, for example, Tay and Diener (2011:359) found that people can be living in hazardous poverty and yet still derive much satisfaction from having their social needs (belonging and esteem) fulfilled.

In spite of some of the criticisms, Maslow's theory has provided a useful theoretical framework upon which the various needs of the girl children can be discussed, and probably be satisfied, to enhance their academic performance.

### **2.5.1 Physiological needs**

These are the basic needs which have to be satisfied first before the higher-level needs can be attended to. These needs include the need for food, shelter, water, and sex. Kenrick (2010:16) indicates that the body aims to achieve homeostasis, equilibrium of different factors, namely the water content of the blood, the salt, sugar, protein, fat, calcium, and oxygen content, a constant hydrogen level/acid base level, and a constant blood temperature. This is obtained with food, drink, shelter, fresh air, and a constant temperature. If all of a human being's needs are not met, then the physiological need takes the higher priority. Given the above, the physiological needs such as for food, water, and sleep are dominant, and are basic to the motivation of children from poverty-ridden backgrounds. Unless these needs are satisfied, everything else recedes (Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, & Schaller, 2010:8). Healthy hungry people think of little else but food (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010:192; Ecker & Nene, 2012; Ecker & Breisniger, 2012; Nabarro, et al., 2012; Fanzo, 2012). All the human capacities, such as intelligence, memory, and dreams are put to work in trying to seek psychological, as well as physiological comfort.

A study carried out in Kenya on adolescents who do not often eat breakfast or suffer from malnutrition, revealed that they generally became lethargic, and stopped interacting; thus their learning potential was severely lowered (UNESCO, 2010). Tay and Diener (2011:359) indicate that "... a good way to obscure the higher motivations and to get a lopsided view of human

capacities and human nature is to make the organism extremely and chronically hungry or thirsty”. This implies that a child from a poor background have problems in respect of self-actualisation because of hunger. This, to some extent, affected his or her academic performance.

### **2.5.2 Safety needs**

When all an individual’s physiological needs are satisfied, and are no longer controlling all his or her thoughts and behaviours, the need for security comes into being. These are needs such as the need for security, protection, stability, and freedom from fear and anxiety, and also for structure and limits in our lives (Snowman & Biehler, 2011). Berth (2010) indicates that the safety and security needs include personal and financial security, and health and wellbeing. Logue (1985, as cited in Kenrick, et al., 2010:9) is of the opinion that children are especially susceptible to unfamiliar surroundings, hence they seek refuge in routines, because too many open-ended and ambiguous experiences may constitute a threat to their safety. When a child grows up in a happy and secure environment, a stable psychological being develops, but when he or she grows up in areas where a sense of security is lacking, an unstable foundation develops. Tay and Diener (2011:360) indicate that sometimes the desire for safety outweighs the desire to easily satisfy physiological needs. However, in the case of acute danger, safety comes before aspects like stilling the hunger.

### **2.5.3 Love needs (belonging needs)**

After the physiological and safety needs, the third layer of human needs is social, and involves feelings of belongingness. This need is especially strong in childhood, and can override the need for safety, as witnessed in children who cling to abusive parents. This is sometimes called the *Stockholm syndrome* (Tay & Diener, 2011). The absence of this aspect in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs can impact on an individual’s ability to form and maintain emotionally-significant relationships in general, such as friendships, intimacy, and with family members (Kenrick, et al., 2010:9). Human beings need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, whether it comes from a large social group, from religious groups, or from small social connections, (family members,

peers, and confidants). Humans need to love and to be loved (sexually and non-sexually) by others. In the absence of these elements, they may become susceptible to loneliness, social anxiety, or depression (Tay & Diener, 2011:362). This need for belonging can often forego the physiological and security needs, depending on, for example, the strength of peer pressure; an anorexic may ignore the need to eat, and the security of health, for a feeling of control and belonging (Tay & Diener 2011:359; Kenrick, 2010:10).

#### **2.5.4 Esteem needs**

Mwamwenda (2010) indicates that all human beings have a need to be accepted and valued by others. They need to engage themselves in something or other in order to gain recognition, and partake in an activity that gives that person a sense of contribution, and to feel self-valued, be it in a profession, or a hobby. Imbalances at this level can result in a low self-esteem, or inferiority complex. Persons with a low self-esteem need the respect of others. They may seek fame or glory, which again depends on others (Kenrick, 2010:7). However, it is important to note that many people with a low self-esteem will not be able to improve their view of themselves simply by receiving fame, respect, and glory externally, but they have to first accept themselves internally. Psychological imbalances, such as depression can also prevent the individual from obtaining self-esteem on both levels (Tay & Diener, 2011:361).

All people have a need for self-respect and self-esteem. Maslow noted two versions of esteem-needs, a lower and a higher one (Tay & Diener, 2011:363). The lower one is the need for the respect of others, the need for status, recognition, fame, prestige and attention. The higher one is the need for self-respect, for strength, competence, mastery, self-confidence, independence, and freedom. Deprivation of these needs among children can lead to an inferiority complex, weakness and helplessness. It should also be noted that the esteem-needs help to shape the self-concepts of the individuals positively or negatively.

Berk (2006:446) defines *self-concept* as a set of attributes; abilities, attitudes and values, and Sprinthall, et al. (2006) define it as a conscious, cognitive perception, and an evaluation by

individuals of themselves. It includes how girl learners for example see themselves, what and how they judge themselves in terms of appearance, personality, ability, talents, motives, goals, ideas, and social interactions (Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 2007:366). Berth (2010:36) defines *self-concept* as a person's private mental image of himself or herself, that is, a collection of beliefs about the kind of person he or she is. Therefore, the *self-concept* is described as the core of the personality, and is meaningful to the individual. Santrock (2007) adds that the *self-concept* is a normative concept, based on the evaluation of the self in terms of good or bad, pretty or ugly, clever or stupid, poor or rich, girl or boy. The child's self-concept is characterised by the way he or she sees, perceives and accepts him- or herself, and this has an influence on academic performance. The self-concept and achievement are interactive reciprocal forces, and each affects the other in a positive or negative way, according to Choko (2004:6).

Children with positive self-concepts are socially better adapted than children with negative self-concepts (Pienaar & Peens, 2006:311). Pienaar and Peens (2006) maintain that children with low self-concepts find it difficult to meet the expectations of the peer group. A positive self-concept results in characteristics like self-confidence, self-appreciation, and the ability to view oneself realistically, whereas a negative self-concept results in feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, which is seen in the lack of self-confidence, and of being insecure. It is important to note that the development of a child's self-concept (either positive or negative) is influenced by his or her interaction with his or her parents, other family members, educators, and friends.

The exploration of a child's self-concept is important. It helps him or her to assess his or her value and worth. For example, secondary school children with positive self-concepts are keen to achieve, and spend most of their time on academic activities, whereas those with negative self-concepts avoided academic tasks and neglected their work.

These first four levels in Maslow's hierarchy were considered by him to be *deficiency* or *instinctual* needs. If a child is deficient at any one of these four levels, he or she becomes highly compelled to fulfil that need. But if he or she has all the needs fulfilled at each level, he/she does not feel anything, and is not at all compelled by them (Kenrick, 2010:8; Kenrick, et al., 2010:12).

The remaining four needs are growth needs, able to be acted upon only if the deficiency needs are fully met. Once the growth needs are met, they continue to be felt, and may become stronger as time goes by.

### **2.5.5 Cognitive needs**

At this level the need to know and understand is high; the child develops his or her cognitive potential. This is the level on which schools would like to operate, and it is actually the level on which many schools in comfortable neighbourhoods function, because the deficiency needs of their learners have been met. Here the child is able to listen, speak and explore in his or her quest to understand and make meaning from the world around him or her. Maslow believed that all human beings have the need to increase their intelligence, and thereby pursue knowledge. The cognitive needs imply the expression of the person's need to learn, explore, discover and create a better understanding of the world around him/her (Kenrick, et al., 2010:12). This growth need for self-actualisation and learning, when not fulfilled, may lead to confusion and an identity crisis in the child. Also, it is directly related to the need to explore, or the openness of experience.

### **2.5.6 Aesthetic needs**

At the aesthetic level, the individual approaches and appreciates symmetry, order, and beauty. He or she becomes able to invest emotion into learning. Based on Maslow's beliefs, it is stated in the hierarchy that all humans need beautiful imagery or something new and aesthetically pleasing to continue towards self-actualisation. People need to refresh themselves in the presence and beauty of nature while carefully absorbing and observing their surroundings to extract the beauty that the world has to offer.

It is therefore imperative that the teachers encourage their learners to wear clean and neat uniforms, and to write clearly in their exercise books. The learners should also ensure that their books are neatly covered. The child who cannot afford to do this may feel inferior and fail to

self-actualise, because of an inferiority complex. It is against this background that this study is informed by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory.

### **2.5.7 Self-actualisation**

*Self-actualisation*, a term that originated with Kurt Goldstein, is the instinctual need of a person to make the most of his/her unique abilities and to strive to be the best he or she can (Tay & Diener, 2011:362). What a man can be, he must be (Kenrick, 2010:10). This forms the basis of the perceived need for self-actualisation. This level of need pertains to what a person's full potential is, and realising that potential. Maslow describes this desire to self-actualise as the desire to become more and more what one is, namely to become everything that one is capable of becoming (Kenrick et al., 2010:13).

In order to reach a clear understanding of this need, one must first not only achieve the previous needs, namely the physiological, safety, love, esteem, cognitive, and aesthetic needs, but also master these needs (Tay & Diener, 2011:363). Self-actualisation is the summit of Maslow's motivation theory. It refers to the quest of reaching one's full potential as a person, in this case the highest academic performance. Unlike the lower-level needs, this need is never fully satisfied; as one grows psychologically there are always new opportunities to continue to grow. According to Maslow, only a small percentage of the population reaches the level of complete self-actualisation (Berk, 2007:66). Self-actualising people are self-aware, are concerned with their personal growth, less concerned with the opinion of others, are interested in fulfilling their potential, and will therefore achieve high academic performances.

According to Santrock, et al. (2010), *self-actualisation* refers to the individual's intentional effort to realise his/her latent potential, including his/her capacities and talents, which is the achievement of success. Maslow defines *self-actualisation* as a man's desire for self-fulfilment, namely the tendency for him to become actualised in what he could potentially become. Meyer, et al. (2007:336) add that an individual's final goal is realising his or her true potential. They



continue to point out that with self-actualisation all that is needed is for the individual to discover his or her potential that is already present, and to allow it to flourish.

Sue, Sue and Sue, (2004:57) maintain that *self-actualisation* is a term popularised by Maslow, which means that people are motivated to fulfil their biological needs, to cultivate, to maintain, and to enhance the self. Mwamwenda (2010:346) describes *self-actualisation* as the tendency of achieving more than one is capable of. Louw and Louw (2008:62) conclude that *self-actualisation* refers to people striving to develop their abilities, and to achieve their ideals. These can be achieved irrespective of the individual's socioeconomic background, gender, or motivation. O'Neil (2011) describes the road to self-actualisation as an on-going process, with no final destination.

Self-actualisation can only occur when all the lower needs such as for food, water, sleep, and oxygen are fulfilled. This has a bearing when exploring children from poor backgrounds. Santrock (2009:101) states that once the child is accepted in a group, he or she is more able to accept him- or herself in a positive and realistic manner. However, children who experience unhealthy relationships due to a lack of close relationships with their parents, find it difficult to be positive and realistic in a peer group. These children do not feel accepted in the group. Engle and Black (2007:26) suggested that solutions for healthy behaviour lie in peer re-negotiation. This suggestion is supported by Zirpoli (2008:140), who stated that a child who has friends who value academic achievement may be influenced to improve his or her academic performance.

Choko (2004:31) concludes that children from poverty-stricken households may experience feelings of insecurity, neglect, and isolation due to a lack of basic resources and parental care. This may influence their ability for self-actualisation. Children need the assurance of love, security, care, and encouragement to be able to cope with the situation of abject poverty.

### 2.5.8 Self-transcendence

Maslow later divided the top of his triangle to add self-transcendence, which is also sometimes referred to as *spiritual needs*. *Spiritual needs* are a little different from other needs, being accessible from many levels. This need, when fulfilled, leads to feelings of integrity. It takes things to another level of being (Tay & Diener, 2011:364).

The common interpretation of Maslow's famous theory suggests that once a need is satisfied, the person moves onto the next need, and to an extent, this is entirely correct. However, an overly rigid application of this interpretation will produce a rigid analysis, and people, and also motivation, are much more complex. So, while it is true that people move up (or down) the hierarchy, it depends on what is happening to them in their lives. Maslow's theory is a guide which requires some interpretation and thought, given which, it remains extremely useful and applicable for understanding and explaining the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

While Maslow's theory was regarded as an improvement on previous theories of personality and motivation, it has its shortcomings. The concept of self-actualisation is considered vague and psycho-babble by some behaviourist psychologists (Snowman & Biehler, 2011). Self-actualisation is a difficult construct for researchers to operationalise, and this makes it difficult to test Maslow's theory (Santrock, et al., 2010; Snowman & Biehler, 2011; Tay & Diener, 2011:365). Transcendence, on the other hand, has been discounted by secular psychologists, because they feel it belongs to the domain of religious beliefs. Also, everyone is not motivated by the same needs. Some researchers have noted vagueness in what a 'deficiency' is; what a deficiency is for one is not necessarily a deficiency for another (Tay & Diener, 2011:365). Finally, there seem to be various exceptions that frequently occur, for example, some people often risk their own safety to rescue others from danger. It should be noted that despite the shortcomings cited above, this theory continues to provide a rich theoretical framework for explaining the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

## **2.6 Summary**

This chapter focused on the theoretical framework that helps to explain the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe. Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the humanistic perspective were briefly discussed. The next chapter focused on the literature related to the study.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will review the literature on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child.

Despite heightened international efforts to bring more attention to poverty and human development, the most vulnerable children, the girls, are still the most invisible. If the developing nations turn a deaf ear on the plight of girls, this will perpetuate the cycle of poverty and poor human development. There is an adage that says that if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. This summarises the essence of education to the girl-child and indeed so, calls for the attention to be focused on the education of the girl-child, because education is the bedrock of all facets of development. A number of authorities and research studies were consulted to explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl children in Zimbabwe and the world over, thus establishing the relationship between low socio-economic status and the academic achievement of girl children.

The number of girl children living in poverty in Zimbabwe and indeed, the world over, is continually increasing, and has become a growing issue. Poverty affects the girl child's psychosocial development across multiple contexts, including the family, the home, the neighbourhood, and the school (Grimm, 2012; Chilton, et al., 2007:263; Kasayira & Chireshe, 2010; Chireshe, et al., 2010), and has more detrimental effects on the socio-emotional, and the cognitive functioning, and academic achievement (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 2007:8; Conger & Donellan, 2007:24). Poverty directly and indirectly causes many barriers to learning. It is also the cause of a range of social, emotional, and psychological problems, and disabilities, and learning difficulties (Donald, et al., 2010: 157; Chireshe, 2010; Chireshe & Plattner, 2010). The result is the reinforcing of poor educational conditions, which generate further barriers to learning (Donald, et al., 2010:276). Poverty is thus detrimental to the holistic development of the

learners. Its impact is mostly felt by the girl child in developing countries, and Zimbabwe is not an exception.

### **3.2 Definition of *poverty***

It is difficult to provide a single, absolute and standardised definition of *poverty* rather than defining it in relative terms. Different authors provide different definitions for the concept of *poverty*. It is a broad, multifaceted, and multi-dimensional concept that involves the economic, social, political, and environmental well-being of the people (World Bank, 2010). In the World Bank Development Report (2012) *poverty* is defined as the inability to attain a minimum standard of living, not having enough to eat, a low life expectancy, a higher rate of infant mortality, a low educational standard, enrolment and opportunities, poor drinking water, inadequate health care, unfit housing conditions, and the lack of active participation in the decision-making process. Poverty is therefore pronounced deprivation in well-being and as seen, comprises many dimensions (Neuman, 2009:582). It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity.

In addition, poverty also encompasses poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, the lack of a voice, and the insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life (Grimm, 2012; Connell, 2010:141). Furthermore, poverty is also characterised by the failure of individuals, households or entire communities to command sufficient resources to satisfy their basic needs, namely, food, shelter, clothing, health and education; it is a state of deprivation and insecurity (Abebe, 2009:13). Implicit to the above, poverty therefore indicates the extent to which an individual does without resources. In most cases, poor people lack the capability to function effectively in society; hence they feel marginalised and stigmatised.

This researcher observed that what might be called poverty in developed countries might not be defined thus in Zimbabwe. The World Bank Development Report (2012) for example, defines *poverty* as living on less than 1, 25 USD per day. This definition does not apply to people in Zimbabwe, especially those in the rural areas and parts of some towns where this research was done. The definition of *poverty* in rural Zimbabwe goes further to look at people without cattle, goats, donkeys, pastures, high yields, large farming fields, many wives and children to till the

land. In the urban and mining towns, people without their own houses, land to build on, stoves, television sets, refrigerators, and those who cannot afford to pay their electricity and water bills and their rent, are regarded as poor. Thus, material wealth can be used to measure the extent of poverty in Zimbabwe. Given the above, understanding poverty is not an easy task, and reaching a common and universally agreeable definition of *poverty* is a mammoth and a controversial one. Poverty remains a global problem of huge proportions, which needs great attention to reduce it. In this research, *poverty* is defined as being unable to afford the basic human, financial and material needs.

Poverty can be seen as absolute or as relative, and is associated with a lack of income, or with the failure to attain your capabilities. It can be chronic or temporary, and is sometimes closely related or associated with inequality (Chireshe, 2010; Emwawu & Osujo, 2010). Absolute poverty is the absence of adequate resources, and it hampers learning in developing countries because of poor nutrition and health, the circumstances at home (the lack of books, lighting or a place to do homework), and the education of the parents (Neuman, 2009:582). For example, in most rural areas in Zimbabwe, there is no electricity, and the people cannot afford candles or other sources of lighting. Furthermore, in the urban areas, load shedding has affected households to an extent where functioning has been reduced to zero. Poverty discourages enrolment and survival to higher grades, and also reduces learning in schools (Robertson, 2011:2). From the above analysis, it is therefore clear to say that both relative and absolute poverty perspectives are common among the families from a poor background; it can reduce the motivation of the relatively poor, and their ability to gain the full benefit of education.

Poverty is often correlated with vulnerability and social exclusion, but they are not the same (Atkinson, 2008:1). Walker (2006:8) asserts that chronic poverty brings very few opportunities for people to escape from it. This can disengage girl children, which explains why the experience of poverty is closely related to social exclusion. An example is that of a family where the parents are not employed. They live in an overcrowded household; both parents lack confidence, and have low levels of literacy and numeracy. The family has few resources across all dimensions of poverty, which makes it very vulnerable to negative changes in their circumstances. Given the above, the poor often lack adequate food, shelter, education, and health, and may experience

deprivations that prevent them from leading the kind of life that everyone values. They also face extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation and natural disasters (Nsingo, 2011:3). Moreover, they are exposed to ill-treatment by institutions of the state and society, and are powerless to influence key decisions affecting their lives (UNIFEM, 2011). Thus, poor people everywhere continue to suffer from unacceptably low social conditions and the lack of access to services. The poor girl children are no exception; hence the need to explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on their academic performance.

Poverty can be considered as a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and also of information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services. It is also characterised by a lack of participation in decision-making, and in civil, social and cultural life. As a result of an inadequate income and resources, girl children may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society, leading to a negative attitude and a low self-concept, thus negatively affecting their academic performance.

### **3.3 Global overview of poverty**

Out of the total world population of about 6.8 billion, 925 million people do not have enough to eat; about 98% of the world's undernourished people live in developing countries. Approximately 306 million children live in sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2008:113). At least 40-50% of children in most African countries live below the poverty line (World Bank, 2007:25). This implies that at least 137 million African children of primary school age do not attend school (UNICEF, 2008, 2007).

In addition, almost one billion people in the world today are unable to read a book, or even sign their names. The majority of them are women (Atkinson, 2008:8). Recent statistics indicate that 65 million young people and adults in Africa, that is roughly more than 60%, are women; less than half of the women aged over 15 in Africa cannot read or write. This is both a symptom and a cause of women's continuing marginalisation and poverty (Watkins, 2008). Thus, non-literate

Africans, as well as being predominantly women, are on average poor, and often from rural and poor urban areas.

Research has shown that millions of girls do not have access to education, despite concerted efforts to push the cause forward. Okeke, et al. (2012) identified child labour, poverty, and the lack of sponsorship, a quest for wealth, bereavement, truancy, broken homes, and the engagement of children as house helps, as the factors, or the clog in the wheel of children's access to education. According to World Bank Development Report (2012), more than 350 million people, over half of Africa's population, live below the poverty line of one dollar a day. This implies that poverty too excludes children, including the girl-child, from school.

In Ethiopia child brides face early pregnancy, responsibilities to their children and their in-laws, and the reticence of their husbands, who are usually much older, to let them out of the house (United Nations, 2012). In Kenya, girl child education is elusive (Chege, 2007, as cited in United Nations, 2012). Mwangi (2010) indicated that a combination of poverty, disease and backward cultural practices continued to deny the girl-child her right to education. Even with the introduction of free primary education, access to education still remains a pipedream to many Kenyan children. Despite the introduction of free primary education in the country, which accounted for an increase in enrolment, a sizeable number of children, especially girls, still find themselves out of school, owing to a number of reasons (Chege, 2007, in United Nations, 2012).

In Ethiopia, girls are sometimes abducted for marriage when they are younger than eight years old. In West Africa they are recruited from poor rural families to work as domestic servants in coastal cities or even in neighbouring countries. In South Africa a recent report by Human Rights Watch warned that sexual violence and abuse are hampering girls' access to education. In Afghanistan, girls have simply been barred from school under the Taleban regime (United Nations, 2012). According to Guttman (in UNESCO, 2009), customs, poverty, fear, and violence are the reasons why girls still account for 60% of the estimated 113 million out-of-school children. The majority lived in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.



UNICEF (2008) reported that in sub-Saharan Africa, the number of girls out of school each year has risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002. In the eleven West African countries, there are 16 million children of secondary school age who are not receiving any form of formal education at school; nearly 10 million of them are girls. This is a huge proportion of the children missing out on the benefits of schooling and the gains of education in Africa. It therefore means that 40% of the total number of children out of school in all the 47% countries of sub-Saharan Africa is in West African countries (Watkins, 2008). These figures show how vulnerable the girl child has become, due to poverty. Among the girl children living in poverty-ridden households in developed and African nations, poverty has been associated with lower physical functioning (Chireshe, et al., 2010; Chireshe & Plattner, 2010; Randel, Moore, & Blair, 2008; LaFraniere, 2005), poor academic performance, and less adaptive psychosocial functioning (Connell, 2010:127). From the statistics given, women are therefore the worst enemies of poverty. Hence, there is a need to explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl children.

The number of girl children living in poverty, and who are affected and infected by HIV/AIDS, is alarming, and it is becoming a cause of concern among educators and the governments. In Zimbabwe a significant number of girls have withdrawn from school because of poverty and HIV/AIDS. About 30% of the children in developing countries suffer from stunted growth - are underweight -, and nearly two million girl children under the age of 14 years are HIV-positive, thus exacerbating their plight (WHO, 2010 in United Nations, 2012). Research established that out of the 45 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the world, about 65% (nearly 2/3) of the young people are women (UNICEF, 2010).

This researcher noted that poverty and HIV/AIDS are inextricably linked, thus each affects and aggravates the other. The poor girl children are either infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. Both poverty and HIV/AIDS are therefore detrimental to the holistic development of learners. The majority of the children in Africa have lost either one or both parents, thus increasing the poverty levels among families. It should also be noted that more than 11 million children in Africa die each year from preventable poverty-related health issues such as malaria, diarrhoea and pneumonia (Watkins, 2008:20). It is against this background that this research is carried out with

the aim of suggesting sound policies and measures to reduce the effects of poverty on girl children.

In general the school drop-out rates are high in Africa because of poverty (Chireshe, 2010; Manwa, et al., 2010). Less than one in four children who start primary school actually complete it; the figures are lower for girls (Connell, 2010:145; Global Campaign for Education, 2005). Also the lack of trained teachers, material resources and infrastructure impact on both the quality of education and on attendance rates of girl learners (Mufanechiya et al., 2012). The learning barriers are particularly high for girls because they carry a larger burden of domestic responsibility than boys, and are more likely to be kept out of school. In many poor countries families with limited funds are forced to send boys rather than girls to school. The majority of the parents think boys are a better investment; hence girls remain at home to help with the domestic chores.

### **3.4 The Zimbabwean context**

The majority of Zimbabwe's poor people (88%) live in rural areas; the communal farming areas have 76% of the poor and 82% of the very poor in Zimbabwe (Robertson, 2011:3). Poverty is most common and deepest in the low rainfall areas of Matabeleland, Masvingo and Mberengwa. The main causes of poverty include economic sanctions on Zimbabwe by the Western countries, drought, environmental degradation, and the land issue, and economic and political instability. It is estimated that about seven in ten families in the urban areas of Zimbabwe are poor, and eight in ten families in the rural areas (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011:185; Chitiga & Chinoona, 2011; Moyo, 2012). Thus, the number of people living in poverty in Zimbabwe is alarming. It should be noted that the more families in Zimbabwe live in dire poverty, the more the education of their children is compromised, especially the education of the girl child.

At independence in 1980 the Zimbabwean dollar was worth about 1.50 USD. However, the 1990s witnessed a turnaround of economic fortunes, and the downward spiral began (Kapungu, 2007:2). Extreme poverty increased significantly during the 1990s. This assumption is based on the total consumption poverty line (poor and very poor); households in poverty increased from 42% in 1995 to 78% by 2008 (PASS, 2008, in Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011). Between 2000 and

2009 the economy of the country was characterised by ever-escalating inflation levels, namely 624% in early 2004, falling back to low triple digits around 2005, before surging to a new high of 3,713% in April 2007 (Kapungu, 2007:2; Rusinga & Moyo, 2012). Distortions in the pricing of basic commodities and services, high unemployment rates, rising poverty levels, foreign exchange and commodity shortages, the deterioration of the provision of basic public services, electricity power cuts, the shortage of consumer goods, rising inequalities, and large income disparities characterised the economy. The education situation in the country was exacerbated by a yearlong teachers' strike in 2008, which led to a dramatic decline in the standard of learning. This affected many families in different ways, leading to a number of psychosocial problems affecting the academic performance of the children. The majority of Science, Mathematics and Geography teachers migrated to South Africa, Botswana and Namibia, in search of greener pastures, and as a result, worsening the situation in the schools.

The economic crisis in Zimbabwe was worsened by the land reform. Zimbabweans undertook an unsystematic land reform programme, code-named 'The Third Chimurenga'. This land reform caused shockwaves internationally. Its mechanics were violent, as white farmers were literally dragged from the farms, and their properties burnt. There was no compensation for infrastructure made in the farms (Moyo, 2012:11). As a result of the violence, the country was diplomatically isolated, and the economy melted down. The social delivery sectors like health and education collapsed as a result (Nsingo, 2011). The living standards of many average Zimbabweans drastically declined. The Zimbabwean crisis, however, reached its peak following the much disputed presidential election in March 2008. Thereafter the political terrain of the country plunged into the Machiavellian law of the jungle as the ordinary people felt the wrath and suffered a lot. ZANU PF's Robert Mugabe and MDC's Morgan Tsvangirayi wrestled for the support of the people across the country, in a way that came to mirror the proverbial fight of elephants in which only the grass suffers. The women and the children were greatly affected, and they suffered the most.

The switch from the Zimbabwean dollar to multi-international currencies in the economy has also contributed to raising levels of poverty. This would include the lack of housing, clothing, access to medical health, access to education, and severe unemployment. In the new dispensation

all the services are being paid for in foreign currency, which most people in Zimbabwe simply do not have and cannot afford to get. As a result of poverty, many Zimbabweans have fled to settle in neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, and Malawi. The mass exodus of the population in search of greener pastures has led to a shortage of qualified workers, especially in the education sector, compromising the quality of education (Kapungu, 2007:5; Chitiga & Chinoona, 2011). This also has had a negative impact on the education of the children. Since most parents and guardians will have gone to neighbouring countries in search of greener pastures, many children became latchkey (self-cares). This is detrimental since the children are exposed to various forms of abuse, such as sexual and drug abuse, and this affects their academic performance. It should be noted that the exodus of teachers to neighbouring countries disadvantaged girls and boys alike. This, however, does not rule out the fact that girls are more vulnerable to poverty than boys.

With the prevailing economic hardships faced by the majority of the people in Zimbabwe, the lack of resources by parents and guardians for schooling negatively affects the schooling of many children in the country, thereby compromising their academic performance, and their grade completion rates, as illustrated in tables, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 respectively. The girl child is most affected, since education in Zimbabwe requires the payment of tuition fees at all levels, pre-school, primary, secondary, and tertiary. This means that a huge burden falls on the parents to send their children to school. Because of the high costs of living for most families in Zimbabwe, the majority of parents would prefer to send the boy child to school rather than the girl, as indicated by the secondary school completion rates by sex and parity index below. Thus, economic factors are responsible for the widening of the academic gaps between boys and girls in developing countries. The tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 below depict the education completion rates per sex, and also the completion rate per province in Zimbabwe.

**Table 3.1 Secondary School Completion Rate, Form 1 to Form 4, by sex and parity index, Zimbabwe 2004-2008**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Parity Index</b>
2000-2004	73.69	82.09	78.07	0.90
2001-2005	74.42	82.16	78.44	0.91
2002-2006	70.96	83.43	77.27	0.85
2003-2004	67.47	71.96	69.80	0.94
2004-2008	70.66	75.27	73.05	0.94

Source: (Zimbabwe National Strategic Plan, 2012:2).

As shown in table 3.1 above, between 2000 and 2008 the completion rates were lower for girls than for boys. However, the situation of girls compared to boys has improved between 2004 and 2008, as indicated by an increase in the parity index. In the light of the figures as indicated above, the education of girls in Zimbabwe continues to lag behind, hence the need for this research to explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

**Table 3.2: Secondary School Completion Rates, Form 1 to Form 6, by sex and parity index, Zimbabwe 2004-2008**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Parity Index</b>
1999-2005	5.78	7.79	6.81	0.75
2000-2006	5.45	7.51	6.53	0.73
2001-2007	6.17	8.58	7.43	0.72
2002-2008	8.29	12.51	10.42	0.66

Source: (Zimbabwe National Strategic Plan, 2012:2).

Table, 3.2 illustrates that the A Level completion rates were much lower for girls than the Form 2 and O-level ones, although they have been on a gradual increase since 2006. In 2008 only 10.42% of the pupils who started Form 1 in 2002 completed Form 6. The completion rates for females and males for the same year were 8.29% and 12.51% respectively. The girls' completion rates were thus lower than those of the boys. A needs assessment needs to be done to determine the factors that militate against the completion of education, and the academic performance of the girl children.

**Table 3.3: Secondary School Completion Rates, Form 1 to Form 6, by province, form and sex, Zimbabwe 2008**

Province	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Harare	90.67	94.89	92.73	12.15	19.40	15.67
Manicaland	71.89	76.49	74.36	8.41	12.34	10.46
Mashonaland Central	55.03	64.07	60.04	7.16	10.21	8.75
Mashonaland East	68.94	75.50	72.46	8.56	9.99	9.30
Mashonaland West	68.36	73.93	71.39	4.72	9.94	7.44
Masvingo	67.86	75.09	71.62	7.33	11.70	9.59
Matabeleland North	70.00	71.46	70.71	9.18	12.47	10.77
Matabeleland South	68.52	67.22	67.88	6.88	10.41	8.60
Midlands	68.12	73.00	70.62	8.44	14.56	11.45

**Source:** (Zimbabwe National Strategic Plan, 2012:2).

This research study will be carried out in Masvingo Province, which had a low completion rate of 71.62, 67.86 for girls and 75.09 for boys. Mashonaland Central had the lowest completion rate, whilst Harare had the highest completion rates of 92.73 and 15.67 respectively. As shown in table 3.4 above, the females continue to be more disadvantaged than their male counterparts at all levels, except in Matabeleland South.

Robertson (2011) mentioned that 94% of the rural schools serving the majority of the population were closed in 2008, and 66 of the 70 schools were abandoned. The attendance rates plummeted from over 80% to 20%. Learning only resumed in some urban areas where the teachers' salaries were paid in US dollars by the parents, creating a widening gap between rural and urban schools, thus also exacerbating the academic gap between boys and girls. In 2009 the Minister of Education, David Coltart reported that about 100 000 of the learners (33%) of those eligible to write the Ordinary Level examinations, and around 10 700 of the learners (29% of those eligible to write the Advanced Level examinations) had failed to register. About 70% of those who failed to register were girls, since the families gave priority to boy children in situations of poverty in Zimbabwe (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012).

Although the country has made significant progress in terms of education, with literacy rates reaching 80% for women and 90% for men, this has not had the desired effect of reducing the academic gap between boys and girls. Hence this study will explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl children, with the aim of suggesting sound policies, measures and solutions that help minimise the effects of poverty on girl children.

### **3.5 A gender perspective on poverty and education**

Females in developing countries typically receive less education than do males (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012; UNICEF, 2010; Manwa, et al., 2010:147; Chitiga, & Chinoona, 2011; Saito, 2011; Chireshe, 2010; Chreshe, et al., 2010). Williams, Seed and Mwau (2010) indicate that women are two thirds of the world's illiterate, earn one tenth of the world's income, and perform two thirds of the world's work. High education costs have seen the male child getting preference to continue with his education. In many cases people may argue that the girl child will get married and that the boy child will remain with and support his family, hence the family always strives for him to get a career. Primitive as this might sound, a number of girls still face this dilemma in Zimbabwe, and in most African countries.

In developing countries more boys than girls are enrolled and complete their education (Saito, 2011:43). Zimbabwean families are forced to decide who they will send to school, boys or girls. The reason why so many girls are absent from school is because the parents think boys are a

better investment, because they are more likely to get jobs. Thus the mothers keep their daughters at home to help with the domestic chores. The parents assume the girls will simply marry, and do not need schooling (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011:194). Girls are also said to be vulnerable to physical attacks on the way to and from school (Kapungu, 2007:2). While it is true that the girl child is mostly affected by the psychosocial effects of poverty, boys also have become victims of poverty. Some do not go to school because of not being successful in obtaining school fees. The majority of them are employed on farms, in the mine, or as vendors. This researcher noted that some boys also did not complete their Ordinary Level studies because of poverty. This shows that, to some extent, poverty does not discriminate in respect of gender, although the girl child in most countries is affected the most. Poverty has, however, worsened the plight of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

The 2009 UNESCO EFA Report stated that the average Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in sub-Saharan Africa was 25% in 2006, meaning that 78 million children were not enrolled in secondary school. Gender disparities intensify in secondary education, as cultural attitudes reinforce the norm that girls do not need further education after primary school (United Nations, 2012). According to the UN Beijing Review and Appraisal, only one in five girls in sub-Saharan Africa are enrolled in secondary school. If the financial expenses of education force parents to choose whether to send their son or daughter to school, they will choose the son, because sons are seen as a higher economic investment for the future of the family (Nsingo, 2011:8; Neuman, 2009:586; Rowan, et al., 2004:6; Watkins, 2008). However, even when girls are provided with the opportunity to pursue secondary education, their preparation level is far below that of boys, due to unequal treatment at primary school, and the lack of parental and family support.

Thus the transition from primary to secondary school is an important drop-out point, where boys are lauded for passing their examinations successfully, and girls are left behind (Neuman, 2009:586; Rowan, Cohen & Raudenbush, 2004:6). In 2005 in sub-Saharan Africa, the transition rate from primary to secondary school was 66% for boys versus 57% for girls (Luthar, 2009; Mikkola, 2006). In Rwanda, for example, according to the Ministry of Education Statistics in 2006, the transition rate was 62% for boys and 55.3% for girls. It can therefore be concluded that more boys than girls proceed to secondary school. Thus the females' educational opportunities



remain significantly lower than that of males, and the gap is particularly marked in the poorest countries; hence the need to explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the girl child in Zimbabwe.

Egalitarians have argued that in education the learners must be accorded a common social contact so that there may be social harmony and justice (Gwarinda, 2011:24); hence the call for equal education access for all. Most governments in developing countries, including Zimbabwe, recognise the principle that education is a fundamental human right, namely that all children have the right to education, irrespective of their gender (United Nations, 2012). Many governments have attempted to ensure the provision of this basic human right. However, there are still some disadvantaged groups that have fallen behind, including girls and women (United Nations, 2012).

Both the Dakar Final Framework for Action, in Education for All (EFA) (UNESCO, 2009), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations, 2012) emphasised the importance of gender equality in education within the process of international goal-setting. While there has been much improvement in gender parity with respect to school participation rates since 1999, the gender equality issue in education needs to go far beyond parity (UNESCO, 2011). Studies by Chireshe (2010), Saito (2011), and Okeke et al. (2012) reveal that boys are treated differently from girls, but due to the fight for women's rights worldwide, inequalities in education have been reduced considerably in recent decades and Zimbabwe, in particular, is no exception to this development.

Girl children in Zimbabwe and Africa are denied educational opportunities and exposure to education, due to various reasons. Sexual harassment, cultural practices, and abuse by even school teachers and parents, the lack of school fees, child labour, early marriages, parental commitments, and early pregnancies affect the academic performance of girls (Donald, et al., 2010:292; Sachiti, 2011; Chireshe, 2010). Education policies, however, need to address and correct these inequalities if the goals of achieving universal education are taken seriously in Zimbabwe and the world over.

Gender gaps can reach extremes in conservative rural areas, where traditional practices can impede a girl's education (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012). In Northern Nigeria, for instance, an early marriage is widely seen as ensuring a bride's chastity (Watkins, 2008). In a largely Muslim culture, religious factors dictate exclusion from schools. Muslim parents often believe that the secular education offered in public schools is harmful to their religious traditions, and will corrupt their girl children. As a result, Muslim parents, especially in rural areas, tend to send their sons to public schools, and their daughters to Quaranic Institutions (Watkins, 2008). This has serious implications in respect of the academic performance of the girl child. In Zimbabwe it is mainly people from poor households who hold on to segregatory cultural and religious practices, like *chimutsamapfihwa*, which militate against the education of girl learners.

The demand for education in Zimbabwe and other developing countries depend on a number of factors, such as the financial and opportunity costs of education, the quality of education, and its perceived benefits (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011). The financial and opportunity costs of schooling are often high for girls, making it difficult for poor parents to afford schooling for their children. Such financial costs include not only school fees, but also other direct costs, such as the cost of transport, school uniforms, and school books.

In addition to the financial costs, there are also the non-financial costs, such as the opportunity cost of sending children to school. Particularly in rural areas, many girl children may be involved in agricultural work or domestic duties, so sending them to school is an opportunity cost to the household (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010). Girls often have more household responsibilities, and there may be fewer well-paying jobs available for educated girls than for boys (Watkins, 2008; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 2007). Given the above, cost sensitivity (price elasticity) might even be greater among the poor girl children, leading to greater inequality in access to education.

Opportunity costs are usually much higher for girls than for boys, since girls are expected to do more domestic work than boys. Researches done in Burkina Faso, Nepal, West Africa, Nigeria and Zimbabwe show that girls are generally required to spend more time on household chores than boys (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012; Engle & Black, 2008:251; UNICEF, 2010; Manwa, et al., 2010:146). Girls' labour is used to substitute the mothers, in work such as caring for the siblings,

fetching firewood and water, caring for animals, and pounding grain. The loss of girls' labour while they are at school thus has an impact on the women's ability to raise the household income, either through food production or wage labour (Herz, Subbarao, Habib, & Raney, 2001:12, Watkins, 2008). It is common knowledge in Zimbabwe that women care for the family in every respect. They plan, prepare and cook meals, wash clothes, clean the home, and take care of the sick. Given the above, the girl children in comparison to boys spend a lot of time on domestic chores, thus compromising their homework and academic performance.

Tradition favours female seclusion, or women remaining within the home. The future economic returns on girls' schooling are less than that on boys' schooling (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012; Hanushek & Zhang, 2006:19). The current earning capacity of women also influences expectations of how much a girl in education can expect to earn in later life. Girl children whose families faced deep and persistent poverty fared the worst, and registered the largest achievement gap, which again suggests that these children would gain the most from added income (Bergeson, 2006:9). The inverse is also true, thus reducing the costs associated with education, including school fees, is likely to improve school attendance among the poor. That is one of the reasons why the global Education for All initiative places such a great emphasis on eliminating school fees in poor countries. The World Bank Report (2005:116) notes that poor people are often the last to enrol in basic education, thus government spending that improves access strongly favours the poorer households.

Studies in Morocco also reveal that the reasons for the non-attendance of school differ by gender, and that poverty was found to be a reason for non-attendance of 15.8% for girls, but only 8.9% for boys (Baden, 2008:34; Jensen, 2007:126). In the poorest countries, girls were much less likely to attend school, with 48.5% non-attendance for girls versus 22% for boys. (World Bank, 2009). Rao (2004:140) indicated that when girls or women try to combine schooling with home apprenticeships, the choice between work and study time may lead to family tensions, poor performance, poor lesson attendance, and dropouts. Thus girls often have more household responsibilities, which may limit their educational opportunities.

Girls too, may contribute their wages towards the survival of the household, especially in households experiencing extreme poverty. In some instances girl children may even finance

other children's education. A study on child prostitution in Mozambique in 1994 and 1995 established that some girls were earning money through sex work in order to pay for their own schooling, often with the tacit approval of their parents (Baden, 2008:34). In many Asian countries the daughters' earnings are used to pay for the sons' education (Watkins, 2008; Baden, 2008:34). It should be noted that education is a fundamental right of every child everywhere, and key to transforming the girl learner's life and the life of her community. Without education girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential, and to play productive and equal roles in their families, and elsewhere, in the larger society. The education of the girl child has a strong and very important role on the women in society. It tends to draw many women into the labour force, thus reducing the vicious cycle of poverty.

Other constraints to girls' schooling in Zimbabwe and the world over include concerns about their safety both at school and in journeying between home and school, and also concerns about privacy (Her, et al., 2001:17). In Ghana and Zimbabwe the girls' enrolment is deterred by the long distance to school. Data from Indonesia, for example, shows a direct correlation between distance and income groups, with the poorest living the furthest away from the secondary schools, and the richest situated conveniently closer (Watkins, 2008). Rich families can also afford transport fees to and from school. Greater distances to school for poorer households are likely to be a greater constraint to girls' schooling than for boys', given the concerns for girls' safety, particularly at puberty (UNDP, 2009; Herz, et al., 2001:17).

Studies done in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Thailand, and Mexico, for example, attest to similar conditions (Grimm, 2012; Chabaya, et al., 2009:18; Emwamu & Osujo, 2010; Fry, 2003; Rodriguez, 2008; Wikan, 2004). In some of the many rural villages in Zimbabwe, secondary and high schools are located long distances from the homes of the girls who participated in the study. This situation exists because low learner numbers do not justify the establishment of schools in every village and/or local municipality ward. Girls found it hard and sometimes unsafe to travel long distances to attend school, therefore more has to be done to facilitate access to schooling for as many girl learners as possible.

Issues concerning puberty and sexuality also relate to safety concerns. The parents fear that the boys and male teachers at school may lead to inappropriate sexual activity, or even physical

abuse (UNICEF, 2010; UNICEF, 2012). In Bangladesh the parents are unlikely to send their daughters to school if the schools lack private toilet facilities (Herz, 2004; Burrows & Maunder, 2004). For poor households these safety concerns may be increased due to the fact that children from the poorest households are often furthest from schools, particularly at secondary school level. The biggest social problem disadvantaging girls more than boys is related to the issue of sexuality (Department of Women, Children and Persons with Disability, 2011; Department of Gender & Women's Health, 2003). Sexual harassment at school and the lack of protection against it also discourage parents from sending their girl children to school.

Early marriages or pregnancies as a result of poverty are another factor reducing female education. The perception of women's roles and the extremely high number of early marriages in Africa, limit the prospects of girls being educated (Bakare, 2011:454; Watkins, 2008). In many countries the legal minimum age at marriage, and the actual age are lower for females than for males. In Zimbabwe, for example, the minimum age for girls is 16, and for boys 21. Early marriage therefore probably acts as a deterrent to female education more than to male education. Pregnancy also disrupts girls' schooling, and in many countries girls are automatically expelled from school when pregnant. The girls' early marriage, linked to poverty as poor households may push daughters to marry for economic reasons, to save on the upkeep, or to obtain bride wealth.

Sachiti (2011) established that early marriages are the order of the day in most Zimbabwe communal areas. Mrs Masvokisi (a chief's wife from Chipinge communal area in Zimbabwe) said some of the girls voluntarily entered into marriages while others were forced to do so under the Kuputsa or Kuzvarira tradition, risking pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and the curtailment of their education. *Kuputsa* is a form of marriage where a young girl, sometimes as young as from birth, is given to another family in exchange for either food or livestock. Thus girls from poor households may also be more likely to engage in sexual survival strategies to secure support for their schooling.

Given the above, the relationship between academic failure and teenage pregnancy is quite strong, since the latter affects the educational achievement of the girls as well as that of their children (Okeke, et al., 2012). Thus parenthood is a leading cause of school drop-out among teen girls. With education cut short and disturbed, teenage mothers may lack job skills, making it

difficult for them to secure good jobs. Some end up dependent on other family members or on assistance from the public. This leads to them living in poverty.

Reference has been made about the increased risk of girls becoming pregnant while still at school (Grant & Hallman, 2006:134). While there are barriers to gender equity, there is need for a policy which addresses the education needs of girls, a gender-sensitive school environment, and a home and community environment which is adequately supportive (Conley, 2009). As pointed out elsewhere, the legislation environment is girl-friendly, but perhaps not so in terms of the Education Policy. Gross enrolment rates for girls in most developing countries went up from 52% to 94% in 2005. However, the rate of girl drop-outs is still worrisome (United Nations Girls' Education Initiative - UNICEF, 2011).

The Zimbabwean situation, as of 2005, was that there was gender equity in terms of enrolment, but the completion rate was still a cause for concern, owing to family poverty and teenage pregnancy. Girls, especially at secondary school level, are affected by teenage pregnancy. They are at a stage where they experiment with sex, and many of them are caught in the wrong net, hence the increase in the drop-out rate (Watkins, 2008). The World Bank Development Report (2012) noted that girls have higher drop-out numbers, and the reasons for this situation, such as pregnancy and the need to care for the family, are unique to girls. Given the above, gender disparities still remain throughout the education system, since the completion rates of boys and girls are different.

The policy on maternity leave was rescinded and revised in September 2010 after pressure from the parents, and religious and traditional leaders who felt the move would increase promiscuity among students. The Minister of Education, Sport and Culture made it clear that students may be suspended, excluded or expelled from school. However, an exception was made in respect of female students who fell pregnant. Pregnant girls would be allowed to continue their schooling, depending on the circumstances of each individual case. There seems to be some vagueness in the revised policy, but essentially the position does not differ in substance from the policy as announced in August 2010 with regard to the girl child.

Gender inequality in education also manifests itself in fields of study opted for by boys and girls in schools, leading them to pursue particular careers and employment. There is a general perception that boys are better than girls in Mathematics, the Sciences and Technology, while women are more verbal, thus more oriented towards languages, Home Economics, food and nutrition (Manwa, et al., 2010:7). This perception is generally one that posits that society, boys and girls themselves, hold due to socialisation. Culturally, subjects in schools are often assigned by gender identity, and attitudes towards certain subjects, and careers developed in the classroom, the home and the wider societal setting influencing the students' participation (Mwetulundila, 2001).

One study in respect of secondary school children in Zimbabwe found that school subjects were gender-typed on the basis of perceived ability to master them, as well as the occupations that they led to (Kapungu, 2007:6). Girls are often discriminated against on the basis of sex. Certain subjects are reserved for boys, and some for girls in the schools. The pupils often have little choice of the subjects they wish to take or to specialise in. Bowles and Gintis (1976:42, as cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2010) indicate that schools do different things to different children: boys and girls, blacks and whites, the rich and the poor are treated differently. Affluent suburban schools, working-class schools, ghetto schools, high ability classes and low ability classes all exhibit a distinctive pattern. The researchers are also of the opinion that allocating pupils to some subjects reinforces social inequality, which ultimately benefits the elites. The Marxists believe that the culture taught at schools is that of the dominant group, and that is why they pass.

It should be noted that children from a middle class background bring with them a valid and rich culture that will advantage them in their education. The opposite is also true of lower class children. This notion is supported by Basil Bernstein as cited in Gwarinda, 2011:43) who talks of the socio-linguistic theory emphasising the elaborated and restricted codes of language. The languages used in schools are from the upper class, which the pupils from affluent backgrounds find familiar. This gives the lower class children a disadvantage on coming to school, as this code acts as a barrier to learning. This explains why lower class children perform badly in school. Moreover, children who come from well-kept homes and who are themselves clean and well-clothed stand a greater chance of being put in the high ability classes than their measured

ability would seem to justify. By implication, children who are socially disadvantaged are more likely to be in low ability streams; hence they will be sponsored for failure, while their counterparts from affluent backgrounds will be sponsored for success.

A study conducted by Sum and Fogg (2001, as cited in Bergeson, 2006) found that poor students are ranked in the 19<sup>th</sup> percentile on assessments, while students from a mid-upper income family are ranked in the 66<sup>th</sup> percentile on assessments. In one study, 43.5% of low-income students did not successfully meet any of the required subject area assessments, while only 13.2% of low-income students met all of the required subject area assessments (Bergeson, 2006:15). Similar studies have found comparable results (Bergeson, 2006:15). Children from very poor households with an income below 50% of the poverty line, scored 7 to 12 points lower than children from non-poor households, while children from poor households, with an income from 50% to 100% of the poverty line, scored 4 to 7 points lower (Smith, Lowers & Larkin, 2009). Mayer (2007:83-87) tested students in reading and Mathematics prior to an increase in income, followed by a post-test after the increase in income. The findings indicated that the effect on the reading scores ranged from a small negative effect to a small positive effect, while the effects on the scores in Mathematics were slightly bigger (Mayer, 2007:87).

An additional study conducted by Mayer (2007:93) studied the test scores of siblings, testing one sibling prior to an increase in parental income. The study found that "...changes in income between siblings have a very small and statistically insignificant effect on children's test scores and educational attainment" (Mayer, 2007:96). Thus the studies showed that there was no correlation between the students' test scores and income level. The occasional lack of correlation between income and achievement in some studies may be due to the source of the income. The study therefore shows that not only the lack of income negatively affects academic performance. Other factors like heredity, the attitude of the teachers and the learners' negative attitude towards school should also be explored to produce a balanced argument.

While it is true, to some extent, that children from poverty-stricken households tend to perform poorly in comparison to children from affluent backgrounds, in some situations some children from poor backgrounds defied the odds and performed very well. Findings from a study by Rutter (2008) (as cited in Bernard, 2012) indicated that children who have resilience tend to do



better in some risky contexts when compared to children without protective factors in the same contexts. This shows that not all children from low socio-economic backgrounds will perform badly at school. However, this is not a justification to expose a child to any risk, because there are girl children who do better when not exposed to high levels of poverty or adversity (Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, & Wallace, 2006:738; Tugade, Fredrickson, & Barrett, 2004:1167).

It is against this background that parental levels of education, parental support, size of the family, socioeconomic status, peers, the neighbourhood, school, the teachers' attitudes, resource endowment, drop-out rates and enrolment rates, and government policies on education will be explored to find the extent to which they affect the academic performance of girl children. This researcher will try to ascertain in what way the multiple contexts of poverty affect the academic performance of girl children in Zimbabwe with the aim of suggesting sound policies, intervention measures and possible solutions to minimise the effects of poverty on the girl child.

It is widely believed that poor children pose a major challenge to schools. Many reside in central city neighbourhoods or relatively isolated rural areas, compounding the existing obstacles to equal educational opportunities and academic success (Brooks, 2008). Most students from poor backgrounds are usually enrolled at poor schools without any resources. Qualified and experienced teachers tend to shun such schools, thus exacerbating the plight of the children. Studies consistently document that most educators themselves come from middle-class backgrounds, making it difficult for them to relate personally with students who live in poverty (Zeichner, 2003:509; Books, 2004). The capacity of the teachers to work with poor children is shaped by the teacher educators, the school district administrators, educational researchers, and other experts. It is not clear; however, just what lessons about the poor are being transmitted to the teachers and other educators, and how they are being prepared to work with them more effectively. The teachers, therefore, are instrumental in shaping the self-concepts of the children; which implies that they need to be genuine, warm, loving, and empathising towards the learners to help them to self-actualise.

The United Nations Educational Report (2010) states that girls are disproportionately the victims of intolerance, discrimination and violence in the education system. Research findings of this nature raise questions on whether the girl child is a victim because she is a female or girl. The

Nziramasa Commission (1999:172) states that countries throughout the world are in agreement with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1990 World Summit for Children, Children, the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien. All of them affirm the right of every human being to education, and universal primary education by 2015, and the Millennium Development Goals, which advocate equal education for all by 2015, and who wish to eradicate poverty and hunger completely by 2015. The gender gap has, however, lessened significantly over the last 15 years, particularly in primary education, with high priorities being placed on girls' education in national, continental and international education policies and laws, conventions and agreements. However, there are still a great number of girls without access to primary and secondary education across the continent, hence the need to explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child.

The World Bank has stressed investment in female education as an important development strategy for developing countries, and this strategy is broadly agreed upon across a range of agencies and, increasingly, the governments. In particular, the World Bank has stressed the high social rates of return to female education. It is widely claimed that educated women marry later, want fewer children, and are more likely to use effective methods of contraception. The more educated the mother, the lower is the maternal mortality rate, and the healthier is the child (World Bank, 2010).

The girl-child in Zimbabwe has of late received considerable attention from the government and non-governmental organisations, covering virtually all facets of life economically, politically and socially, but more so in respect of education. The World Bank is a partner, and one of many players, in the international drive to improve gender equality, and to empower girls and women. The activities of the World Bank focus on assisting the countries' own efforts to advance gender equality. Through its lending and non-lending activities, the Bank has helped to improve the lives of girls in client countries. Zimbabwe is a signatory to several such conventions, and has also introduced a plethora of laws which seek to improve the plight of women. For instance, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1990 World Summit for Children, and the 1990 World Conference on Education for

All, in Jomtien, Thailand. Zimbabwe also subscribes to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence (1991), the Global Platform for Action, and the Beijing Declaration (1995) in the United Nations (2012), and introduced gender-sensitive legislation, such as the Sexual Offences Act. These were put in place to promote gender equality, and to protect women's rights. Above all, in Zimbabwe there is a Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, whose mandate it is to oversee the development of gender programmes, and to facilitate gender mainstreaming. The impression which emerges is that the legal framework is favourable, but this is not matched by action on the ground in many spheres, especially in education.

### **3.6 The Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was established in 1989 as the first internationally binding legal organization to encompass the full range of human rights: civil, political, economic, cultural, and social, and it codified the concept of human rights specifically applicable to children. Article 12 proclaims that children are entitled to express their views on all matters of concern to them, and this norm, in turn, applies to all aspects of childhood education. Article 28 of the Convention addresses education, and specifies that all children have the right to primary education, which should be free for all (universal primary education). Education, therefore, is the fundamental right of all children, although some parents prefer to send boys only to school in case of an economic crisis.

The Beijing Conference in 1995, the Fourth World Conference for Women, set out a Broad Platform of Action (BPFA) concerning the girl child. Drawing on baseline statistics from 1990, 330 million children worldwide had no access to primary education, of which 281 million were girls. A considerably higher number of girls had no access to secondary education. The United Nations, (2012), and UNICEF (2010) acknowledged the urgent need to increase girls' access to primary and secondary education, to alter the representation of women and girls in the school curriculum, and to increase the number of female teachers worldwide. The Strategic Objective stated that there was a need to eliminate any discrimination against girls in education, skills development, and training. Without any significant change to traditional curricular representations of women in roles of inferiority, girls would find it difficult to aspire to transcend

these roles, and to work toward gender parity. In Zimbabwe a number of both primary and secondary school textbooks have been revised to become more gender sensitive. There is need, however, to educate all children, irrespective of gender. Moreover, female teachers must be trained and placed in schools to serve as positive role models for young girls, both in primary and in secondary schools (UNICEF, 2010). Through these threefold changes, Beijing set out a transformative path for the 21st century toward gender equality for girl children. This path proved the foundation for the agenda of the Dakar World Educational Forum in 2000, and the formation of the MDGs to be accomplished by 2015 (United Nations, 2012).

The World Educational Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, established a Framework of Action to achieve Education for All (EFA) by 2015. EFA Goal no. 2 aims to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE), and EFA Goal no. 5 is to remove gender disparities and inequalities in education. The Framework of Action was further divided into a two part agenda, gender parity in school participation, and equality between girls and boys in opportunities and outcomes (UNESCO, 2010). Girls and boys should have equal and full access to primary education worldwide, and should complete primary school with equal preparation and assistance in order to facilitate the passing of the required examinations and entrance into secondary school. Throughout their schooling girls and boys should experience both equal preparation and treatment, within the classroom by teachers, and by school advisors, in such a manner that girls and boys will emerge with comparable skills to enter the workforce.

The MDGs, established also in 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit and signed by 189 Heads of state around the world, outline a list of eight overarching goals for developing countries to be achieved by 2015. In this list, Goal no.3 is to “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015”. Thus MDG 3 sets a high priority on ensuring girls’ equal access to primary and secondary education (as well as tertiary) in order to achieve the broader objective of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls (UNICEF, 2010; Mahlomaholo, 2010). However, it has to be noted that this third MDG is inextricably interwoven with the other seven MDGs which also address the plight of women.

The first of these identifies the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger as the top priority in the world. For this to be achieved, women who are in the majority and are the primary life and health-givers, have to be empowered so that they may play their roles effectively. Linked to this goal is the achievement of universal primary education (MDG 2), which firmly places women and girls at the centre of any effort towards growth, improvement and development (United Nations, 2012). Women are the ones whose health is directly linked to that of the unborn and born children. This observation does not remove the responsibility from the males, but focuses specifically on the plight of females. Thus, if the world intends to reduce infant mortality (MDG 4), then it entails that women have to know more about taking care of their health (MDG 5) (Mahlomaholo, 2010:290). In a nutshell, MDG 6 refers to combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. All these diseases are poverty-related, hence the need to also address MDG 6. Females are better positioned to ensure environmental sustainability (MDG 7), as well as to establishing global partnerships for development (MDG 8) (Mahlomaholo, 2010:290). The MDGs continue by providing the road map for reducing poverty and hunger, saving children and mothers from premature death, providing sustainable and decent livelihoods, and preserving the environment for future generations. They also aim to promote parity, thus providing education to all children irrespective of gender.

However, the targets set by EFA and the MDGs have largely been missed on the African continent. According to Peninah Mlamba, Executive Director of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE, 2007:7) "...a lot of girls are dropping out of school or not being sent at all because of the poverty of parents. Traditional cultural attitudes are still very strong, especially in rural areas. The little money parents have to scrounge for sending children to school is seen as too big an investment to risk on the girl child." "Without achieving gender equality for girls in education," Kofi Annan stated, "the world has no chance of achieving many of the ambitious health, social and development targets it has set for itself." (UNICEF, 2010). Thus girls' education is a crucial precedent to meeting the broader goals of gender quality, the empowerment of women and children's rights, as indicated in the EFA and the MDGs.

### **3.7 The psychosocial effects of poverty on pupils' academic performance**

#### **3.7.1 Physical and mental health**

Girl children living in poverty are much more prone to the health and safety risks associated with malnutrition, disease, infection, and injury than are children who are not poor (Donald, et al., 2010:156; Jensen, 2007; Lacour & Tissington, 2011:552). In addition, many of these health and safety risks cause physical, cognitive, neurological or sensory problems that are likely to cause disabilities and learning difficulties (Donald, et al., 2010:276). Given the above, poverty-related diseases are thus detrimental to the academic performance of children. Children often have to miss lessons because of poverty-related illnesses, and fail to concentrate in class, thus affecting their academic performance.

Health problems and nutrition deficits are important ways by means of which poverty affects children's cognitive and school-related outcomes (Stevens, Finucane, Paciorek, Flaxman, White, Donner, & Ezzati, 2012; Hodinott, Rosegrant & Torero, 2012; Fanzo, 2012; Cameron, 2012; Ecker & Breisinger, 2012). Poor children face the increased probability of being born with a low birth weight, and experience both nutritional deficits and stunted growth (Lacour & Tissington, 2011:524; Lamb, Land, Meadows and Traylor, 2005; Gordon, 2008). Poor nutrition early in life contributes to stunted growth (Ecker & Nene, 2012; Stevens, et al., 2012; United Nations, 2012).

Furthermore, being stunted by the age of two and three years has been shown to be associated with cognitive deficits later in life, poor school achievement, and high rates of school drop-out (Pleiss & Conley, 2007:56). Research has established that the prevalence of these conditions, in addition to other health problems, can account for as much as 20% of the difference in the I.Q. scores between poor children and their non-poor peers (Bergeson, 2006:12; Phillips & Flashman, 2007:78). Thus, if girl children do not have enough food, even at three years and below, that has a tremendous effect on their academic performance later in life. The problems educators encounter in their interaction with girl learners from poor backgrounds, therefore, date back to the period before the children were born.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2011) states that more than a quarter of children below fifteen years of age in sub-Saharan Africa are underweight due to a poor diet and

malnutrition, making them more vulnerable to disease, and less able to concentrate at school. A study by Connell (2010:127) also revealed that 34% of low birth-weight children were either repeating grades, or placed in special education classes, while only 14% of normal birth-weight children experienced the same outcomes. Research studies also report elevated levels of grade repetition as a result of low birth-weight (Bray, et al., 2010; Duncan, et al., 2008). This shows that nutrition is of paramount importance in the academic performance of children. A study by Connell (2010:127) found that a low birth-weight reduces children's chances of graduating at high school by nearly 75%, when compared with their full-term siblings, regardless of family income. Given the above, poor nutrition therefore negatively impacts on the ability of children to learn.

Understanding the scope and severity of poverty is critical in Zimbabwe, so as to develop intervention programs and social policies to protect children at risk, and to treat children who have already been affected. Children from low socio-economic backgrounds are at a very high risk of developing long term social, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and personality problems.

According to Shrestha and Pathak (2012), and Brauw, Meenakshi and Gilligan (2012), underfeeding in childhood was thought to hinder mental development solely by producing permanent structural damage to the brain. A number of studies in Latin America, Africa and the United States reported that on intelligence tests, girl children with a history of malnutrition attained lower scores than children of similar social and economic status who were properly nourished (Fanzo, 2012). Thus protein energy malnutrition, iron deficiency, anaemia, Vitamin A deficiency – these poverty-related conditions, decreases resistance to disease in general. Malnutrition may cause illness, brain damage, delayed physical growth, the delayed development of motor skills, and delayed intellectual development

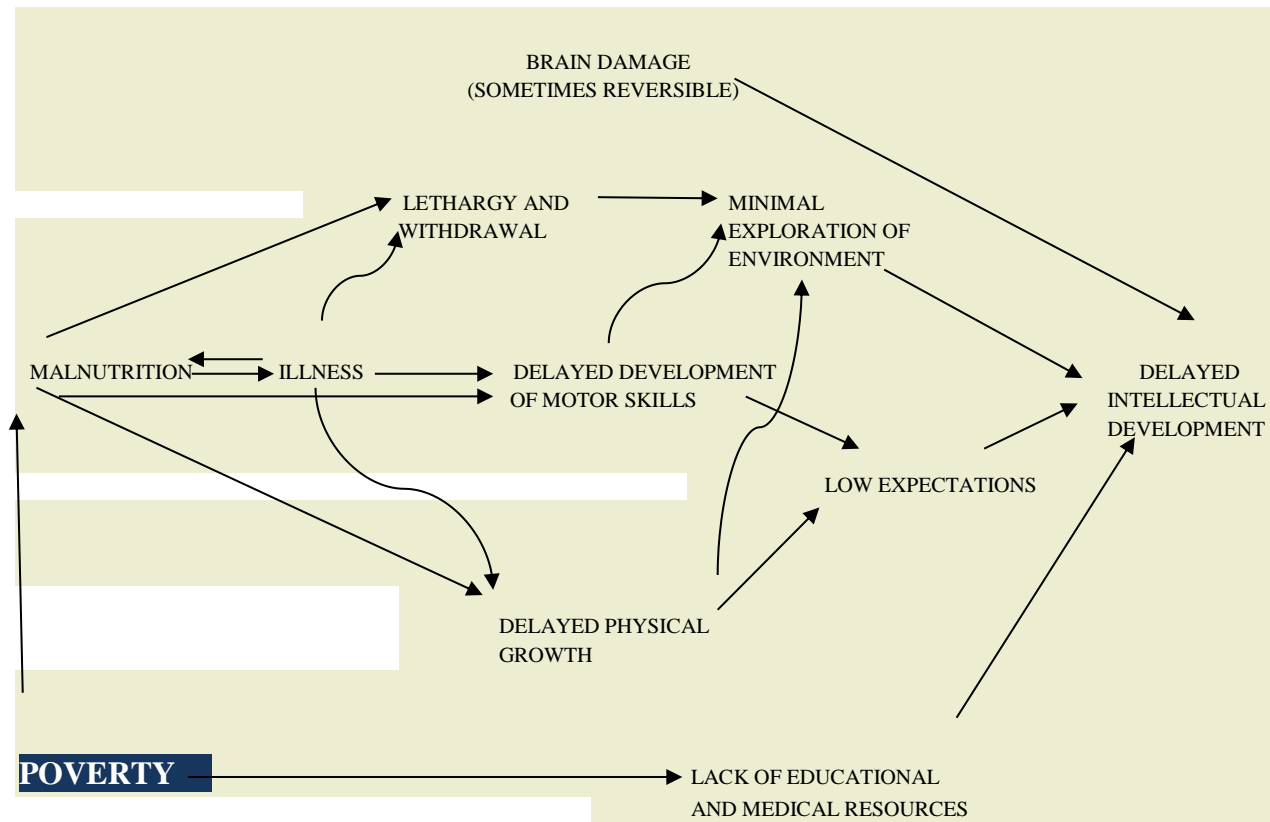
In a project carried out by the Institute of Central America and Panama in 2008 (Ferguson, Munoz, & Medrano, 2012: 453), girl children and young adults in Guatemala who had received nutritional supplements at infancy were studied to assess the influence of early diet and poverty on their later intellectual development. They were given a battery of cognitive tests. Those who regularly took a highly nutritious supplement called *Atole* performed well on most tests. But the performance of those given a less nutritious supplement called *Fresco* varied with poverty level.

Evidently, good nutrition early in life can help counteract the destructive effects of poverty on intellectual development. Those who took Atole scored significantly higher than those who took Fresco, an indication that poor nutrition in infancy can subsequently undermine the benefits of schooling (Ferguson et al., 2012: 453). There is, therefore, ample evidence to support the view that early nutrition, when the children are already at school, has strong beneficial effects on their ability to learn. Conversely, poorly-fed children find it difficult to concentrate at school. This finding provides strong support for school feeding schemes in poor countries and communities.

During the first three years of life a child's brain develops rapidly through the generation of neurons, synaptogenesis, axonal and dendritic growth, and synaptic pruning, each of which builds upon the other (Orazem, Glewwe & Patrinos, 2007:25). Any interruption in this process, such as trauma, stress, under-nutrition, or the lack of nutrients can have long-term effects on the brain's structure, and on the child's socio-emotional development and academic performance. Early poverty has been found to have relatively long-term effects on reading skills, the I.Q., and class placement during later school years, possibly even into high school (Ferguson, et al., 2012: 453).

Research has established that malnutrition early in life can limit the child's long-term intellectual development (Lacour & Tissington, 2011:525). Implicit to the above, children should not be exposed to malnutrition even at an early age, for it has detrimental effects on their academic performance, and on their holistic development. Malnutrition constrains the ability of children to fulfill their potential to the utmost. Hunger and undernourished children are not able to do physical work, do not attend school regularly, and if they do, are less able to concentrate and learn (Fanzo, 2012; Shrestha & Pathak, 2012). In support of the above, Pollitt and Brown (2006) assert that malnutrition hinders the cognitive abilities through several interacting routes, as shown in the diagram below (fig 3.).





**Figure 3.1: How malnutrition hinders cognitive development**

(Pollitt & Brown, 2006)

As shown in figure 3.1, poverty may lead to malnutrition, which causes an array of psychosocial problems like illness, brain damage, delayed physical growth, and the delayed development of motor skills, and of intellectual development. Malnutrition, therefore, influences the intellectual development by interfering with the child's overall health as well as his or her energy level, rate of motor development, and rate of growth. In addition, a low economic status can exacerbate all these factors, placing impoverished children at particular risk for cognitive impairment later in life. Fanzo (2012) indicated that for the past ten years, hunger has been measured against the achievement of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) no. 1, with the target of reducing the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by half between 1990 and 2015. Many countries are still far from reaching this target, and much of the progress made has been eroded by the recent global food prices and economic crises during 2007-2008, and in 2011.

Despite high-level commitment in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other initiatives, most developing countries are likely to fail in achieving their nutrition-related goals, although there are large differences in the nutritional achievements across the countries (Stevens, et al. 2012). The lack of political commitment and action on the part of the central governments may be a critical factor (or even the main reason) for failure to counteract malnutrition, whereas in other developing countries having a functional nutrition policy in place may be the driver of success (Nabarro, et al., 2012).

Children from low-income families have generally poorer physical health than do their more affluent peers. In particular, there is a higher incidence of such conditions as asthma, respiratory infections, tuberculosis, ear infections, and hearing loss (Donald, et al., 2010). Children with no health insurance may receive little or no treatment for illnesses, and are far more likely to die from injuries or infections than are well-off children (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002:591; Bradley & Caldwell, 2004). In addition, early healthy conditions may have significant long-term consequences, even as the children's socio-economic status improves later in life (Ecker & Breisinger, 2012; Hoddinott, et al., 2012; Jensen 2007; McLoyd, 2008:198). Donald, et al. (2010:201) found that a significant portion of health differentials across neighbourhoods (high and low income) could be explained by the disparate levels of stress across these neighbourhoods.

Studies have shown that children who live in persistent or chronic poverty indicate less favourable cognitive and social development, and poorer physical and mental health (Bolger, Patterson, Charlotte, Thompson, William, & Kupersmidt, 2005:1120; Costello, Compton, Keeler & Angold, 2003:2026; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2007:12). The greater incidence of health issues among lower-income students leads to increased absences from school (Chabaya, et al., 2009), tardiness (Abebe, 2009), incidences of illness at school, and rates of undiagnosed and/or untreated health problems or disabilities (Jensen, 2007).

Girl children raised in poverty tend to miss school more often because of illness, which can impair their brain functioning, thus affecting their academic performance. A vicious cycle of poverty can be noted when children from poor backgrounds suffer malnutrition, poor physical and mental health, socio-emotional disturbances, and poor academic performance. It is not easy

to break the cycle of poverty for poor children. This, however, does not rule out the fact that some children have the resilience to excel, despite coming from impoverished backgrounds.

### **3.7.2 The effect of the home and the family on academic performance**

Children who experience poverty may live in physical environments that offer less stimulation and fewer resources for learning. Their parents may be less able to buy them games, toys, books, computers, and other resources that promote learning, or to provide them with high-quality childcare (Yeung, Linver & Brooks-Gunn, 2002:1870). They may be living in places that are not safe for outdoor play. Thus, in many poor communities their home circumstances are often not conducive to learning. These include factors such as a lack of lighting, spending much time on domestic chores, having no desk or table to work at, or not having books at home. These circumstances may lead to anxiety and emotional stress, which may be increased by violence and abuse among girls in some homes (Donald, et al., 2010:192). All of these challenges in poor communities, considered together with the impact of lower levels of parental education, may result in the children having little or no assistance with their homework, and less motivation to learn.

Higher-income children benefit from higher levels of cognitively stimulating materials available in their homes, compared to low-income children (Hanushek & Zhang, 2006:21). The family income directly influences the material resources available to the children in their homes. The provision of a stimulating home environment, in turn, accounts for much of the effect of income on the cognitive development of school children, and may be the most important pathway through which poverty operates. In poor countries the lack of educational resources in the schools sometimes makes learning extremely difficult. In 2001 an average of only 8.7 on a list of 22 desirable resources for teaching were available in the 14 SACMEQ (Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality) countries, and as many as 10% of children, (45% in Zanzibar) had no place to sit (UNESCO, 2004, 2011). Such absence of basic resources and extreme overcrowding in many developing country schools means that other factors that are crucial for quality education (for example, teacher subject-knowledge) may initially play a smaller role. But as the budget situation improves, more resources do not always generate a similar educational improvement, perhaps because the organisation of the school and

the classroom does not adjust to use the additional resources well, or because there may be threshold levels beyond which adding further resources do not yield significant additional benefits for the teacher (Saito, 2011).

Children from poor economic backgrounds are not afforded the same luxuries and opportunities as those from wealthy backgrounds. This is one reason why differences in vocabulary and reading ability are associated with family income (Hanushek & Zhang, 2006:21). Poor families are faced with the direct as well as the indirect consequences of their economic situation, including the lack of resources, and the stress associated with their predicament (Bradley, Corwyn, McAdoo & Coll, 2001:1859).

Bradley, et al. (2001:1861) found that being poor can affect almost every aspect of a child's home life. Such qualities as parental responsiveness, parental teaching, and the quality of the physical home environment were all associated with family income. Bradley, et al. (2001:1862) studied the home environments of children in the United States according to age, ethnicity, and poverty status. They indicated that knowledge of a child's day-to-day exposures contribute to the understanding of the relationship between the environment and development. For example, children who have access to a large number of books in their homes, and are consistently being read to, develop the ability to read and vocabulary at a faster rate than children without these resources. Educational resources play a significant role in boosting the academic performance of learners. Poor families have fewer material resources, and children growing up with fewer resources tend not to do well at school and in other aspects of life, leading to variations in social, emotional, cognitive, and physical functioning.

Resources are often more readily available in urban than in rural areas, in rich than in poor neighbourhoods within cities, and in rich than in poor schools (Levine, 2006). Even in countries where public resources are equitably distributed among schools; good teachers may avoid poor schools because of the greater difficulty of teaching poor children (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011). Developing countries find it difficult to find good teachers to teach in the rural areas, while in rich countries good teachers often avoid poor schools. In Zimbabwe financial incentives have not been very successful at attracting better teachers to poor rural and urban schools. This is partly

because of the extreme difficulty of teaching poor children, often in deprived circumstances, and the preference of good teachers to teach in more affluent schools.

Many studies in developing countries have shown that access to education differs, depending on income level (Okeke, et al., 2012; Chireshe, et al, 2010; Chabaya, et al, 2009; Obure, Obongo & Waka, 2009:450; Masitsa, 2006:101-103).

The effects of income and other highly correlated aspects of socioeconomic status, maternal education, maternal depression, home learning resources, parental interaction, neighbourhood factors, and school attendance will be explored to understand the separate contribution of each factor to the academic performance of girl children in Zimbabwe.

Constantine (2005, as cited in Brooks-Gunn, et al., 2007) examined six communities in the greater Los Angeles, California area, and found that children in high-income communities had access to significantly more books than children in low-income communities did. In fact, she found that in some affluent communities, children had more books in their homes than low socio-economic status (SES) children had in all the school sources combined. The lack of support and cognitive stimulation in the children's home environments was found to account for one third to a half of the disadvantages in verbal, reading, and mathematical skills among persistently poor children (Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 2005:145). Poverty results in poor home circumstances for learning, and affects the children's physical well-being and ability to learn, is associated with low parental education, and limits the resources for investing in education. Given the above, the home environment should be endowed with resources and be conducive to promote learning. At the household level, evidence suggests that children from poorer households are generally likely to receive less education.

Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (2007:68) established that prolonged exposure to poverty is detrimental; the most damaging effects seem to occur for girl children who have been living in these severe environments for many years. They found that children living below the poverty threshold performed less well than children living in moderately deprived environments. Additionally, poorer children were more likely to experience learning disabilities and developmental delays than non-poor children. Yeung et al. (2008:418) explored the extent to

which childhood poverty affects the life chances of children. They compared children's completed schooling and no marital childbearing, to parental income during middle childhood, adolescence, and early childhood. The results showed that family income was associated with completing schooling, and the association of income and academic attainment appeared to be the strongest among children in low income families. Conversely, high parental income during a child's adolescence was found to increase entry into college (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 2007).

Some children, however, seem to cope well at school despite coming from poverty-stricken households and neighbourhoods. These children have resilience, and are able to accept their adversity and benefit from school whilst living in dire poverty. *Resilience* is an individual's capacity to recover from dysfunction and to rise above the disadvantage (Tugade, et al., 2004:108). Children who have resilience tend to do better in some risky contexts when compared to children without protective factors in the same contexts; hence they excel in their school work. So, to say that all children from poor backgrounds and neighbourhoods will underperform at school, will be myopic, and an underestimation of a rather complex issue.

The paradigm of upbringing that does not expect girls to withstand (social) hardships and to be resilient in the face of adversity seems to leave them vulnerable to issues such as poverty (Emwamu & Osujo, 2010; Gordon, 2008). An example from this perspective is that in instances where the family cannot afford tuition fees, decent clothing and/or school uniforms, girls seem to be less likely to seek alternative means to generate income to maintain themselves at school (Fry, 2003; Hammond, Linton, Smink & Drew, 2007). If they happen to find a job, they leave school and mostly do not return. Sometimes, due to poverty, girls resort to activities such as prostitution, where they are abused and devalued as human beings, and have health problems as a result of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS (Grant & Hallman, 2006:132). The problem of early and unplanned pregnancy also affects them almost exclusively because of the cultural practices which expect girls or mothers, instead of boys or fathers, to care for the unwanted/unplanned child (Grant & Hallman, 2006:133). This implies that poverty has drained *unhu/ubuntu* from the Zimbabweans. It is evident in Zimbabwe that the trying times the country has gone through over the past decade have left the majority of Zimbabweans out of touch with the invaluable virtues of integrity, honesty, honour and justice. The economic hardships created

the dog-eat-dog state of affairs, thus directly and indirectly causing learning barriers among girl children.

### **3.7.3 The effect of neighbourhood poverty on child outcomes**

The neighbourhoods in which poor families reside are another pathway through which poverty may negatively affect the children's educational outcomes. Financial strain limits the housing and choices of neighbourhood available to low income families, constraining these families to live in neighbourhoods characterised by high levels of crime and unemployment, low levels of resources, and a lack of collective efficacy among the residents. Neighbourhood residence, in turn, is associated with child and adolescent school outcomes, above and beyond the effect of family poverty. In most urban communities in Zimbabwe, families from a low socio-economic status, SES only afford rentals in high density suburbs, where the households are overcrowded. Such areas are often characterised by noise, sanitary problems, sewage blockages, water cuts, prostitution, the use of drugs like *mbanje*, and all sorts of inter-disciplinary problems.

Girls who live in poverty-stricken households and neighbourhoods are significantly more likely to experiment with drugs, alcohol, and risky sexual behaviour (Lacour & Tissington, 2011, Hanushek & Zhang, 2006:21). Recent research acknowledges the multiple environmental influences that occur at the same time and interact over time on children and families, and the influences of families and children on their environment (Luthar, 2006:785; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2004:330) found that the effects of the neighbourhood, such as neighbourhood poverty, negatively influence the children's achievement and behaviour. Not surprisingly, neighbourhoods with many high SES residents were shown to have a positive effect on school readiness and achievement outcomes (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2004:332). Kohen, Dahinten, Leventhal and McIntosh (2008:167) studied the effects of neighbourhood disadvantages on young children, namely the mediating effects of neighbourhood SES on young children's verbal and behaviour outcomes, by looking at potential mediators such as neighbourhood cohesion, family processes, psychological factors, and parenting behaviours.

Living in a neighbourhood with low cohesion was associated with less supportive family environments in which to raise children (Kohen, et al., 2008:168). Poor family functioning

resulted in less literacy stimulation in the home. Also, parenting behaviour that was described as being consistent was associated with higher verbal ability skills. Residing in a low-income and disorganised neighbourhood was associated with negative family functioning (Kohen, et al., 2008:173). Because poor parents typically have less affluent social networks, this reduces the future benefits of additional education for poor children, as they are less likely to be able to obtain good jobs. This can affect the self-concept and self-esteem of the learners. Most of these learners will fail to self-actualise as a result. In many poor neighbourhoods in Zimbabwe the houses are overcrowded, and the neighbourhoods are often very noisy, thus rendering the area not conducive to study.

### **3.7.4 The effect of parental involvement on child outcomes**

Hill and Taylor (2004) outlined some of the mechanisms by means of which the involvement of the parents affects their children's academic achievement. Research has shown that parental involvement at school has a positive influence on school-related outcomes. It equips the parents to assist their children in school-related activities. Also, the parents become aware of the school's expectations in respect of behaviour and homework. Parental involvement at school is also beneficial because the families and the schools establish appropriate behaviour that is reiterated to children at home and at school (Juma, Simatwa & Ayodo, 2012; Hill & Taylor, 2004:161; Bonga, 2010). Parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be involved in their children's schooling than parents of a lower socio-economic status.

Conversely, parents from low-income backgrounds have to deal with non-flexible work schedules and stress, due to residing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, which also inhibit their involvement (Hill & Taylor, 2004:163). The implication from the above analysis is that children from affluent backgrounds are bound to do well because of their parents' contribution towards their schoolwork, while children whose parents are uninvolved in their schoolwork, and tend to perform poorly.

Juma, et al. (2012) argued that the employment of the mother affects the parenting styles, which then affect academic achievement. The concern behind maternal employment is that working mothers will not have enough time to raise their children well. Beyer (2005, in Brooks, 2008)



found that maternal employment had a positive impact on the academic achievement of the working-class and disadvantaged children, and that this effect was a consequence of the effect of their work on their parenting style. Working parents were more likely to interact with their children, to promote learning, and to be warm and encouraging (Witt, 2012) than non-employed parents, and these differences were associated with academic achievement. In support, Jeynes (2007) also argued that parental involvement has a positive impact on children's academic achievement. It appears that children whose parents regularly communicate with their children, who check their homework, and have high expectations for their children, positively influence their child's learning outcomes.

Additionally, the parents' skills and knowledge can affect their involvement. Parents with little education, in comparison to those with professional degrees, feel less able to assist their children with homework, are less able to communicate with the teachers, and feel out of place at school (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005:98). It may be concluded that poverty is strongly correlated to a range of home background variables, including parental education, which influence the children's educational outcomes. Thus it may be difficult to separate these influences, and to know the extent to which the education of poor children is being retarded by too few financial resources, rather than other home background factors. Because these factors are so difficult to disentangle, researchers often treat all the mechanisms operating via socio-economic status as a single effect (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2007:23).

The educational outcomes generally improve as the socioeconomic status (SES) of the children rises "...in all countries, at all age levels, and for all subjects", according to Juma, et al. (2012). This has come to be referred to as the socio-economic gradient (Willms, 2006). SES is usually measured as a constructed variable that includes parental education. More affluent people in urban settings are often better located to gain access to schools. There are sometimes only a small number of schools in the poorest rural areas of developing countries. This situation is reflected in the lower proportion of learners starting school. In addition to access, there is the further problem of the limited demand for education among the poor girls in developing countries. More females than males in Zimbabwe, for example, are not employed, thus the majority of the families do not see the need for girls to be educated.

Poverty also has negative consequences on the social position of adults and children (Juma, et al., 2012; Conger & Conger, 2002:370-371). Economic hardship diminishes the parents' ability to interact with and socialise with their children in ways that are beneficial to their well-being. For example, there is evidence that poverty, income loss, and unemployment reduce the parents' responsiveness, warmth, and supervision, while increasing inconsistent disciplinary practices and the use of harsh punishments (McLoyd, 2008:197). Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (2000:35) identified five pathways by means of which income influences child development. These pathways include, namely the quality of the home environment for cognitive stimulation, the quality of child care received outside of the home, financial stress and resources which produce parental psychological distress and conflict, as well as the ability to purchase goods to invest in child rearing, parenting practices, and health that influence parent-child interactions, and the structure, resources and social processes of community environments such as neighbourhoods and schools.

This study will explore these pathways in order to explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

### **3.7.5 Stigmatisation and marginalisation**

Poverty influences education where the poor are marginalised, preventing them from full participation in social and economic processes. Research established that living in poverty involves being stigmatised, marginalised, and stereotyped negatively (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson & Tagler, 2001:220), and excluded (Lott, 2002:105) by the non-poor segment of society. In essence, poor children are viewed as inferior (even less than human, to a certain extent), consigned to a 'them' or 'out-group' status, and then treated accordingly (Lott, 2002:107). Consequently, poor children may experience feelings of shame and embarrassment, and have trouble viewing themselves in a positive light, thus negatively affecting their academic performance.

It can also be argued that schools play a central role in the stigmatisation and marginalisation of poor children. The school environment is actually where the poor children are exposed to a great deal of disparaging social input and feedback. The school, intentionally and sometimes out of

ignorance or omission, often marginalises girls and their performance (Emwamu & Osujo, 2010; Mikkola, 2006). The argument is that teachers tend to create self-doubt and sustain it among girls regarding their performance by not giving them enough attention and support in the classrooms. This researcher's experience as a secondary school teacher established that teachers tend to favour children from well-to-do families because they are presentable, healthy, and supportive, and they bring learning resources to school. Children from poor backgrounds are more likely to experience peer rejection, suffer from inferiority complexes, and conflicting peer relations than those from a high SES.

The argument, therefore, is that a closer scrutiny of this process is required at the level of the province and the district, so that it can be demonstrated how inequalities between the genders continue, and are entrenched through education at the micro, meso, exo and macrosystem levels, as has been purported by Urie Bronfenbrenner, as indicated in chapter two.

According to McLoyd (2008:196), most teachers grew up in middle class homes, and as a result, are prone to class-based biases against low-income learners. McLoyd (2008:197) reports that the teachers of low-income learners tend to perceive these pupils less positively, have lower achievement expectations for them, provide them with less positive attention and fewer learning opportunities, as well as less positive reinforcement, for instance, in respect of good performance. Even punishment at school varies by social class, with low-income children reporting more penalties than high-income children for similar infractions, and also penalties that are more severe, disproportionate to the offenses, and humiliating in nature (Chinyoka, 2011). A self-fulfilling prophecy may result, as the learner develops a poor self-concept, and consequently underachieves. When children feel inferior, they experience tension and negative attitudes towards learning, leading to negative psychological outcomes.

This has much bearing on this study, since the pupils' self-concepts will be shaped by the teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards them. There is a need for teachers to treat all children equally, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, sex and gender, as purported by Rogers' unconditional positive regard, discussed in chapter two.

Studies of classroom interaction and the assumptions that underlie it indicate that classrooms are settings in which certain pupils are ‘sponsored’ for success, while others are nudged towards failure (Bilton, 1993, as cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2010). This is vividly illustrated in Rist’s study (Haralambos & Holborn, 2010) of what happened at an American primary school. When the pupils first arrived at the school, the teacher used the information about their home background, gender, appearance, and demeanour to divide pupils into three streamed workgroups. Those learners whom the teacher assumed to be fast learners (from affluent backgrounds), nicknamed the Tigers, were constantly given indications of favour, and they were seated at a table nearest to the teacher where they could claim her attention more readily. The others (from a low socio-economic background), the Cardinals and the Clowns, were seated at tables further away.

Rist’s (1970) study, as cited by Haralambos and Holborn (2010) argues that the teacher set in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy by predicting that the Tigers would be fast learners, and that, by encouraging them and giving them indications of favour, she almost ensured that the prediction would come true. The notion of a self-fulfilling prophecy implies that differences between ‘dull’ and clever pupils or ‘good ones’ and ‘deviants’, boys and girls may be heightened, or even created by classification. The pupils may gradually feel persuaded to bring their own self-image in line with that of the teachers (Chinyoka, 2011:92). Mead and Cooley (2001, as cited in Hayes, 2008) focussed on how a person is judged by others. They indicated that one develops your self-respect or self-concept in relation to how others have judged you.

In support of the above, Becker (1996, as cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2010), a proponent of the labelling and self-fulfilling prophecy, argues that by perceiving certain learners in this way, the teachers experience problems in working with them. The teacher applies a label on the child, on the basis of his perception and evaluation of child’s conduct at school. Where a pupil is evaluated favourably, a positive label is applied, and the pupil is regarded as conforming to the teacher’s expectations. On the other hand, where the evaluation is unfavourable, where a negative label is applied, the pupil is regarded as a deviant (Haralambos & Holborn, 2010). A girl child who is perceived to be dull by the teachers and her fellow learners may lack confidence, and may feel ridiculed, despised and inferior. She may perceive the class atmosphere

as unfriendly and insecure. A self-fulfilling prophecy may result, as the learner develops a poor self-concept, and consequently underachieves. When children feel inferior, there exist tension and negative attitudes towards learning, leading to negative psychological outcomes. This assumption has a lot of bearing on this study, since the pupils' self-concepts will be shaped by the teacher's groupings.

Finally, it is proposed that receiving derogatory information about oneself and one's social class is not conducive to psychological health, and that the internalisation of such information by the child may bring about a negative self-esteem and low self-concept. Being stigmatised and marginalised by the larger society also has the potential to result in internalising (e.g., depression) or externalising (e.g., acting out, aggression, anger) behaviour (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011). Another possibility is that the poor child will shape his/her identity around the disparaging societal messages about the poor, and thus come to see him- or herself in a negative light. Children's personalities is shaped by significant others, who also have a tremendous influence on their academic performance. Thus girls continue to be seen as the weaker sex, who is unable to cope with the intricacies and gruelling demands of learning. This stereotype becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy where ultimately, in tests and examinations, girls do not perform as well as their male counterparts, due to the low expectations the teachers have of them.

Mahlomaholo (2010), Mugaga and Akumu (2010), Obure, et al. (2009), and Gordon (2008) indicated how girls and women continue to be excluded from participating fully in the economy through the lack of access to quality education. This exclusion starts with underperformance, then escalates into early school-leaving among the girls (Mahlomaholo, 2010; Chabaya, et al., 2009; Emwamu & Osujo, 2010; Fry, 2003; Mugaga & Akumu, 2010; Obure, et al., 2009:450; The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2009:12). In most instances the exclusion is no longer overt, but is maintained covertly through negative stereotypical discourses about girls' potential to do well at school. For example, a culture devaluing girls' abilities to do well has been in place for centuries in almost all contexts (Alcoff, 2006:34). Girls continue to be seen as the weaker sex, who is unable to cope with the intricacies and gruelling demands of learning, especially of Mathematics and the Sciences (Manwa, et al., and 2010:147). This stereotype

becomes self-fulfilling prophecies, where ultimately in tests and examinations, girls do not perform as well as their male counterparts, due to the low expectations teachers have of them.

High levels of academic failure are recorded among girls in the research studies conducted in Zimbabwe and South Africa (Rodriguez, 2008), the East (Sarkorova & Manzarshoeva, 2007), and Africa (Chabaya, et al., 2009; Emwamu & Osujo, 2010; Fry, 2003, Wikan, 2004). In these studies the girls are indicated as leaving school early as a result of early pregnancy, financial challenges, child labour and cultural reasons especially when they get to the senior high school grades. One of the reasons cited by most girls is their diminished self-confidence due to repeated failure (Rumberger & Lim, 2008:375; Gordon, 2008). Many of them saw themselves as incompetent and incapable of meeting the challenges of studying. The negative stereotypes that existed initially in their environment ultimately became internalised into their repertoire of meaning-making, to the extent that they behaved and performed as expected. Research by Fausto-Serling (2000, 2003) even claimed that the cognitive abilities of girls are genetically and inherently inferior. Traditional African societies view girls as inferior to boys, and their needs are secondary.

A thorough investigation is therefore necessary to explain how girls across different contexts tend to consistently under-perform, and ultimately leave school early if the 'biological inferiority' thesis referred to above is inadequate. An alternative explanation for the underperformance of girls emanates from research that blames schooling for this phenomenon. The school, intentionally and sometimes out of ignorance or omission, marginalises girls and their performance (Emwamu & Osujo, 2010; Mikkola, 2006). The argument is that teachers tend to create self-doubt and to sustain it among girls regarding their performance by not providing enough attention and support to them in the classrooms.

A closer look at the above seems to point to a systemic exclusion of girls which has, over the years and across contexts, become 'normalised' to the extent that it is taken for granted that girls will always underperform, and ultimately leave school early and more readily than boys do, never returning to take 'a second chance' (Manwa, et al, 2010; Havenan & Wolfe, 2004; Obure, et al., 2009).

### **3.7.6 Emotional and social effects**

Many low SES girl children face emotional and social instability (Jensen, 2007:98). The weak or anxious attachments formed by infants in poverty-stricken households become the basis for full-blown insecurity during the early childhood years. Very young children require healthy learning and exploration opportunities for optimal brain development (Dunn, 2004; Miller & Korenman, 2004:238). Unfortunately, in impoverished families there tends to be a higher prevalence of such adverse factors as teen motherhood, depression, and inadequate health, poor performance and bad behaviour on the child's part.

A research study by Harris (2006, as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 2008) established that the complex web of social relationships students experience with peers, adults in the school, and family members, exerts a much greater influence on their behaviour than researchers had previously assumed. This process starts with the students' core relationships with their parents or the primary caregivers in their lives, and they then form a personality that is either secure and attached, or insecure and unattached. Securely-attached children typically behave better in school (Hayes, 2008). Once the children are in school, the dual factors of socialisation and social status contribute significantly to behaviour. The school socialisation process typically pressures the learners to be like their peers, or to risk social rejection, whereas the quest for high social status drives the learners to attempt to differentiate themselves in some areas like sport, personal style, a sense of humour, or street skills, for example.

Girl children raised in poverty are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to sub-optimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance, emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues (Dunn, Chambers & Rabren, 2004). Combined, these factors present extraordinary challenges to academic and social success (Jensen, 2007). On the other hand, a better understanding of these challenges points to actions educators can take to help their less advantaged learners to succeed.

Research seems to be divided on the aspect as to whether poverty status contributes to the girl children's externalising behaviour problems, including antisocial behaviour. Data from the

Charlottesville Longitudinal Study, examining elementary school-aged children, found that children who endured even only one year of family economic hardship possessed higher levels of externalising behaviours than children who did not experience poverty. Girls were more adversely affected than boys, according to that research (Jensen, 2007). Other research, using an income-to-needs ratio as an index of family poverty, reported a link between poverty and delinquency in young boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 16 years (Brooks-Gunn, et al., 2007). Boys and girls experiencing poverty were at a greater risk of engaging in extreme delinquent acts than boys and girls who have never been poor. Less severe manifestations of externalising behaviour were not influenced by family poverty, according to this particular study (Brooks-Gunn, et al., 2007). Thus, families' poverty status may have its greatest impact on externalising behaviours in their most severe form. Research has established that children from impoverished homes develop psychiatric disturbances and maladaptive social functioning at a greater rate than their affluent counterparts do (Abebe, 2009). In addition, low SES children are more likely to have social conduct problems, as indicated by both teachers and peers over a period of four years (Dunn, 2004).

Low-income parents are often overwhelmed by a diminished self-esteem, depression, and a sense of powerlessness, and inability to cope - feelings that may get passed along to their children in the form of insufficient nurturing, negativity, and a general failure to focus on their child's needs. In a study on the emotional problems of children of single mothers, Kean and Zeal (2001, as cited in Woolley & Taylor, 2006:100) found that the stress of poverty increases the depression rates among mothers, which results in an increased use of physical punishment. Children themselves are also susceptible to depression. Research shows that poverty is a major predictor of teenage depression (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010:190). In terms of psychosocial adjustment, Bolger, et al. (2005:1122) found that girls who experienced persistent poverty were more likely to have problems in peer relations, and to display conduct problems at school, and reported a low self-esteem. At the same time, persistent poverty has been linked to a higher involvement in delinquency (Jarjoura, Triplett & Brinkler, 2002:179).

From the above analysis one can conclude that the socio-emotional factors of poverty may make children anxious and insecure, thus affecting the daily activities that affect and shape many



aspects of their cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioural development negatively or positively.

### **3.7.7 Stress and anxiety**

*Stress* can be defined as the physiological response to the perception of loss of control resulting from an adverse situation or person (Santrock, 2009). *Occasional* or *roller-coaster stress* is healthy for all of us, as it supports our immune function and helps develop resilience. However, the acute and chronic stress that the children raised in poverty experience leaves a devastating imprint on their lives (Kohen, et al., 2008:1858). *Acute stress* refers to severe stress resulting from exposure to such trauma as abuse or violence, whereas *chronic stress* refers to high stress sustained over time. Low SES children are more subject to both types of stress than are their more affluent peers. Children living in poverty experience significantly greater chronic stress than do their more affluent counterparts (Atkinson, 2008:6). Thus, stress exerts a devastating, insidious influence on children's physical, psychological, emotional, and cognitive functioning in areas that affect brain development, academic success, and social competence. Children subjected to such stress may lack crucial coping skills, and experience significant behavioural and academic problems at school.

Poverty involves exposure to multiple stressors that may have an undesirable influence on a person's intellectual development (Chilman, 2001:196). Economic deprivation entails stressful life events and chronic strains (Eamon, 2001:263). Exposure to such a high (and chronic) degree of stress is of great concern because, as McLoyd (2008:196) and Mikkola (2006:375) point out, the coping resources of poor children and girls in particular may be outstripped by the demands placed on them by excessive stress. Parents who are struggling to provide the basic necessities are often unable to spend much quality time with their children, leading to a low self-esteem and lifelong learning difficulties (Cataldi, et al., 2009).

Among low-income families, stressors may include living in overcrowded, sub-standard houses or unsafe neighbourhoods, enduring community or domestic violence, separation or divorce, or the loss of family members, and experiencing financial strain, forced mobility, or material deprivation (Evans, 2004:80). The frequency and intensity of both stressful life events and daily

hassles are greater among low-SES children (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010:194). For example, in any given year, more than half of all poor children deal with evictions, utility disconnections, overcrowding, or do not own a stove or refrigerator, compared with only 13% of well-off children (Conley, 2009). In addition, such factors as the lack of proper supervision, physical neglect or abuse, inadequate day care and schools, difficulties in forming healthy friendships, and vulnerability to depression combine to exert inordinate and debilitating stress upon the developing child.

Sapolsky (2005, as cited in Jeynes, 2007) found that the lower a child's socio-economic status is, the lower his or her overall health. Sub-standard housing in low income neighbourhoods leaves children exposed to everything from greater pedestrian risks (heavier traffic on narrower streets) to environmental hazards, such as exposure to radon and carbon monoxide (Evans, 2004:80). Poor housing may cause respiratory morbidity and childhood injuries (Connell, 2010:147), and may elevate psychological distress in children (Evans, 2003). Poor children are more likely to live in old and inadequately maintained houses, and to be exposed to lead in peeling paint, a factor associated with a decreased I.Q. (Connell, 2010:148). These negative environmental effects synergise with and build on one another, thus affecting the learners in a number of ways. More often than not, low income parents are overstressed in trying to meet the daily needs of their families. The resulting depression and negativity often lead to insufficient nurturing, disengaged parenting, and a difficulty in focusing on the needs of the children.

Abuse is a major stressor to children raised in poverty. Numerous studies, for example by Mutekwe, Modiba and Maphosa (2012:118) have documented that caregivers' disciplinary strategies tend to grow harsher as income decreases. Lower income parents are, on average, more authoritarian with their children, tending to issue harsh demands, and to inflict physical punishment, such as spanking (Bradley, et al., 2001:1866). A study by Evans (2004:81) found that blue-collar parents were twice as likely to use physical punishment with their 7 year olds as white-collar parents were. UNICEF (2010) found that poor girl children were 1.52 times more likely to report physical neglect, and were 1.83 times more likely to report sexual abuse than were well-off children. Abuse occurs with much higher frequency when the parents are using alcohol or drugs, experience an array of stressful life events (Evans, 2003:930), or live in

decrepit, crime-ridden neighbourhoods with limited social support networks (Chess, 2011:188). Children who perceive their home, school and neighbourhood environments as less supportive are more likely to exhibit psychological distress. The cost of these constant stressors is hard to quantify, hence exposure to chronic or acute stress is hardwired into children's developing brains, having devastating, cumulative effects (Bakare, 2011:454; Jeynes, 2007:104).

Stress has an insidious effect on learning and behaviour (Jensen, 2007:39). Chronic stress is linked to over 50% of all absence from school (Duncan, et al., 2008), impairs attention and concentration (Bakare, 2011:455), reduces cognition, creativity, and memory (Books, 2004), and diminishes social skills and social judgement (Jeynes, 2007:105). It also reduces motivation, determination, and effort (Johnson, 2007:6), increases the likelihood of depression (Evans, 2004:81), and reduces neurogenesis (the growth of new brain cells) (Chilman, 2001:196). Impulsivity, for example, is common disruptive classroom behaviour among low SES students (Evans, 2003:929). In the light of the above, a child who comes from a stressful home environment, therefore, tends to channel that stress into disruptive behaviour at school, and be less able to develop a healthy social and academic life.

Girl students raised in poverty are especially subjected to stressors that undermine school behaviour and performance. Exposure to community violence and an unsafe home neighbourhood, or a dangerous path to school contributes to lower academic performance (Bronfenbrenner, 2006:738). In addition, stress resulting from poverty impairs test scores, diminishes attention spans, and increases absenteeism and tardiness (Hoff, 2003:1372). Santrock (2009) found that adolescence, a period accompanied by dramatic brain changes, is a particularly vulnerable time for children to be exposed to chronic stress. Hoff (2003) also found that risky decision-making (such as taking alcohol or drug use) and poor social competency correlated with the adolescents' previous exposure to highly stressful life events. In addition, stress adversely affects cognition. Poor children are more likely to give up or become passive and disinterested in school. This giving-up process is known as *learned helplessness*. Many girls with learned helplessness become fatalistic about their lives, and are more likely to drop out of school, or become pregnant while in their teens.

In the light of the above, the effect of stressors is cumulative (Evans, 2004:80; Evans, 2003:930; Bakare, 2011:455; Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010:192; Chabaya, et al., 2009). Girl children who have had a greater exposure to abuse, neglect, danger, loss, or other poverty-related experiences are more reactive to stressors. Each stressor builds on and exacerbates the others, and slowly changes the child. It is the cumulative effect of all the stressors that often makes life miserable for poor children. Multiple stresses are not conducive to psychological wellbeing or healthy child development, and might be anticipated to result in a depletion of the poor child's motivational resources over time, as well as the emergence of various manifestations of socio-emotional maladjustment, such as depression, and anxiety, and self-medication, in the form of substance-abuse.

### **3.7.8 Poverty and readiness for school**

School readiness reflects a child's ability to succeed both academically and socially in a school environment. It requires physical well-being, appropriate motor development, emotional health, a positive approach to new experiences, age-appropriate language skills, and age-appropriate general knowledge and cognitive skills (Castro & Murray, 2010:398). Poverty decreases a child's readiness for school through aspects of health, home life, schooling and neighbourhoods. A child's home has a particularly strong impact on school readiness (Connolly, 2005:10; Jensen, 2007:32). Children from low-income families often do not receive the stimulation and do not learn the social skills required to prepare them for school.

Home learning environments that include parental assistance with homework, the availability of play materials, and parents who understand the role of play, have been shown to predict greater school readiness among learners (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 2007:66). Improvements in parents' understanding of the role of play, in addition to their ability to facilitate their children's learning, have been associated with more positive behavioural outcomes, such as increased creativity, curiosity, and independence in the classroom (Brooks-Gunn, et al., 2007:16). When a child is neglected and does not receive the basic needs due to poverty, the brain does not grow as much (Tay & Diener, 2011:362). Unfortunately, low-SES children in general receive less cognitive stimulation than middle-income children do. Coley (2002, as cited in Kenrick, 2010:12) found that only 36% of low-income parents read to their kindergarten-age children

each day, compared to 62% of upper-income parents. They also have fewer play areas in their homes, have less access to computers and the Internet (and use it in less-sophisticated ways), own fewer books, toys, and other recreational or learning materials, spend more time watching television, and are less likely to have friends over to play (Evans, 2004:80). A low income and the parents' financial limitations often exclude their kids from healthy after-school activities, such as music, athletics, dance, or drama.

Bronfenbrenner (2008) found that schools with the largest proportion of children with low school readiness were from neighbourhoods of high social risk, including poverty. Willms (2006) established that children from lower socioeconomic status (SES) households scored lower on a receptive vocabulary test than higher SES children. Thus, the evidence is clear that poor children arrive at school at a cognitive and behavioural disadvantage. Schools are obviously not in a position to equalise this gap (Willms, 2006).

This researcher (Mrs. K. Chinyoka) noted that girl children are mostly affected by poverty in Zimbabwean secondary schools; hence the need to explore the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child.

Children living in deep poverty scored ten to twelve points lower than non-poor children on measures of achievement and cognitive ability at age five to six years. This effect was also found for girl children who lived in deep poverty, they scored seven to nine points lower on the achievement measures at age seven to eight years (Connell, 2010:146). The differential effects of persistent and transient poverty were also seen in middle childhood. Five to eight year-old children who lived in persistent poverty scored six to ten points lower on measures of cognitive ability and school readiness than children who had never been poor. Children who had experienced transient poverty scored three to six points lower, on average, than children who were never in poverty (Baden, 2008:16). A study in Canada by Pagani, Boulerice and Tremblay, (2008) also found that persistent poverty was significantly related to academic failure. Children who had experienced poverty throughout their lives were twice as likely as never-poor children to be placed in a non-age appropriate class.

The percentage of teachers who reported that teacher absenteeism was a problem in their schools increased to higher than expected levels in high-poverty schools. High-poverty schools had the highest percentage of teachers with 3 years or less teaching experience (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010:194). Other research established that teachers in poorer schools are less likely to have specialised in the content of the subject they teach and schools serving larger percentages of low-income students have higher numbers of teachers who are teaching out of their fields (Mufanechiya, et al., 2012; Tope, 2012; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 2007:68). When poverty is concentrated in a school, both low-income and higher-income students are impacted by the instructional climate in the school. Data from the National Education Longitudinal Study in America showed that the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup>-grade teachers who reported spending more than one fifth of their time on classroom discipline increased sharply from 12% in low-poverty schools to more than 21% when the concentration of students in the school living in poverty reached over forty% (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 2007:70). Chinyoka (2011:94) adds that negatively-labelled teachers are often made to teach at poor schools where there are no teacher incentives.

Given the above, many girl children raised in poverty enter school a step behind their well-off peers (Santo & Lesmire, 2009:368). Poor academic performance often leads to diminished expectations, which spread across the board, and undermine the girl children's overall self-esteem. Teachers need to be tuned into the culture of poverty, and to be sensitive to the vast array of needs that children of poverty bring to the classroom. Social contexts have a significant impact on the development of children.

### **3.7.9 Girl children and resilience**

This researcher, as an experienced secondary school teacher, indicates that some girl children seem to cope well at school, despite coming from poverty-stricken households. These children are believed to have resilience, thus are able to accept their adversity, and to benefit from school whilst living in dire poverty. Resilient children, as described by Garmezy (2010:132) as children working and playing well and holding high expectations, have often been characterised by using constructs such as locus of control, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and autonomy. Bernard (2012: 15) concluded that resilient children have high expectations, a meaning for life, goals, personal agency, and inter-personal problem-solving skills. All of these factors work together to prevent

the debilitating behaviour that is associated with learned helplessness. Chess (2011) identified *adaptive distancing* as the psychological process whereby an individual can stand apart from distressed family members and friends in order to accomplish constructive goals, and to advance their psychological development (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh & Larkin, 2003:372).

Fostering resilience in girl children requires family environments that are caring and structured that hold high expectations for their children's behaviour, and encourage participation in the life of the family. Most resilient children have a strong relationship with at least one adult, not always a parent, and this relationship helps to diminish the risks associated with family discord. Bernard (2012) found that even though poverty produces stress, the availability of social support from the family and the community can reduce it and yield positive outcomes. Girl children with high levels of resilience are, therefore, likely to show low levels of depression, and are less likely to smoke cigarettes or use drugs, to engage in early sex, and to drop out of school (Tugade, et al., 2004:1188). Moreover, low resilient people exhibit the difficulties of regulating negative emotions and demonstrate sensitive reaction to daily stressful life events (Ong, et al., 2006:743).

### **3.8 Summary**

Poverty's negative effect on the children's development has been examined by numerous scholars over the past years, for example by Mahlomaholo (2010:32); Nabarro, et al. (2012); Ecker and Nene (2012); Ben-Chendo, Lemch, Ohajianya, Eze, Emeyeonu and Ehirim, (2012); Chireshe, et al. (2010); Chireshe (2010); Chabaya, et al. (2009); Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (2007), Evans (2004); Lacour and Tissington (2011); McLoyd (2008); Ganga and Chinyoka (2010); Chinyoka and Ganga (2011). Childhood poverty is associated with higher rates of academic failure or grade retention (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 2007; Pagani, et al., 2010) and higher incidences of school drop-out (Connell, 2010). Adolescent parenthood is higher among poor teenagers (Manwa, et al., 2010), and children raised in poverty have poorer employment records as adults (Abebe, 2009). Furthermore, an increased likelihood of smoking, prostitution, teenage pregnancies, and illegal drug use is associated with poverty among girl children (Kapungu, 2007).

More research is essential for educators charged with making informed decisions on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl in Zimbabwe.

The next chapter presents the research methodology, namely the research design, the population, the sample, the research instruments, and the collection and the presentation of the data, and the analysis procedures for this study



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter details the methods of data collection, and attempts to give a justification for the methods preferred in the research. It focuses on the research design, the population, the sampling procedures, the instruments, the collection and presentation of the data, and the analysis procedures. An outline of the coding format of the transcript data and an explanation of Tesch's data analysis is also given.

The subjects of this research, namely six teachers, three school heads and fifteen girl learners, who were purposively sampled from a population of one hundred and ninety seven from the three secondary schools studied, needed to be protected, so it was important for this researcher to adhere to ethical standards and refrain from infringing on the rights of the participants throughout the investigation of the research problem.

#### **4.2 The research design**

The research design and methodology employed are described below.

Table 4.1 presents the methodological overview of the research approach and design employed in this study.

**Table 4.1: The research design and methodology**

<p><b>Research Design</b> Qualitative in Nature Phenomenological Descriptive Study</p>
<p><b>Data Collection Strategies (Methods)</b> Triangulation in Data Collection Tools Interviews, Observations, Focus Group Discussions, Audio-recording Validity (Credibility) and Reliability</p>
<p><b>Data Collection Strategies (Participants)</b> Purposive Sampling in 3 Secondary Schools (1 urban, 1 rural and 1 mining) Triangulation in Participant Selection 15 girl learners, 5 from school A, 5 from school B, 5 from school C, 6 teachers, two from each school and 3 school heads, one from each school = <b>24</b> Three (3) focus group discussions, one from each school.</p>
<p><b>Pilot Testing</b> Each Instrument tested in 1 secondary school (not used in main study) Five (5) girl learners, one school head and two teachers interviewed, one (1) focus group discussion and observation</p>
<p><b>Transcriptions and Member-checking</b>  Researcher and Participants involved  Ethical Considerations</p>
<p><b>Data Analysis Plan</b>  <b>Inductive methods of data analysis</b>  Tesch’s Qualitative Data Analysis Tool (Tesch, 1990, in De Vos, et al.,2012)</p>

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a *research design* refers to the plan and structure of the investigation used to obtain evidence to answer the research questions. Good research is not accidental (McCall, 2008). It requires careful planning, as well as execution. This study, entitled *Psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe* is a qualitative/descriptive research study that attempted to accumulate data regarding the impact of poverty on the academic performance of Form 2 girl learners in Zimbabwe. The

qualitative phenomenological design was adopted for use in this study to describe the girl child's individual experiences on the psychosocial effects of poverty on her academic performance. Jantti and Cox (2011:8) posit that the operative word in phenomenological research is 'describe', hence the emphasis is on describing, rather than on judging or interpreting.

The phenomenological research design therefore entailed a descriptive study of how girl children experienced a phenomenon, in this case the psychosocial effects of poverty (Smith, 2007). The researcher tried to gain access to the girl children's life worlds, which are their worlds of experience (Creswell, 2008; Moustakas, 2009). A researcher applying the phenomenology design is therefore concerned with the lived experiences of, in this case, the girl learners from poverty stricken families (Bell, 2012; White, 2012; Kruger, 2010; Greene, 2010; Robinson & Reed, 2008; Kvale, 2006). Phenomenological studies, therefore, made detailed comments about individual situations of girl learners, bracketing taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving, which do not lend them to direct generalisations (Smith, et al., 2009).

The main aim of the study was descriptive and exploratory. One of the advantages of the phenomenological design is that it allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the social phenomena from the participants' perspectives in their natural settings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:315; Conrad & Serlin, 2012: 407). Based on Smith's (2007) as well as Smith et al.'s (2009) research, this research design was also used because it was found to be consistent with ethnographic field studies. The researcher went into the natural setting of the school environments in the three schools to probe the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl children. The researcher noted that this method was also ideal to use because it exposed the plight of girl children, which many researchers to date have taken for granted.

The aim of this researcher was to describe as accurately as possible the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts. According to Kruger (2010:189), "...the phenomenologists were concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved". This approach is most often used by psychologists who seek to explain the "structure and essence of the experiences" of a group of people (Creswell, 2008). Given the

above, this researcher was therefore concerned with understanding the girl children's behaviours from their point of view. Phenomenological inquiry required from this researcher to go through a series of steps in which she tried to eliminate her own assumptions and biases, examining the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child without presuppositions, and describing the "deep structure" of the phenomenon based on internal themes that were discovered (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This, therefore, implies that qualitative phenomenological research is holistic, in the sense that it attempted to provide a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationships of causes and consequences of poverty on the academic performance of girl children, thus affecting human behaviour and academic performance. In doing so, it sought to avoid both the deliberate manipulation of variables, and the study of attitudes or indicators as variables isolated from the wider totality.

This research design was also used in this study because of its flexibility, and the fact that it allowed for a systematic collection of data by penetrating into the realities of the situation of the specific girl children. The method used by the researcher enabled her to see over and beyond what she would be investigating. Thus, an exploration of the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance among girl learners in Zimbabwe required the utilisation of qualitative methods, which are flexible. Hence phenomenology concerned itself with providing rich descriptions of the phenomenon without the intervention of an experiment, or of artificially contrived treatment. Fryer, (1991, in Creswell, 2010) noted that qualitative phenomenological researchers aim to decode, describe and interpret accurately the meaning of a certain phenomenon happening in their customary social contexts. The focus of this research in utilising the framework of the interpretative paradigm was on the investigation of the authenticity, complexity, and contextualisation, the mutual subjectivity of the study and the respondents, as well as the reduction of illusion.

For this study phenomenological methods were chosen because they were found to be particularly effective in bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of the girl learners from poverty-stricken households on academic performance, from their own perspectives, and thus challenging structural or normative assumptions (Babbie, 2009; Punch, 2011; White, 2012). The use of the phenomenological design in this research also helped at surfacing deep issues, and

making the voices of the girl children heard. The research design also challenged a comfortable status quo (Groenwald, 2004). It helped to gather deep information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus group discussions, and participation observation, and representing it from the perspective of the girl children (Groenewald, 2004).

The purpose of the phenomenological approach in this study was therefore to illuminate the specific, that is, to identify the psychosocial effects of poverty as they are perceived by girl children and those who have interacted with them, especially teachers and headmasters. This translated into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions, thus representing them from the perspective of the research participants (girl learners, teachers and headmasters). Furthermore, the phenomenological and associated approaches can be applied to single cases, or to serendipitous or deliberately-selected samples (Corbetta, 2011; Babbie, 2009; Creswell, 2008; Groenwald, 2004). Phenomenological research, however, can be robust in indicating the presence of factors and their effects in individual cases (Salkind, 2011; Hesse-Biber & Levy, 2010), but must be tentative in suggesting their extent in relation to the population from which the participants or cases were drawn.

While the above points applaud the phenomenological design as very important, Creswell (2008) insists that it generated a large quantity of interview notes, tape recordings, jottings and other records, all of which have to be analysed. Thus, it was noted to be time consuming. Bernard (2012) also insists that at times it may yield inaccurate results, as a result of over- and underrating. This study minimised the above perceived problems by clarifying ambiguous terms and questions, and also by conducting a pilot study before the main research study commenced. The analysis of the data was also not clear cut, as the data did not fall into neat categories, and there were many ways of linking between different parts of the discussions or observations (Gray, 2011:215; Gay, 2010). Where the data was fairly disorganised, the interview transcripts, and unstructured notes or personal texts were read through to get a feel of what was being said, identifying key themes and issues in each text. Points which were not identified through this process were added. Furthermore, the strategy of 'member checks' was used to overcome the threat of misinterpretation of the data. The participants' responses contained in the interview data and tentative interpretations thereof were taken back to the participants for confirmation of

some interpretations regarding their thoughts and views, in order to make the results more plausible (Punch, 2011).

Finally, phenomenological approaches are good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard. This was not always comfortable for some governments, the Ministry of Education, or funders, particularly when the research exposed the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions, or challenged a comfortable status quo. On the other hand, many educationists valued the insights which the phenomenological approach brought in terms of cutting through taken-for-granted assumptions, thus prompting action among educators, the government, NGOs, and all interested parties (Creswell, 2008; Groenewald, 2004).

### **4.3 The population**

Mitchell (2012) defines a *population* as the target group with whom the research was going to be carried out. Gay (2010) also defines *population* as all the possible elements that should be included in the research. The study was carried out in three secondary schools in Masvingo District, one in a rural area, another in an urban area, and the third in a mining area. The researcher examined the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in three secondary schools. The target population comprised of girl students doing Form 2, aged between 13 and 16 years, and teachers teaching these pupils in nine different subjects, and the administrative staff (headmasters) at the three secondary schools. About twenty four teachers teach Form 2 learners the various subjects. The total number of learners doing Form 2 in the three selected schools was one hundred and seventy (170). The target population was therefore one hundred and ninety seven (197). From the total population of about one hundred and ninety seven, a sample of fifteen girls, five from each school, six teachers, two from each school and three headmasters (administrative staff), one from each school, was drawn. This was sufficient triangulation for the participants and places where the data were drawn. The research targeted learners, teachers and headmasters. Targeting teachers and headmasters provided collaborative data about the performance of the pupils and the effect of poverty on the pupils' academic performance. Girl children gave their views and perceptions in respect of the extent to which the psychosocial effects of poverty affected their academic performance.

The choice of schools from within the same province was done for their proximity and easy access. This allowed for the researcher's swift movement from one school to the other during the collection of the data. Form 2 pupils were chosen because they were in the intermediate stage at the secondary school level. It was assumed that at that stage the pupils will have had an idea of what they wanted to do in life. The students were also mature enough to vividly describe their circumstances in poverty-stricken schools, families and the neighbourhood.

#### **4.4 The sample**

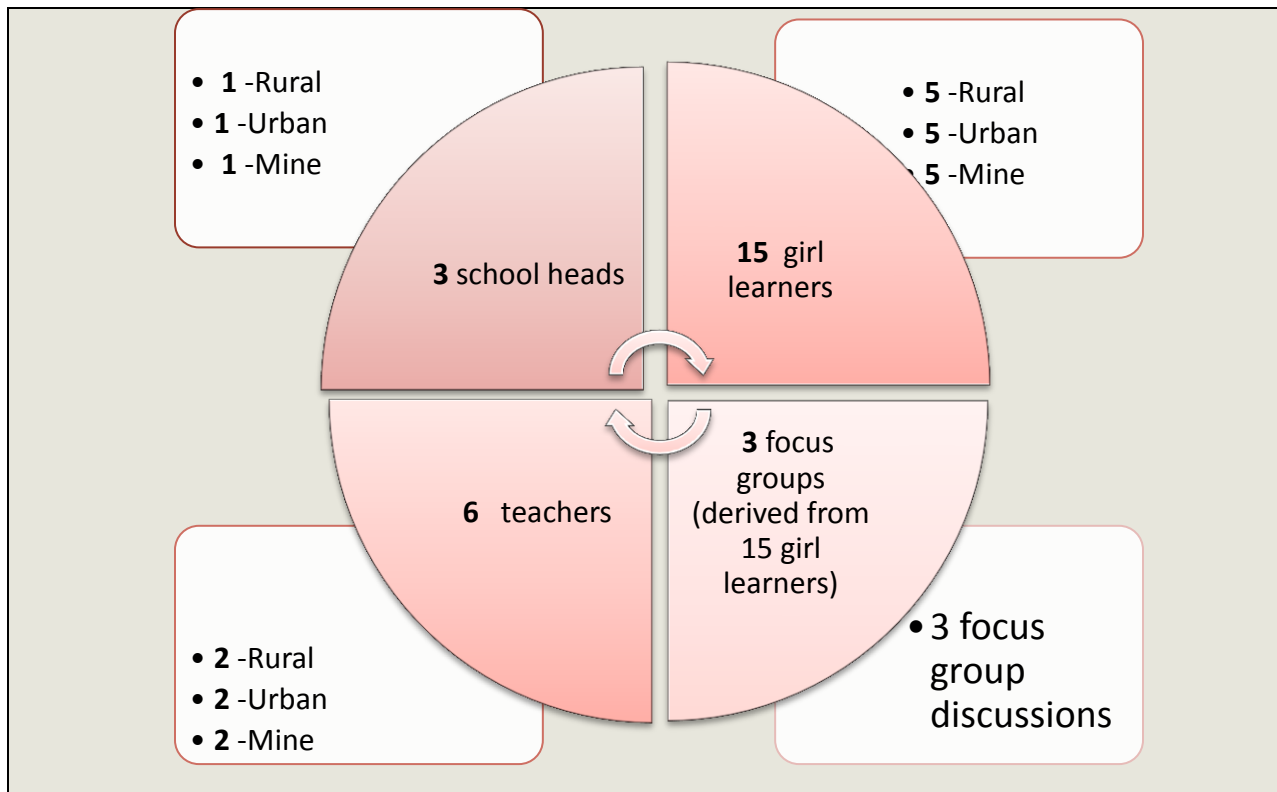
A *sample*, according to Best and Khan (2003:13) is a small proportion of the population selected for observation and analysis. This view is shared by Bless and Higson-Smith (2010:85) who also define a *sample* as a subset of the whole population which is actually investigated by a researcher, and whose characteristics are generalised to the entire population. A sample of twenty four participants was drawn from the teachers, headmasters, and girl learners, using the purposive sampling method. Bernard (2012) and Lewis and Sheppard (2006) describe the *purposive* sampling technique as a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within. The purposive sampling technique, also called *judgment* sampling, is a deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. Bernard (2012) and Seidler (2004) applaud purposive sampling because of its flexibility. Purposive sampling can be more realistic than other sampling methods in terms of time, effort and the cost needed in finding informants (Bernard, 2012; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). The inherent biases of the method contribute to its efficiency, and the method stays robust, even when tested against random probability sampling (Bernard, 2012). Given the above advantages, choosing a purposive sample was fundamental to the quality of the data gathered in this study, thus the reliability and competence of the informants were ensured, since the informants were based on defined qualities.

Despite the merits highlighted above, the danger with the purposive sampling method is that the researcher exercises his or her judgment on the informants' reliability and competency. In this study the girls from poor backgrounds were judged on grounds of their appearances, the resources they brought to school, their homesteads (for those coming from rural areas), and the

location/area where they lived (for those coming from the mining and urban areas), and the teachers' background knowledge of the girls.

The diagram below, figure 4.1, summarises the sample used in the research study.

**n -24**



**Figure 4.1: The sample of the study**

From the diagram, figure 4.1, it can be seen that a sample of twenty four participants was drawn from the teachers, the administrative staff/ school heads, and the pupils, using the purposive sampling method. Fifteen (15) girls, five (5) from each school, six (6) teachers, two (2) from each school and three (3) headmasters, one (1) from each school were selected. Sandelowski (2007, as cited in Jantti & Cox, 2011) asserts that determining an adequate sample size in qualitative research is ultimately a matter of using judgement and experience in evaluating the quality of the information collected, against the use to which it can be put, the particular research method and purposeful sampling strategy employed, and the research product intended.



Punch (2011) regards two to ten participants as sufficient to reach saturation, and Creswell (2008:65,113) recommends ten people in a phenomenological research study. With regard to the use of the focus group, the following recommendations were made, namely six (6) to nine (9) participants (Kruger, 2010; Morgan, 2010; Leedy, 2010; Sandelowski, 2007), and six (6) to twelve (12) participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). In general, as noted by the above researchers, the sample size in qualitative research should not be too small that it becomes difficult to achieve data saturation. At the same time, the sample should not be too large to make it difficult to undertake a deep, case-oriented analysis. It is against this background that a sample of twenty four participants was considered adequate for this research.

Targeting headmasters and teachers provided corroborative data about the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe. Because of the need to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, all the respondents (girl learners, teachers and headmasters) in this study were coded, and the schools were given pseudonyms.

#### **4.5 The sampling procedures**

Purposive sampling is considered by Creswell (2008) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling to identify the primary participants, namely fifteen girl learners, three headmasters and six teachers. Purposive sampling, also known as *judgmental*, *selective* or *subjective* sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling technique (Bryman, 2010:107). Non-probability sampling focuses on sampling techniques where the units that are investigated are based on the judgement of the researcher. The sample of this research was selected on the researcher's judgement and the purpose of the research, namely looking for those teachers who have experience of teaching pupils from poor backgrounds, and girl children affected by poverty. Borg and Gall (2009) also posit that purposive sampling targets richer sources of data with resembling characteristics of aspects or variables under investigation. The above, therefore, explained why only girl children from poverty-stricken households, headmasters and teachers were chosen for this research. The purposive sampling technique is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. It does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants (Campbell, 2006). Targeting girl children from poverty stricken

households therefore helped to expose the predicaments that befell them, thus affecting their academic performance.

During the course of this research, the researcher used more than one type of purposive sampling technique since these different types complemented one another. *Homogeneous* sampling is a purposive sampling technique that aims to achieve a homogeneous sample, that is, a sample whose units ( for example, girl children) share the same or very similar characteristics or traits, a group of people that are similar in terms of age, gender and socio-economic background (Cohen, et al., 2011). This was quite relevant to this study since it targeted girl children only, aged between 13 and 16 years, all who came from poor socioeconomic backgrounds.

In this study, when the data appeared to be incoherent and implausible, cross-checking and the validation of methods, such as triangulation, were done to verify certain ideas and concepts (Seidler, 2004; Corbetta, 2011). *Maximum variation* sampling, also known as heterogeneous sampling, was used to capture a wide range of perspectives relating to the phenomenon that this researcher was interested in, that is, maximum variation sampling searches for a variation in perspectives, ranging from those conditions that were viewed to be typical through to those that were more extreme in nature (Campbell, 2006; Topp, Barker, Degenhardt & Schwandt, 2007). The basic principle behind maximum variation sampling is to gain greater insight into a phenomenon by looking at it from all angles. In this research study the sample was derived from a rural area, an urban area, and a mining town. This helped the researcher to identify common themes that were evident across the sample.

Expert sampling is also a type of purposive sampling technique that was used in this study when the research needed to glean knowledge from individuals that have a particular expertise (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010); in this case, girls from poverty-stricken households, headmasters and teachers with the experience of teaching and working at poor schools. Expert sampling was noted to be particularly useful where there was a lack of empirical evidence in an area and high levels of uncertainty, as well as situations where it took a long period of time before the findings from the research were uncovered (Jantti & Cox, 2011).

A total of fifteen girl learners, three headmasters, and six teachers were purposively sampled for the sake of detailed interviewing. In order to find some of the respondents for the focus group discussions, purposive sampling was also done. All the girls came from poverty-stricken households, some lived in Child Headed Households (CHH), while others had only one parent, or no parents at all. The headmasters and senior teachers were interviewed by virtue of their knowledge and experience in dealing with girl children and pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds. The headmasters also participated as critical sources of information on the history, policy, and the academic cultures of the schools. The teachers were crucial to the study because of their expertise in dealing with pupils from low socioeconomic backgrounds, before and after they came to school.

Bernard (2012) as well as Seidler (2004) applauded purposive sampling because of its flexibility; that there was no cap on how many informants that should make up a purposive sample as long as the needed information was obtained. This method is especially useful when there are not enough funds and other resources available (Campbell, 2006; Topp, et al., 2004). In this study purposive sampling was found to be more realistic than other sampling method in terms of time, effort and cost needed in finding informants (Bernard, 2012; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). The inherent bias of the method contributed to its efficiency, and the method stayed robust even when tested against random probability sampling (Bernard, 2012). Given the above advantages, choosing the purposive sample was fundamental to the quality of the data gathered in this study, thus the reliability and competence of the informants were ensured since they were drawn from those with defined qualities, for example, girl children from a low socioeconomic status, their teachers and headmasters.

Purposive samples, irrespective of the type of purposive sampling used, are highly prone to researcher bias (Borg & Gall, 2009; Neuman, 2010). The idea that a purposive sample had been created based on the judgement of the researcher was not a good defence when it came to alleviating possible researcher biases, especially when compared with probability sampling techniques that were designed to reduce such biases. However, this judgemental and subjective component of purposive sampling was only a major disadvantage when such judgements were ill-conceived or poorly considered (Campbell, 2006). The subjectivity and non-probability-based

nature of selecting the participants in purposive sampling meant that it was difficult to defend the representativeness of the sample. Despite the weaknesses stated above, this study used purposive sampling to achieve theoretical/analytic/logical generalisations.

Given the above, the dangers associated with the purposive sampling methods were that the informants were chosen out of convenience, or from the recommendations of knowledgeable people (Cohen et al., 2011, Smith, 2007). This was a relevant concern, especially regarding key informants on whom much of the data quality rested. Godambe (2012) posits that it is critical to be certain of the knowledge and skill of the informant when doing purposive sampling, as inappropriate informants may render the data meaningless and invalid. Thus, the informants may give unreliable data voluntarily or involuntarily because they are eager to please; some may even have hidden agendas and intentions, and have their own emotional issues, principles and viewpoints. In this study the researcher was alert for possible biases on the part of the informants; hence the interviews and focus group discussions were done repeatedly until no new ideas emerged from the respondents.

#### **4.6 The research instruments**

Data collection is an essential component in conducting the research. O’Leary (2012:150) remarks that collecting credible data is a tough task, and that one method of data collection is not inherently better than another. Therefore, which data collection method to use would depend upon the research goals and the advantages and disadvantages of each method (O’Leary 2012:150). In this research study use was made of semi-structured in-depth phenomenological interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and field notes, considered sufficient for the triangulation of data. Triangulation was the basis upon which the researcher claimed the validity and reliability of the data. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:520) pointed out that, “...to find regularities in the data, the researcher compared different sources, situations and methods to see whether the same pattern keeps recurring”. It is against this background that a number of research instruments were considered for this research. Below is a data matrix plan, after which a detailed analysis of data collection methods will be given below.

**Table 4.2: The Data Matrix Plan**

<b>Broad research questions</b>	<b>Data needed</b>	<b>Data collection method(s)</b>
What are the effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl children?	Proportions of negative, neutral and positive effects of poverty on academic performance.	Focus group Discussions Interviews Observations
What are the developmental experiences encountered by girl children in poverty-stricken households?	Effects of poverty on the physical, moral, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development.  Negative, neutral and positive effects of poverty.	Interviews  Focus group discussions  Observations
How do teachers relate to girl pupils from poverty-stricken households?	Negative, neutral and positive attitudes towards pupils from different SES groups	Discussions  Interviews  Observations
What are the views and perceptions of the teachers on the academic performance of girl pupils affected by poverty?	Positive, negative and neutral perceptions towards the academic performance of girl children from poverty-stricken households.	Discussions  Interviews  Observations
What possible solutions can be given to attenuate the negative effects of poverty on the girl child?	Possible solutions and measures to minimise the effects of poverty on girl children.	Discussions  Interviews  Observations

#### 4.7 The interview

The researcher used a semi-structured interview to solicit information from six teachers, three headmasters and fifteen girl children from the three schools studied. Interviews were conducted until the topic was exhausted or saturated, as evidenced when the interviewees (girl learners, headmasters and teachers) no longer introduced new perspectives on the topic. Tuckman (2012: 216) describes the *interview* as a way of getting data about people by asking them, rather than observing and sampling their behaviour. It provided what is “inside a person’s head”. This approach makes it possible to measure what a person thinks, his/her attitudes and beliefs (Kitchin & Tate, 2010). Interviewing is a way of collecting data, as well as of gaining knowledge from individuals.

Kvale (2006: 14) regards *interviews* as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. He sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasises the social situations of research data. Interviews are therefore ways for the participants to get involved to and talk about their views. In addition, in this study, the interviewees were able to discuss their perceptions and interpretations with regards to the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl learners in Zimbabwe. Cohen, et al. (2011:267) explain that the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life; it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable.

In the context of this research the researcher and the respondents came together and agreed on a time to meet for discussions. The researcher clearly indicated the purpose of the research, the role of the respondents, and how the research would be conducted. Cohen, et al. (2011) contend that the rationale of explaining the purpose, aim, objectives and the role of the subjects is done to establish a relationship between the researcher and the respondents, as well as to remove suspicion during the research process.

The researcher and the respondents agreed on the ground rules during the discussions, such as repeating a misunderstood question, and clarifying unclear concepts and issues. The interviews were mostly done during lunch hours and after hours with the teachers and headmasters. Some

girl children were interviewed after school and during weekends to give them more time to exhaust the issues.

Dunnie, Pryor and Yates (2010) indicate that interviews are a vehicle for access to the mind of the participants, which is expressed in their responses, without the researcher's influence. This translates to a situation where the researcher asks a question, pauses, and then allows the research respondents to express their opinions. This procedure privileged the researcher's account as she tried to reach the truth by uncovering the facts about the effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl children. The time limit for the interviews were not adhered to very strictly since the researcher was prepared to listen to the research respondents' accounts in depth and detail. The whole process was interactive where the choice of the methods selected as well as the size, scope and focus of the study would need to be justified and reflected upon during and after the study.

The researcher played the role of taking down notes and guiding the interview. This was done to avoid digressions and irrelevant detail. It was important for the researcher to acknowledge to the respondents that their contributions were taken down. Tape recorders were used to capture the data. This made the data-collection process ethical, and helped to maintain a good relationship between the researcher and the respondents (Cohen, et al., 2011). The researcher paid close attention during the interview in order to take note of extra-linguistic features, such as the use of the hands, facial expressions, and any other emotional or physical representations which showed pity, emphasis, pain, agony, or even pleasurable moments.

Borg and Gall (2009), and Willig and Rogers (2008) indicate that interviews should be timed to make them yield meaningful discussions. While the timing was not controlled very strictly, the researcher terminated lengthy, irrelevant discussions by wrapping them up, summarising important points, and then redirecting discussions to an area of interest and focus. This also helped to control repetitions and digressions. Hammersley (in Willig & Rogers, 2008) further asserts that interviews produce the best detailed data if the researcher sits listening attentively to the accounts, nodding his/her head, and using other supporting psychological behaviours of a good listener. It is important to acknowledge that a well-ventilated room, comfortable seats and a

relaxed environment reduce interference and keep the respondents' attention (Willig & Rogers, 2008). Most of the interviews were thus carried out in a relaxed environment.

When exploring the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child, this researcher assumed that the ideal data collection method would be interviewing, which has its own issues and complexities, and demanded its own type of rigour (O'Leary, 2012:162). Hoyle, Harris and Judd (2010:144) comment that the questions have the dual goals of motivating the respondents to give full and precise replies, while avoiding biases stemming from social desirability, conformity, or other constructs of disinterest. In this study the questions were set in a way that captured and solicited a variety of perceptions from each interviewee on the effects of poverty on academic performance.

This researcher designed interview guides (see appendices vi-viii), which are sets of questions set sequentially to help dig deeper in both the verbal and the emotional elements of the respondents. It was also noted that the use of a guide assisted the researcher to conduct relevant interviews, thereby reducing unnecessary departures from the objective and direction of the study. According to Borg and Gall (2009: 451), an interview guide lists the questions that are to be asked during the interview in their desired order, and it provides guidelines to the researcher regarding what to say at the opening and closing of the interview. This research was organised in such a way that the interviews were the chief instruments for the collection of the data. It should be noted that some open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview guide were deliberately repeated (but asked in different ways) at intervals to determine if the respondents were consistently truthful.

To allow for the collection of as much relevant information as possible, the interviews were not tightly structured. Borg and Gall (2009:397) assert that unstructured interviews have great flexibility and freedom. Therefore, relevant issues which were not included in the interview guide but arose during the process of conducting the interviews were explored and noted in impromptu supplementary questions. This was in line with the flexible nature of qualitative research (Yin, 2012; Corbetta, 2011). Follow-ups and probing questions were also asked for elaboration or in order to seek clarification. Probing is a way for the interviewer to explore new paths which were not initially considered (Gray, 2011:217). In this study the researcher noted



that the interviews allowed for the repetition of questions to enhance understanding, and non-verbal responses were observed and noted, more questions were asked, and the use of aided recall questions was possible. Nyawaranda (2008) indicates that interviews assist in identifying other sources of evidence not available in observations.

In this study the semi-structured interviews were non-standardised, and were frequently used in qualitative analysis. The interviewer did not do the research to test a specific hypothesis (David, & Sutton, 2010:87). Consequently the order of the questions was changed, depending on the direction of the interview, and additional questions were also asked. The wording of the questions was left to the interviewer's discretion within each topic. Given the above, the researcher was free to conduct the conversation as she thought fit, to ask the questions she deemed appropriate in the words she considered best, to give explanations and to ask for clarification if the answer was not clear, and to prompt the respondent to elucidate further if necessary. She also established her own style of conversation. Additional questions were asked, and some were questions that were not anticipated in the beginning of the interview. From the above analysis it is plausible to conclude that the researcher conducting semi-structured interviews had a bit more freedom than the one conducting a structured interview (Mitchell, 2012, Kajornboon, 2004:75). Borg and Gall (2009) contend that interviews, if well-organised and timed, can be a very good strategy of data collection. This does not mean that other instruments are not important, but that they are responsible for crosschecking, affirmation, and verification through the processes of triangulation (Cohen, et al., 2011).

The main constraints experienced were in respect of finding suitable times for the interviews. Lunch, break and after school were some of the times used, but these did not provide ample time to finish the interviews and they proceeded into the lesson time. After school hours proved the best time, especially for the teachers and headmasters, but this was not the case in one instance with one Form 2 girl whose friends came early to pick her up, and the interview had to end. Borg & Gall (2009) purport that personal interviews are time-consuming and generally fewer interviews are conducted because of the cost and time constraints, and the possibility of gathering biased data is introduced by the influence of the interviewer. These problems were countered by this researcher through conducting some of the interviews during weekends.

The venue for the interviews also posed problems in some schools. The use of the library, for example, in one school had one interview disrupted as a class walked in to study. The interview continued nonetheless, but outside under a tree. The use of departmental rooms for interviews with teachers also proved problematic, as some members of the department would come in to collect whatever they needed. Their presence in the room made the interviewee uncomfortable. As a result, the best venues tended to be outside the classrooms, and after school hours, during which there was less disturbance. Despite the above problems, the researcher made an effort to record the facial, verbal and non-verbal expressions of all the girls, headmasters and teachers who were interviewed.

Given the above, the interviews remained the best methods to collect the data and to gain knowledge from individuals. Qualitative research interviews could also be objective, in the sense of letting the girl children speak, in expressing the real nature of the phenomenon. Kvale (2006) indicates that the interview as such is neither an objective nor a subjective method, since its essence is inter-subjective interaction.

There are many reasons why this researcher used interviews for collecting the data and using them as a research instrument. The researcher could prompt and probe deeper into the given situations of the girl learners. In addition, the researcher explained or rephrased the questions when the respondents were unclear about the questions. The strengths of semi-structured interviews were that no restrictions were placed on the questions. They were useful and flexible, thereby allowing the researcher to investigate the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child.

#### **4.8 Focus group discussions**

The *focus group* has been defined as a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Krueger & Casey, 2012:5). Bell (2012) defines *focus group discussions* as a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data. A focus group discussion is also a data collection-procedure in the form of a carefully planned group discussion among about six people, plus a moderator and observer, in order to obtain diverse ideas and perceptions

on a topic of interest in a relaxed environment that fosters the expression of different points of view, with no pressure for consensus (Bernard, 2012; Bell, 2012; Borg & Gall, 2009). Group discussions are used as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously. Focus groups are a qualitative data collection method, meaning that the data is descriptive and cannot be measured numerically (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Given the above, the appropriate use of focus groups leads to high quality information for high quality decision-making.

The girl students from the three schools were placed in groups comprising of five students from each school to make up the three focus groups, as shown in figure 4.1.

In this study the prolonged interaction with the respondents led the participants to behave naturally. This meant that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, the girl learners were encouraged to talk to one another, asking questions, exchanging anecdotes, and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view. The method was particularly useful for exploring the girl learners', headmasters' and the teachers' knowledge and experiences, and was used to examine, not only what the girl children thought but why they thought that way. The idea behind the focus group method was that group processes could help the girl children to explore and clarify their views on the effects of poverty on academic performance in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one-to-one interview. Group discussions are particularly appropriate when the interviewer has a series of open-ended questions and wishes to encourage the participants to explore the issues of importance to them, in their own vocabulary, generating their own questions and pursuing their own priorities (Punch, 2011; Kruger, 2010; Morgan, 2010).

The groups were noted to be 'naturally occurring', for example, girl children from poverty-stricken households who lived in the same village and who attended the same school, were drawn together. Using pre-existing groups allowed the observation of fragments of interactions that approximated to naturally-occurring data, such as might have been collected by participant observation. An additional advantage was that friends and colleagues related each other's comments to incidents in their shared daily lives. They challenged each other on contradictions between what they professed to believe, and how they actually behaved.

At the beginning of the focus group discussion, it was helpful to let everyone know of some ways to make the discussion proceed smoothly and respectfully for all the participants. The following were some recommended guidelines or ground rules used by this researcher that helped to establish the group norms, namely only one person talks at a time, confidentiality is assured, and what is shared in the room stays in the room. It was important for the researcher to hear everyone's ideas and opinions. There were no right or wrong answers to the questions, the respondents only related their ideas, experiences and opinions, which were all valuable. It is important for the researcher to hear all sides of an issue, both the positive and the negative (Bernard, 2012). In this group discussion the ground rules were presented to the group, and displayed throughout the discussion on a flip chart page that was hung on a wall in a clearly visible location. In addition to these ground rules, which had been established prior to the discussions, the participants established their own ground rules or guiding principles.

Above all, the right atmosphere was established as the girl participants sat in a circle and discussed issues over a drink in a relaxed and comfortable setting. The sessions lasted one to two hours, or extended into an entire afternoon, or a series of meetings. Disagreements within the groups were used to encourage the participants to elucidate their points of view, and to clarify why they thought as they did. In this study the focus group discussions provoked much discussion, which helped the researcher to obtain a lot of information on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the girl child.

The focus group discussions were recorded using both a tape recorder and hand-written notes by the researcher. The hand-written notes were extensive, and accurately reflected the content of the discussion, as well as any salient observations of non-verbal behaviour, such as facial expressions, hand movements, and group dynamics. During the discussions the researcher monitored the tape recording equipment, and also kept track of the time. The focus group discussions allowed this researcher to collect the opinions and ideas of a number of people at the same time. In the situation where some of the respondents were doing a lot of talking, preventing others from contributing their thoughts, and limiting the usefulness of the focus group discussion, this researcher did whatever she could to try to make certain that all the participants had the opportunity to give their points of view, even if they seemed reluctant at first, or insisted

that what was being said by the others reflected what they would have said. During the focus group discussions it was the duty of the researcher to intervene if someone was dominating the conversation, so as to obtain a variety of perspectives, and to hear the views of the others as well.

During the focus group discussions, the participants were kept focused, engaged, and attentive and interested, and the researcher monitored the time, and ensured that it was used effectively. The researcher used prompts and probes to stimulate discussion. Probes and clarifying questions were an important part of the interviews and had two main purposes, namely to help clarify what a respondent said, and to help get more detailed information. Probes allowed the respondent to provide more than just a one-sentence answer to the question asked. It encouraged them to elaborate their view points.

Despite the merits of the probes and clarifications given by the researcher during the focus group discussions, she interrupted the respondents as little as possible. If for example, the researcher felt that she needed to make a follow-up of something said by using probes, she made a note of it, and asked them about it when they had finished expressing their thoughts. Interrupting the respondent influenced how they answered the research questions. When a respondent strayed off the course, the researcher encouraged her to finish their thought. After they had expressed their thought completely, the researcher then brought them back to the question asked to make sure that they answered it completely.

This researcher also made use of the focus group guide to effectively ensure that all topics were covered, politely and diplomatically enforcing the ground rules. The focus group guide is a series of questions and prompts for the facilitator to use (Bell, 2012; Kvale, 2007). Typically, the facilitator asked the group questions and allowed time for the participants to respond to each other's comments. The focus group guide served as a 'road map' and memory-aid for the facilitator (Willig & Rogers, 2008). In this study the same focus group guide was used effectively for each focus group.

The researcher made use of group interviews as a collective data-gathering procedure, especially where the girls did not have time. The majority of the girls (respondents) who participated in the group discussions volunteered a lot of data. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) contend that group

interviews can be a good form of data-collection if well-planned and the members give detailed and coherent data with a view to construct knowledge about themselves. Group members had the opportunity to volunteer detail, and filled the gaps left during interview discussions. However, there existed a need for the researcher to focus on relevant contributions, especially with the group interviews where disruptions and talkative informants introduced irrelevant aspects. She used the strategy of ground rules for the discussions throughout the proceedings in order to control the discussions.

Group interviews helped with objections on certain controversial issues such as prostitution, the use of sanitary pads, child abuse, and early marriages. Questions were rephrased and rebranded to give focus to the area under investigation. In this study the group interviews were very interesting, as the group members motivated their friends to speak by clapping their hands and stamping their feet in support of an assertion. Scott (2003), as quoted by Willig and Rogers (2008) clearly indicated the importance of group discussions, and their ability to generate as many ideas and data as possible. In the view of Borg and Gall (2009), the group numbers of participants and the level of participation, backed by educational levels and exposure, create validity and reliability on the basis of sampling methods and procedures.

Another advantage of focus group discussions, as noted by this researcher, was that the facilitator created an environment that encouraged the participants to share their perceptions and points of view. Group dialogue tended to generate rich information, as the participants' insights triggered the sharing of others' personal experiences and perspectives, in a way that could more easily or readily tease out the nuances and tensions of complex topics and subjects, a dynamic that was not present during key informant interviews (Morgan, 2010; McCall, 2008). Group interviews, in a way, brought in associate and group reactions (Denzin, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In cases where sorrow, sympathy and empathy were expressed, during the process of giving an account, the researcher was in a position to observe the sorrowful faces and sympathetic psychological behaviour of the girl children. This helped to achieve the truth about the impact of poverty on the girl learners. Moreover, there was no chance of exaggeration, since the interview was properly coordinated and organised by the researcher. The focus groups were also found to be quick and relatively easy to set up. The group dynamics provided useful information that

individual data collection did not provide, since the participants were motivated by each other in sharing the information. The group interviews were also useful in gaining insight into the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe, which was more difficult to gather by means of other data-collection methods.

During the three focus group discussions, the researcher displayed actions that signal non-verbal signs of active listening. Being a good listener meant being an interested listener (Rukuni & Makore, 2011). This was done by the researcher demonstrating that she was paying attention to what the participants were sharing, staying neutral and impartial, and practicing appropriate silence (Morgan, 2010). Indications that this researcher displayed included leaning forward slightly, looking directly at participants while they were speaking, or nodding at appropriate times. Such behaviour not only indicated that she was more engaged, but also helped to maintain the engagement of the participants themselves.

It should be noted that looking away, yawning, or frequently checking one's watch would make the participants feel that the researcher was not listening. If the participants suspected that you are not listening to them with great care, they would take their role of sharing expert knowledge less seriously and, therefore, may not elaborate on or provide much detail with their answers (Dooley, 2010). This researcher made sure that throughout the discussions she paid attention, taking note of verbal and non-verbal signs, although silence at times encouraged the elaboration by the participants, because it gave them a chance to think about what they wanted to say. More often than not, the participants filled the silence with more information. However, it was important to strike a balance between keeping the conversation moving and allowing the participants adequate time to share and process what had been shared.

In this study time management was noted to be one of the most challenging aspects of conducting the focus group interviews. It is always important that the interviewer and the interviewee agree upon the amount of time they are going to spend on the interview, and that time is managed appropriately, so that all the topics may be covered.

Focus groups interviews are susceptible to facilitator bias, which may undermine the validity and reliability of the findings. Discussions could easily be side-tracked or dominated by a few vocal

individuals. Focus group interviews generate important information; however, such information often has limited generalisability to a whole population (Morgan, 2010). Focus group interviews do not provide valid information at the individual level, and the information is not representative of other groups. The analysis of the data is time-consuming, and need to be well-planned in advance.

In this case the weaknesses were overcome by using many research instruments, since the weaknesses of one research instrument could be complemented by the strengths of other instruments.

#### **4.9 Observation**

One of the main research methodologies in studying small groups in their natural settings is that of observational fieldwork, which can either take the form of participant or non-participant observation.

This research adopted the participant-observation methodology. The researcher joined in the daily life and activities of the group that she was studying and attempted to interpret events from the point of view of her subjects, namely the girl children. The teachers also assisted as observers, using an observation guide. The observations were later analysed.

Denscombe (2010) defines *participant observation* as a method in which the observer participates in the daily lives of the people under study, either openly, taking the role of a researcher, or covertly, in a disguised role, but observing, listening and questioning the people concerned. Marshall and Rossman (2011:179) define *observation* as "...the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study". Observations enabled the researcher to describe the existing situations using the five senses, providing a 'written photograph' of the situation under study. Cohen, et al. (2011) define *participant observation* as "...the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher's setting".



Participant observation is therefore the process that enabled this researcher to learn about the activities of the girl learners under study in their natural setting through observing and participating in those activities.

Participant observation is characterised by such actions as having an open, non-judgmental attitude, being interested in learning more about others, being a careful observer and a good listener, and being open to the unexpected in what is learned.

The researcher used observation guides to provide guidance to what was to be observed (Borg & Gall, 2009). The first visit was used to familiarise her with the environment. The research respondents were informed that they were going to be observed. The observations were done in line with what the girls said during the interviews, and then member-checked to confirm the consistence and patterns of thinking in relation to the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girls. Adequate time was set for observing the research respondents. The observation was recorded on the recording sheets and tape recorders.

The observation method was used in this study because it would produce a true picture of the social reality, and first-hand information could be recorded (Kitchin & Tate, 2010). The researcher established a close relationship with the girl children from the poverty-stricken households. The observation method is suitable for dealing with complex realities. The data obtained here were context-sensitive and ecologically valid in as far as girl children in poverty-stricken households were concerned. It enabled the researcher to study the link and relationship between the various factors, thus enhancing the major aim of phenomenological research, namely by allowing the participants to air their views.

Participant observers also gain access to many events and situations where outside observers would not normally be allowed (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:79). Once access is gained, the participant observer is subjected to a moral obligation to protect the interests of those who accepted her.

This study noted that for participant observation to work properly, a certain amount of trust had to develop between the researcher and the girls. This trust worked to facilitate the gathering of knowledge (Bell, 2012). Willig and Rogers (2008) postulate that subjects will misrepresent

themselves to a researcher whom they do not trust, sometimes as a means of self-protection; hence there was a need for this researcher and the participants to maintain trust. Because the girl learners, the headmasters and the teachers who participated in the study trusted the researcher, they shared information with her more readily, and because the researcher trusted the subjects, she accepted the information they provided to her as valid.

The researcher noted that observation was useful in this research in a variety of ways. It provided the researcher with ways to check for the non-verbal expression of feelings, determined who interacted with whom, grasped how the participants spent their day, and checked how much time was spent on the various activities. Participant observation allowed the researcher and research assistant to check the definitions of terms that the participants used during the interviews, and to observe events that the informants may have been unable or unwilling to share, and observed the situations the informants would have described in the interviews and focus group discussions, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies in the descriptions provided (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:8).

Morgan (2010) and McCall (2008) believe that using participant observation as a method was in order to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and as accurate as possible, given the limitations of the method. They suggested that participant observation be used as a way to increase the validity of a study, as observations may help the researcher to have a better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study. Participant observations are used to help answer the descriptive research questions, to build theory, or to generate, or test hypotheses.

In this study the researcher recorded what she actually witnessed, and not theoretical explanations and accounts given by the girls. During the observation the researcher tried to note how the girl children learned, their levels of participation during lessons, and their eagerness (motivation) to participate in the learning activity. The researcher also tried to assess the resources the children brought to school, including textbooks, exercise books, money to buy necessities, and the food brought to school. The researcher also assessed how they interacted with other children and teachers. She observed the resource endowment per class, and the teachers allocated to the different streams. She also accompanied some of the girls to their

homes to observe how they lived, their study habits, the number of meals they ate a day, and their daily activities before and after school.

Debunk and Sobo (2002, as cited in Creswell, 2008) indicated several disadvantages of using participation observation as a method, including the fact that sometimes the researcher may not be interested in what happens out of the public eye, and that one must rely on the use of key informants. Problems related to the representation of events and the subsequent interpretations occurred when the researchers selected key informants who were similar to them (Creswell, 2008). To alleviate this potential problem of bias, Bernard (2012) suggested the pre-testing of informants, or selecting participants who are culturally competent in the topic being studied.

Several researchers such as Mitchell (2012), Bernard (2012) as well as Creswell (2008) have indicated the limitations involved with using observations as a tool for data-collection. Creswell (2008) noted that male and female researchers have access to different information, as they have access to different people, settings, and bodies of knowledge. Participant observation is conducted by a biased human being who serves as the instrument for data collection; - this researcher understood how her gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and theoretical approach may affect her observation, analysis, and interpretation.

The presence of an observer has a considerable effect on the behaviour of subjects and the outcomes of a study. For example, when this researcher visited the girl learners at their homes for observation purposes, they attempted to cover up the poverty in the homes. This shows that no one can be totally objective; all are influenced by past experiences (Kvale, 2007). Seale (2009:15) suggested that observation is filtered through one's interpretive frames, and that the most accurate observations are shaped by formative theoretical frameworks and scrupulous attention to detail. From the above analysis it can be gleaned that the quality of participant observation depends upon the skill of the researcher to observe, document, and interpret what has been observed.

It has been indicated that the observation method is time-consuming, because the researcher has to reach and observe all the areas of study (Borg & Gall, 2009; Patton, 2010). However, due to its sheer practicability, this researcher went ahead and used it. Thus, triangulation enhanced the

study, by the researcher assessing and comparing information being collected in a variety of means, namely by means of observations, focus group discussions, and interviews.

#### **4.10 Validity and reliability in qualitative research**

Patton (2012) states that *validity* and *reliability* are factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about when designing a study, analysing the results, and judging the quality of the study.

The validity and reliability of this study hinged on its truth value, its transferability, and the consistency of the study. In this study the researcher aimed for credibility and confidence in the truth of the data, and at presenting findings that are convincing and believable. As a result, the study employed triangulation, a pilot study, respondent validation, and thick descriptions.

##### **4.10.1 Validity**

The term *validity* indicates whether the item measures or gives a description of what it is supposed to measure (Bell, 2012). *Validity* also refers to the trustworthiness of the inferences drawn from the data. It is the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation or other sort of account (Creswell, 2010). It is concerned with measuring what one thinks he/she wants to measure, possibly some content, construct, or predictions.

In this study strategies were applied to counteract validity threats. Information that was obtained from the girl learners in their respective focus groups, interview settings, and observations (using different sources), were cross-checked and verified, using different sources of information (Conrad & Serlin, 2012:380). The interviews were audio-taped while the researcher made observations and copious notes. This strategy helped to eliminate the problem of inaccuracy or the incompleteness of the data which, according to Maxwell (2006:289), is the main threat to a valid description of what the researcher saw or heard. It was also critical to employ the approach so that anyone assessing this investigation could access the evidence to authenticate the accuracy of the accounts given. In order to attain interpretive validity, the researcher constantly asked herself whether she was measuring what she intended to measure. Throughout the study, the participants' verbatim accounts were recorded.

Here the interviews and focus group discussions, for example, tried to measure the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe. Validating the content of the interviews and focus group discussions was necessary to check whether each question was meant to answer the stipulated research questions. Gray (2011) asserts that content validity is usually determined by expert judgement. Therefore the researcher's supervisor, Dr N. Naidu, as well as other specialists in Psychology of Education (from the Department of Educational Foundations) at Great Zimbabwe University, assisted in validating the instruments. Some modifications were made to authenticate the instruments.

Besides the judgement by the supervisor and other specialists, some internal validity was checked through pilot-testing at a secondary school in Masvingo urban whose environment held almost similar characteristics of the schools in the study, suggesting that it was feasible for trying out the instruments. It was also vital to carry out pilot-testing in settings almost similar to where the main study was to be conducted, as was advised by most researchers. After the pilot-testing, further validation was carried out on all the instruments.

In order to achieve member-checks or respondent validation, the researcher solicited feedback on the data and the conclusions made from the research participants, as suggested by Creswell (2010). The research transcripts were returned to the participants for their own verification and perceptions. By the time the researcher had completed the collection of the data, the respondents were still in their settings, so it was possible to take the research findings back to them.

To ensure credibility, detailed descriptions of the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl children in Zimbabwe were utilised to portray the image and feeling of the setting. The views of the participants were presented, as reflected in the transcripts, on their responses to the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe. The researcher tried to remove bias by being conscious of her personal attitude, opinions, experience, and expectations as an educator (Cohen, et al., 2011). The data-collection and analysis were logical, traceable and well-documented (White, 2012; Creswell, 2008). The prolonged engagement in the field, detailed field notes, high-quality audio-recordings, and the use of multiple data sources improved the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

#### 4.10.2 Reliability

*Reliability* in research refers to the degree to which procedures give results of the same kind under constant conditions on all occasions (Bell, 2012). In concurrence, Nachmais and Nachmais (2008) contend that *reliability* is an indication of the extent to which a measure contains variable errors, that is, errors that differ from observation to observation during the measuring stance. To be more specific with the term *reliability* in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (2010:300) use *dependability* in qualitative research, which closely corresponds to the notion of *reliability* in quantitative research. They further emphasise *inquiry audit* as one measure which might enhance the dependability of qualitative research. Inquiry audit was used to examine both the process and the product of the research for consistency (Hoepfl, 2007). In the same vein, Clont (2002) as well as Seale (2009) endorsed the concept of *dependability* with the concept of *consistency* or *reliability* in qualitative research. Patton (2012) also stated that *reliability* was a consequence of the validity in a study. In this study the consistency of the data was achieved when the steps in the research were verified by means of the examination of such items as *raw data*, *data reduction products*, and *process notes* (Campbell, 2006). To ensure reliability in qualitative research, the examination of trustworthiness is crucial.

This study did not require statistical reliability computations because it was qualitative in nature, though the aspect of using reliable instruments remained a pre-requisite. The test–retest reliability procedures for data collection instruments were carried out at the pilot level where the participants assisted in identifying sections of the instruments that sounded vague or ambiguous. Corrections were made, and instruments were retested until they became more user-friendly. The idea of working with a slightly larger number of participants (Denscombe, 2010), and sorting several experts’ scrutiny of the interviews, observation guides, and focus group discussions, were other strategies planned to ensure the reliability of the instruments before and after the pilot-testing (Gray, 2011).

A visiting schedule was prepared for each school and community so that the respondents were not rushed into the procedures that were taken for data-collection. For the girl learners the afternoons and weekends were mainly used at each school to make sure that those respondents

were exposed to similar situations, and that the participants' responses to the interviews were not directly influenced by too many external variables.

In addition, instrument triangulation, as well as allowing more time for field-work, helped to enhance the validity and reliability of the instruments (Morgan, 2010; Creswell, 2008).

In this study both validity and reliability were enhanced by triangulation and the pilot study.

#### **4.10.3 Triangulation**

Triangulation is considered as an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation in order to control bias and in establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology (Lincoln & Guba, 2010:300). Patton (2012) advocates the use of triangulation by stating that it strengthens a study by combining different methods.

This study established that data triangulation allowed the participants to assist the researcher in respect of the research question, as well as with the collection of the data. Engaging multiple methods, such as focus group discussions, observations, interviews and recordings led to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of the realities. *Triangulation* is then defined as "...a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2001:126).

Given the above, reliability and validity are conceptualised as trustworthiness, rigour and quality in the qualitative paradigm. It is also through this association that the way to achieve the validity and reliability of research findings are affected from the qualitative researcher's perspectives, which are to eliminate bias and to increase the researcher's truthfulness of a proposition about some social phenomenon (Denzin, 2012), namely by making use of triangulation.

#### **4.10.4 The pilot study**

The collection of the data was preceded by a pilot study which was conducted at Masvingo Prestigious School (pseudonym). Five pupils, one headmaster and two teachers were invited to answer questions on the interview guide. Five pupils also participated in the focus group

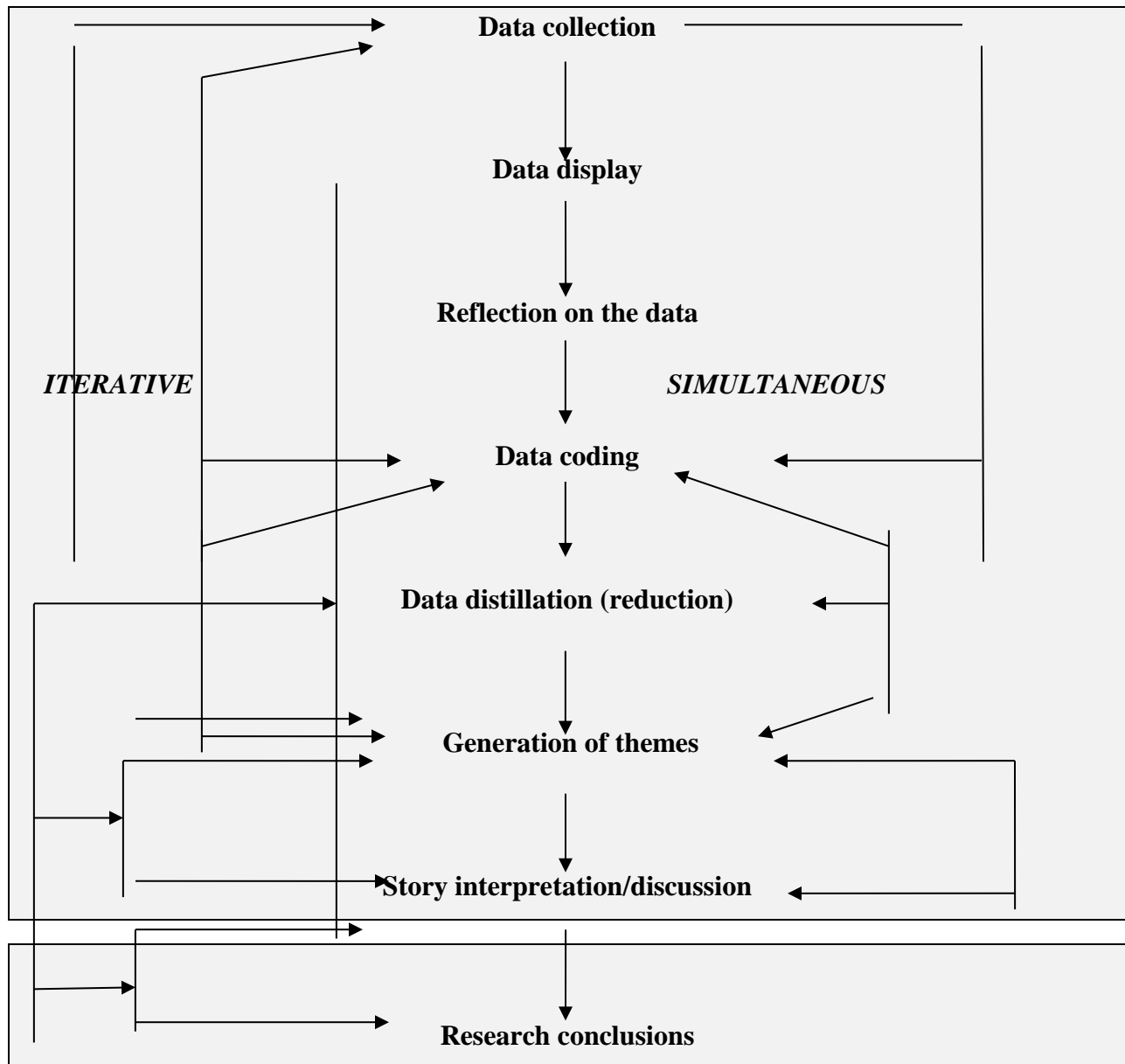
discussions. The purpose of this pilot study was to examine the open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview guide and the focus group questions for bias, sequence, and clarity, as well as for face validity. Marshall and Rossman (2011) posit that this kind of exercise helps the researcher to determine the usefulness and reliability of the semi-structured questions which had been set. It also gives the researcher the opportunity to remove ambiguities and inadequate wording from the questions.

#### **4.11 Data-collection and analysis procedures**

In this study, focus group discussions, interviews and observation techniques were used, administered by the researcher. The interview questions were not sent out, but the interviews were conducted by the researcher, taking note of what the respondents said, and jotting down the information. The interviews were also recorded on tape. The administering of the focus group discussions, the interviews and the on-site observations were done after a pilot study.

Figure 4.2, summarising the data analysis procedures employed in this research.





**Figure 4.2: Tesch’s interactive process of data-analysis**

(Modified after Creswell, 2008)

In order to make sense of the collected data, the researcher applied Tesch’s open-coding method of data analysis to identify themes and categories (Creswell, 2008:155). This is a systemic process of examining, selecting, categorising, comparing, synthesising, and interpreting the data to address the initial propositions of the study (Yin, 2012:109; Leedy, 2010). As shown in figure 4.2, data-analysis is the strategy used to take a complex whole and resolve it into its parts De

Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2012:336). Tesch's approach (in De Vos, et al., 2012:343; Creswell, 2010) of descriptive analysis was used to analyse the data in a way that met the aims of this research, as illustrated in the diagram, figure 4.2.

In this study the data-analysis procedure entailed the capturing, coding and analysis of the gathered information into themes. An inductive approach to analysing the responses was taken to allow patterns, themes, and categories to emerge, rather than being imposed prior to data-collection and analysis (Patton, 2012). The same responses were grouped together into categories. This identification of themes provided depth to the insights about understanding the individual views of the girl children and their teachers on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl learners. Similar codes were aggregated together to form a major idea from the data (Creswell, 2010: 256).

The transcript interviews and focus group discussions, the field notes, and the situational observations comprised the database to be analysed. The researcher used bracketing when doing this, a process whereby what is known about the experience being studied is suspended or laid aside, which is similar to the idea of achieving an open context. This procedure facilitated the process of seeing all the facets of the phenomenon and the formation of new constructs (De Vos, et al., 2012:337). During data-analysis the researcher extracted the memos from the data that were categorised. Two independent coders, (lecturers in Educational Psychology, from the Educational Foundations Department at Great Zimbabwe University) ensured the validity of the findings.

The researcher started by transcribing the data from the audiotapes. The transcripts were read carefully in their entirety and compared to the tape recordings for accuracy. Some ideas were jotted down as they came to mind. The researcher then chose one transcript at a time and reviewed it. During the review of each transcript the researcher asked questions to the girl learners, teachers and headmasters that shed light on the underlying meanings (De Vos, et al., 2012:343).

A list of topics was made for each transcript, as illustrated in figure 4.2. These topics were then clustered according to similarity. The list of topics was compared to the data and codes were

allocated to each topic (De Vos, et al., 2012:351). The most descriptive wording for each topic was found, and this wording became the categories of the data. As shown in the diagram above, the data collected from the observations, interviews and focus group discussions were coded and categorised according to their general themes (Nherera, Machakanja & Mamine, 2009) and topics, drawing out key issues as discussed by the participants. The participants were given the opportunity to clarify the researcher's interpretation of the data, both during and after the interviews and focus group discussions.

According to Tesch's model, once this list of themes has been compiled, the next step is to give each of these themes a code by which it can be recognised. The researcher, according to this model of content analysis, gave each theme a heading or title, which described the content or nature of the theme. These themes were critically scrutinised (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), with the intention of establishing the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe. The responses of the headmasters, the teachers and the girl pupils were scanned in a bid to fully explore the effects of poverty on the girls' academic performance. Data-analysis followed the verbatim transcription of the interviews and the focus group discussions. The observations reinforced the findings from the interviews and focus group discussions.

#### **4.12 Ethical considerations**

By *ethics* the researchers mean the study of moral standards, and how they affect conduct or a system of moral principles governing the appropriate conduct of a person or a group (Creswell, 2008). According to Chireshe, (2000:6, in Mugweni, 2012:149) *ethics* refers to "...a moral philosophy that deals with making judgements, good or bad, proper or improper, approval or disapproval, right or wrong". In other words, these are guidelines for professional conduct or behaviour.

It was vital to consider other people's rights, especially the rights of the child, in particular the girl child. Every person has the right to privacy and dignity of treatment (Creswell, 2010). It was important for the researcher to explain fully to all the participants the major aims of the study,

namely to find ways to enhance learning and academic performance of the girl children living in poverty- stricken households.

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the University of South Africa's Ethics Board, the Ministry of Education, Sports and culture, the Masvingo Provincial Education Office, Zimbabwe, as well as from the headmasters of the selected schools. Further permission was sought from the parents of the selected learners, the girl learners, and the teachers who participated in this study. The girl children signed assent forms to show their approval to participate in the research, while the teachers and the headmasters signed the consent forms. They all agreed to participate in the research out of their own free will. Written consent was preferred in this study, hence the assent and consent forms were signed by participants.

It was essential that the participants understood that their participation was voluntary, and that there were no consequences for refusing to take part in the study, or to answer specific questions. The researcher explained the nature of the study openly and honestly, and in a way that was understandable to the participants. The researcher ensured that the participants understood the nature of the research, its purpose, the potential risks, and the benefits to the participants, and the fact that they were free to withdraw from participating at any time. It was helpful to ensure that there was adequate time to answer any questions the girl learners had before and during the focus group and interview sessions. When the respondents seemed confused or withdrawn, the researcher asked them if they had any questions before proceeding. If the girl learners did not want to talk about a topic, this researcher respected that (Kvale, 2007). The researcher communicated to all the participants how the information obtained during the focus group discussions, interviews and observations would be used.

The ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and consequences for the interviewee were taken into account. In this study confidentiality was assured. The respondents were also assured that they would not be harmed in any way by the research. Throughout the interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher provided guidance and counselling to the girl learners who, through opening-up, became affected socially and emotionally. In such cases the researcher did not misrepresent or misuse her expertise. She respected the rights, dignity and worth of all the participants, and the opinions that differed from her own.

The participants in this research study shared valuable and sometimes sensitive information with the researcher, and they trusted the researcher to ensure that their identity would be protected. It was imperative that only the researcher coordinating and conducting the focus group interviews knew the names of the participants.

A primary consideration in any research study is to conduct the research in an ethical manner, letting the participants know that one's purpose for observing is to document their opinions. While there were instances where covert observation methods were appropriate, these situations were few. McMillan and Schumacher (2010), as well as Borg and Gall (2009), advised that the researcher takes down field-notes openly to reinforce that what the researcher was doing was collecting data for research purposes. When the researcher met girl learners and their teachers for the first time, she informed them of the purpose of being there, and of sharing information about the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child, so that their questions about the research and the researcher's presence may be put to rest.

Another ethical responsibility that was preserved was the anonymity of the participants in the final write-up and in the field-notes to prevent them being identified, should the field-notes be subpoenaed for inspection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Their individual identities were described in ways that the other pupils and teachers from the three schools would not be able to identify them.

Lincoln and Guba (2010:299) pointed out that there exists ethical concern regarding the relationships established by the researcher when conducting participant observation. This researcher developed close relationships with the participants, yet those relationships were difficult to maintain when the researcher returned to her home, which was at a distant location. Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggested that the research findings be shared with the community to ensure the accuracy of the findings. This researcher availed copies of her thesis to the Masvingo Provincial library, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, and the Great Zimbabwe University library for the benefits of all the participants, scholars and interested people.

#### **4.13 Summary**

In this chapter a comprehensive presentation of the qualitative research approach and design was discussed in order to respond to the main research question and sub-research questions of the topic under study. The research made use of the descriptive phenomenological design, and justified it in the light of its relevance and suitability for the study. The researcher also identified the population, sample and sampling procedures used in the study, and the reasons why they were relevant to the study. Focus group discussions, as well as interviews and observations were used to collect the data. These methods helped the researcher to collect the data which were used to form the basis of the next chapter on data presentation, analysis and discussion. The researcher applied the Tesch's open-coding method of data analysis to identify themes and categories which would help to explain the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl learners in Zimbabwe.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE PRESENTATION OF THE DATA, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

The main thrust of this chapter is to present, analyse and discuss the data that were collected by means of interviews, focus group discussions, and observations.

The main informants were fifteen girl children, six teachers and three headmasters from three secondary schools (named Rungwave, Gwadamirayi, and Makanganwa secondary schools). Frequency distribution tables were used in the data presentation; frequencies and percentages indicated the responses that were received. Background information on the respondents was given before analysing the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe. In order to make sense of the collected data, the researcher applied Tesch's open coding method of data-analysis to identify the themes and categories. The data analysis, presentation, and discussion were in the form of detailed descriptions, using narrative vignettes and direct quotes from interviews and focus group discussions. English was used as the medium of communication with the teachers and headmasters during the interviews, while both Shona and English were used with the girl learners during the interviews and focus group discussions. The responses were translated into English by the researcher, and the translations were validated by two colleagues (lecturers at Great Zimbabwe University).

The data codes and significant ideas were singled out systematically, and arranged in themes and categories for a thematic discussion, as indicated in tables 5.1 to 5.4 respectively. The discussion of the findings was done in line with the research questions, themes, and sub-themes derived from the study separately at the end of the chapter. The themes and sub-themes were evaluated and measured against Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, and the humanistic perspective, especially the ideas of Rogers and Maslow, and the literature review (see chapters 2 and 3).

**Table 5.1: Codes of individual interviews: girl learners**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>EXPLANATION</b>
G1U	Girl child number one 1, urban
G2U	Girl child number 2, urban
G3U	Girl child number 3, urban
G4U	Girl child number 4, urban
G5U	Girl child number 5, urban
G6R to G10R	Girl child numbers 6 to 10, rural
G11M to G15M	Girl child numbers 11 to 15, mine

G6R means girl child number 6, from a rural secondary school.

**Table 5.2: Codes of individual interviews: teachers**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
TFR	Teacher, female, rural
TMR	Teacher, male, rural
TM1U, TM2U	Teacher, male 1 or 2, urban
TFM	Teacher, female, mine
TMM	Teacher, male, mine

TMR means teacher, male, from a rural secondary school.

**Table 5.3: Codes of individual interviews: headmasters**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
HMR	Headmaster, male, rural school
HMM	Headmaster, male, mining school
HMU	Headmaster, male, urban school

HMR means headmaster, male, from a rural secondary school.



**Table 5.4: Codes of individual focus group discussions with girl learners**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
FGDU	Focus group discussion, urban
FGDR	Focus group discussion, rural
FGDM	Focus group discussion, mine

FGDU means focus group discussion, from an urban secondary school.

### **5.2 Section A: General characteristics of the respondents**

The social characteristics examined include the following variables, namely age, sex, length of stay in the school, household size, distance to school, level of education of the parents, and occupation of the parents.

Table 5.5 below shows the demographic data as extracted from the interviews.

**Table 5.5: Demographic data as extracted from the interviews**

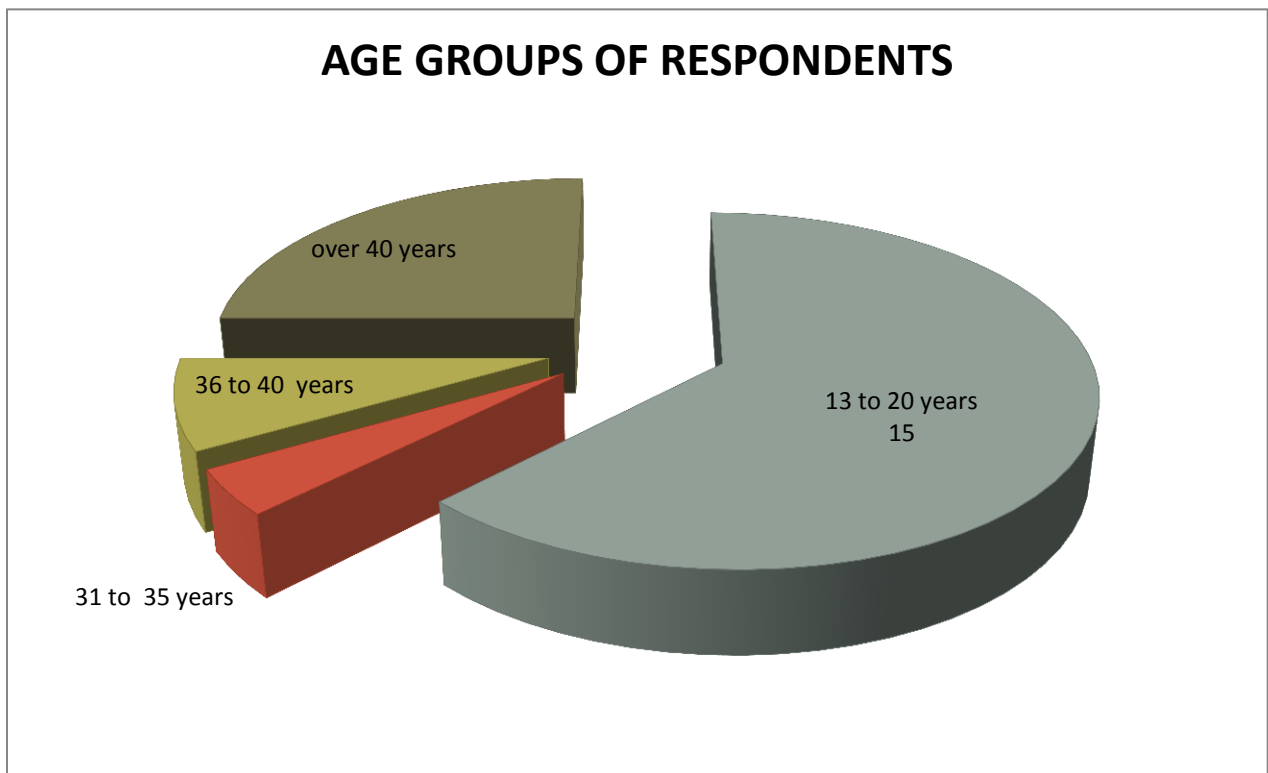
<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>SEX</b>	<b>NUMBERS</b>
Headmasters	Males	3
	Females	0
Teachers	Males	4
	Females	2
Girl learners	Females	15
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>24</b>

(Source: Field data, 2013)

The majority of the participants, namely fifteen (15) in this study (as illustrated by tables 5.1 and 5.5), were girls from the three (3) secondary schools, five (5) from a mining school (pseudo-named Rungwawe), another five (5) from an urban secondary school (pseudo-named Makanganwa), and five (5) from a rural day school (pseudo-named Gwadamirayi). As shown in

tables 5.2 and 5.5 above, of the six (6) teachers who participated in the study, two (2), TFM and TFR were females and four (4), TM1U, TM2U, TMM and TMR were male teachers. All three the (3) headmasters, HMU, HMM and HMR who participated in this study were males, to give a total of twenty four (24) participants altogether. The girl students from the three schools were put in groups comprising of five students from each school to make up the three (3) focus groups, FGDU, FGDR and FGDM, as shown in table 5.4 and figure 4.1.

The pie chart fig 5.1 summarises the age groups of the respondents.



**Figure 5.1: The age group of the respondents** (Field data, 2013)

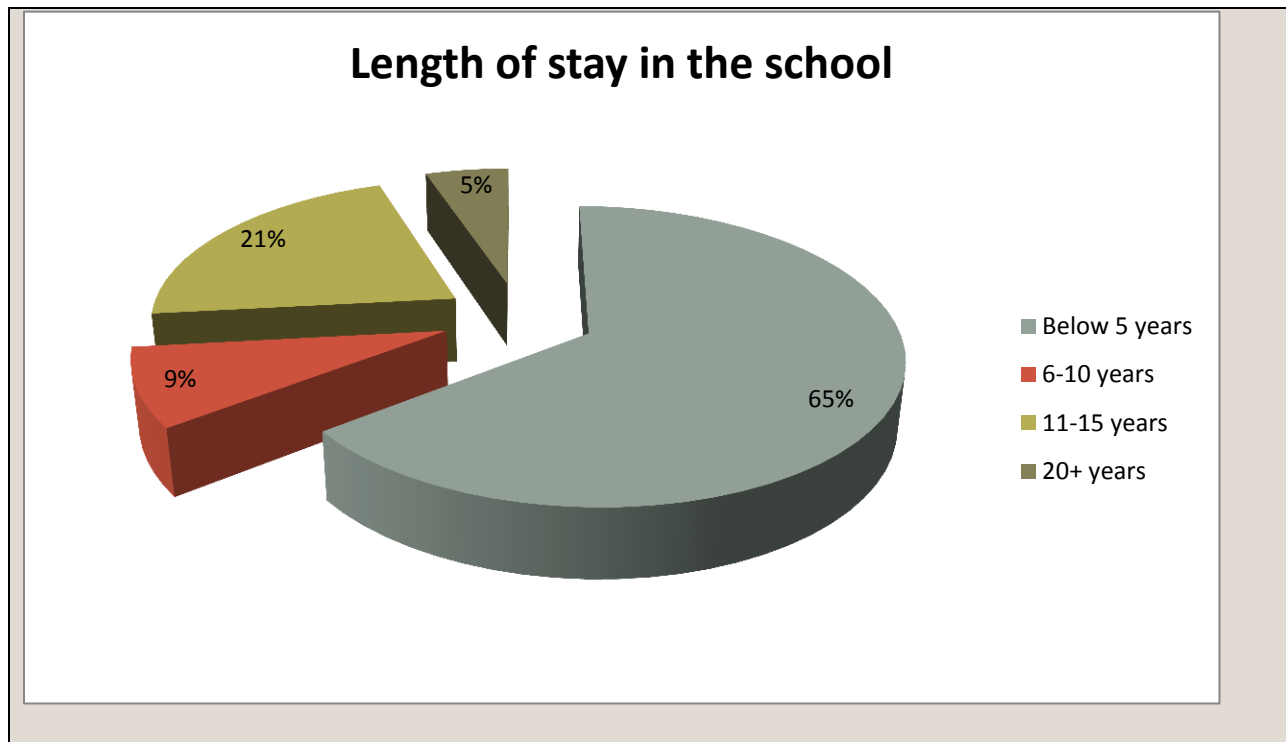
Figure 5.1 reveals that fifteen (15) of the girl respondents were between the ages of thirteen (13) and twenty (20) years, they are Form two (2) girl students who participated in the interviews and focus group discussions. There were no respondents between the age groups, zero (0) to twelve (12) years, twenty one (21) to twenty five (25) years, and twenty six (26) to thirty (30) years. Two (2) teachers and one (1) headmaster were between thirty one (31) and forty years (40), and four (4) teachers and two (2) headmasters were forty (40) years and above. The findings seem to

suggest that the respondents were mature enough to be of essential help in the study. All the respondents were literate, and could therefore decipher valid and reliable information to present meaningful responses to the questions given.

The pie chart below summarises the total number of participants, and the periods they have been staying at their respective schools.

### 5.2.1 Length of stay at the school

n- 24



**Figure 5.2: The participants' length of stay at the school** (Field data, 2013)

As shown in figure 5.2 above, fifteen (15) girl learners, which is 65% of the respondents, have been at their respective schools for a period of below five (5) years, while two (2) out of six (6) teachers, which is 5% of the respondents have been at their respective schools for a period ranging from six (6) to ten (10) years. Three (3) teachers and one headmaster (1) have been at their respective schools for a period ranging from eleven (11) to fifteen (15) years. One (1) teacher and two (2) headmasters have been at their respective schools for a period of twenty (20) years and above. The deduction that can be made from the above findings is that the respondents

have been in their respective schools for a reasonably long period of time to know and experience the effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl learners. This suggests that the respondents are informed on the effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child.

The table 5.6 summarises the house sizes of the girl learners from urban, mining and rural communities.

## 5.2.2 The household size of the respondents

**Table 5.6: The house size of the respondents**

House/Respondents	Number of rooms	Number of people
<b>URBAN</b>		
G1U	4	10
G2U	4	12
G3U	3	11
G4U	3	8
G5U	2	8
<b>RURAL</b>		
G6R	3	10
G7R	3	12
G8R	3	12
G9R	4	11
G10R	2	6
<b>MINING</b>		
G11M	3	10
G12M	4	14
G13M	3	12
G14M	3	12
G15M	3	9

(Field data, 2013)

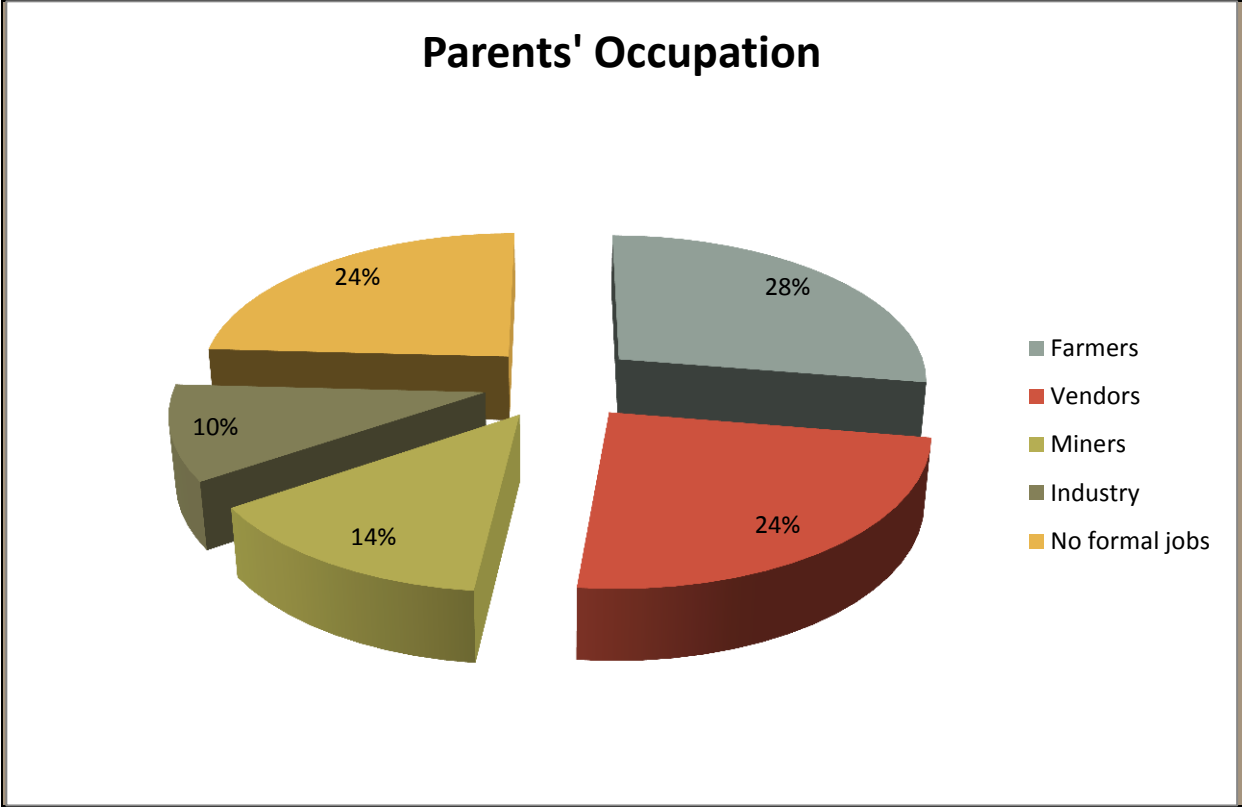
The composition of the household includes the parents, the children and other dependents living under the same roof, and at least sharing some meals together. In the urban areas the houses of

the following girl learners, namely G1U and G2U, had four (4) rooms each, with ten (10) and twelve (12) occupants respectively. As shown in table 5.6, the houses of the girl learners, namely G3U and G4U, had three (3) rooms each; the house of G3U had eleven (11) occupants, while the house of G4U had eight (8). The house of G5U had two (2) rooms, and was inhabited by eight (8) people. In the rural area, three (3) houses, namely those of girl learners, G6R, G7R, and G9R had three (3) rooms each, and had ten (10), twelve (12) and twelve (12) occupants, respectively. The researcher noted in all the rural houses that the third room was a kitchen, which did not accommodate many people. The house of G8R had four (4) rooms, and was inhabited by eleven (11) people, while the home of G10R had two (2) rooms and housed six (6) people. This study established that at the mining town the majority of general workers (those who did all sorts of jobs, and earned the least) lived in the three- (3) roomed houses, which do not have electricity, toilets in the houses, or water. The houses were named *kukomboni*, meaning *where people shared toilets and water*. Table 5.6 shows that four (4) houses, those of the following girl learners, G11M, G13M, G14M and G15M, had three (3) rooms each, and between nine (9) to twelve (12) people lived in each of the houses. Only one house that of G12M, had four (4) rooms with fourteen (14) people living in it.

From Table 5.6, it can be concluded that the girl informants lived in large houses. This clearly depicts that most of the schoolgirls informants are members of large households. This can be attributed to the extended family relations, many children that characterised many households due to polygamy, and the very high rental associated with mining and urban houses. During the interviews and the focus group discussions the girls revealed that a normal household in the areas they lived consisted of between six and fourteen people. The impact of a large household size on the girls' education is that where the income of the household is inadequate to cater for all the members of the household, the girls are denied the opportunity to access education.

The study also explored the occupational composition of the parents to determine the extent to which their occupations impacted on the girl child's schooling.

The pie chart, figure 5.3, shows the occupations of the participants' parents.



**Figure 5.3: The occupations of the parents** (Field data, 2013)

As shown in the pie chart given, figure 5.3, fifteen (15) girl children interviewed indicated that eight (8) of their parents were farmers, seven (7) were vendors, and four (4) were miners, while three (3) worked in the industry, and seven (7) of the parents/guardians did not have formal jobs, hence the respondents described them as not working. Figure 5.3 suggests that most parents in the study areas are predominately small-scale farmers, who depend on their own work and on that of their household, vendors (who trade, i.e. buying and selling in order to make a living), and those who worked in the mines and industry as general workers. It should be noted from the nature of the jobs done by the parents that they were engaged in low-paying jobs which took up most of their time. The nature of their jobs implies that they did not earn enough money to support their children’s education, and to provide in the other basic needs the learner would require. As a result they did not have the time to supervise their children’s homework and reading, as well as to motivate the learners to do their work. The researcher noted that the parents were not attached to their children, hence they did not have close relationships with them.

### **5.3 Section B: The psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe**

This section analyses the primary data collected by means of the interviews, focus group discussions, and observations of the respondents (that is, fifteen girl children, three headmasters and six teachers), in relation to the questions for the research.

This section attempts to unpack the following critical questions, and suggestion, from the data produced:

1. What are the psychosocial effects of poverty on the girl children?
2. What are the developmental experiences encountered by the girl children living in poverty-stricken households?
3. What are the views and perceptions of the teachers on the academic performance of the girl pupils affected by poverty?
4. Suggest solutions that can be given to attenuate the negative effects of poverty on the girl child.

#### **5.3.1 What are the psychosocial effects of poverty on girl children?**

##### **5.3.1.1 Common issues that emerged from the findings**

Different issues emerged from the interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Some of the common factors that were identified by the headmasters, teachers and girl learners as affecting the academic performance of the girl children were, namely the lack of financial resources, money, and an income to support them. Eleven (11) of the girl respondents found it difficult to pay their school fees, to buy textbooks and exercise books, and sanitary wear, and they ended up by absconding from their lessons, or in some instances repeating the grade until they were able to pay the exam fees. During the three focus group discussions the issue of school fees also emerged as the girl children stated that it was one of the major problems that they faced in the three communities (rural, urban and mining), and that contributed to the large

numbers of drop-outs among the girl children. Failure to obtain school uniforms and shoes also emerged from nine (9) girl respondents who said it was a drawback to learning, and affected their self-esteem and motivation to learn. Four (4) teachers, TFR, TMR, TM1U and TM2U, interviewed indicated that rural families and some urban families could not raise the money to pay for school uniforms, although the schools insisted that school uniforms had to be worn, thus deterring the poor children from attending school. All three the headmasters, HMM, HMU and HMR, interviewed confirmed that uniforms were a prerequisite to attend school, so they expected from all the children to wear uniforms. This was observed to exacerbate the plight of girl learners from poverty-stricken backgrounds. Being sent home due to the non-payment of school fees, complete uniforms, and books, stigmatised and stereotyped the girl learners. The teachers were observed to have a negative attitude towards poor girl children, and they favoured those from affluent backgrounds. Four (4) teachers said that they were demotivated to teach at poor schools.

Not having enough food to eat at home and at school was another issue which was commonly discussed during the three focus group discussions, FGDR, FGDM and FGDU, as affecting the girl children's attendance and academic performance at school. Twelve (12) girl children, five (5) teachers and three (3) headmasters interviewed also indicated that there was a shortage of food in most homes, as most people had one meal a day, or nothing. Three (3) headmasters and five (5) teachers of those interviewed confirmed that the children did not always bring food to school. During the focus group discussion, FGDU and FGDR, the majority of the girls highlighted that issues of the lack of food in households caused their sisters to drop out of school, and to consider helping the family to find food instead of being at school. Most of the girls narrated that the lack of food and basic meals was a contributing factor to dropping out of school.

The other reasons for absenteeism identified by the girl learners who participated in the three focus group discussions included, namely the failure to obtain school fees, a lack of parental support, hunger/malnutrition, child labour, sickness, shortage of uniforms, the lack of sanitation pads and privacy, stigmatisation and discrimination, and children becoming care-givers. These were the same reasons given by twelve girls who were interviewed. The three headmasters and all the teachers interviewed echoed the same sentiments. The parents were also observed to



prefer and sponsor the education of a boy child rather than that of the girls. This was very common in the rural areas.

Poverty was observed to be inextricably linked to HIV/AIDS. Thus there were not enough funds for the family to consider education. Three (3) of the girl respondents stated that they did not attend lessons regularly because of sick parents/guardians, and that there was not enough money to support the education of the girl children. The headmasters and teachers also said that many girls suffered from a myriad of diseases due to HIV/AIDS, and poor nutrition. The observations made by this researcher and the teachers confirmed the above findings.

All the fifteen (15) girls narrated, during focus group discussions and interviews, that they were overburdened with household chores, and that negatively affected their academic performance. The fifteen (15) girls explained that they did the household chores while their brothers were out playing with their friends, or sometimes studying and doing their homework. The implication is that boys did not do much of the household chores, and therefore had more time to study. The six (6) teachers and the headmasters interviewed confirmed the observation of too many household chores for the girl learners. One (1) teacher was, however, observed to hold on to the cultural practice of seeing it as normal for girl children to do household duties, because they were girls. The headmasters interviewed also believed that household chores were a hindrance to the optimal functioning of girl learners at most schools, since the girls looked tired at school, sometimes slept in the class, failed to do their homework, and lagged behind in their academic performances as a result.

Nine (9) girl learners interviewed and all six (6) the teachers who participated in this study identified child labour, *maricho* (paid labour), as another key factor in the three (3) communities, mining, rural and urban. The children were observed to be late for school, or were absent because of child labour. Two school headmasters, HMM and HMU confirmed that the girls missed lessons and school more than the boys because parents from poor families preferred to send girls rather than boys to sell wares. The girls were more trustworthy than the boys when it came to bringing the money home. The observations revealed that boys, especially in mining and urban communities, tended to buy drugs with the money they earned from selling wares, thus exacerbating the plight of their families. The majority of the girls highlighted that they engaged

in informal trading, selling vegetables, farm produce, fruit, juice cards, mirrors, and all sort of things before and after school. Furthermore, child labour, and part-time jobs (*maricho*) were done by girls to make ends meet, thus compromising their academic pursuits. The general consensus among the girl learners who were interviewed and those who participated in the three focus group discussions, was that it was necessary for the majority of the girls to work in order to pay for their school fees, to buy textbooks, writing books, and pens, for pocket money, and to contribute to the family's income.

Most of the teachers, five (5) of them, the three (3) headmasters, and thirteen (13) girl children also identified early pregnancies, issues of stigma and discrimination, health problems, child abuse, premarital sex, prostitution, arranged marriages (*kuzvarira*), the shortage of resources, over-crowded homes, bias in respect of the boy child in the families, noisy neighbourhoods, and a low-esteem among the girl children, and anxiety and stress, as contributing to the girls dropping out of school. Only four (4) identified emotional and verbal abuse as factors that specifically affected their performance. Some of the respondents, six (6) girls, narrated how they were abused by their guardians/parents, teachers, sugar daddies and peers, due to them being poor. This, in a way, negatively affected their performance and concentration at school.

It was established by means of the three focus group discussions and interviews that, in many cases, girls are at risk of sexual abuse, economic exploitation, and engagement in criminal activities, teenage pregnancies, and giving birth at an early age. The child's position and role in the household in which he or she lives can affect his/her opportunities for schooling. Twelve (12) girls asserted that, because of traditional beliefs, many parents felt that the money invested in girls' education is money wasted, since their roles are to procreate and to stay in the kitchen. The parents were observed by the headmasters and teachers to be more in favour of the education of the boy child. This was noted to be common among the rural, urban and mining learners from poverty-stricken backgrounds who participated in this study.

Four (4) teachers, three (3) headmasters, and eight (8) girls who participated in the interviews and some of the learners who participated in the three focus group discussions mentioned the impact of small and scattered settlements, resulting in long distances between home and school. They said that some parents realised that it was unsafe to let their girls walk long journeys

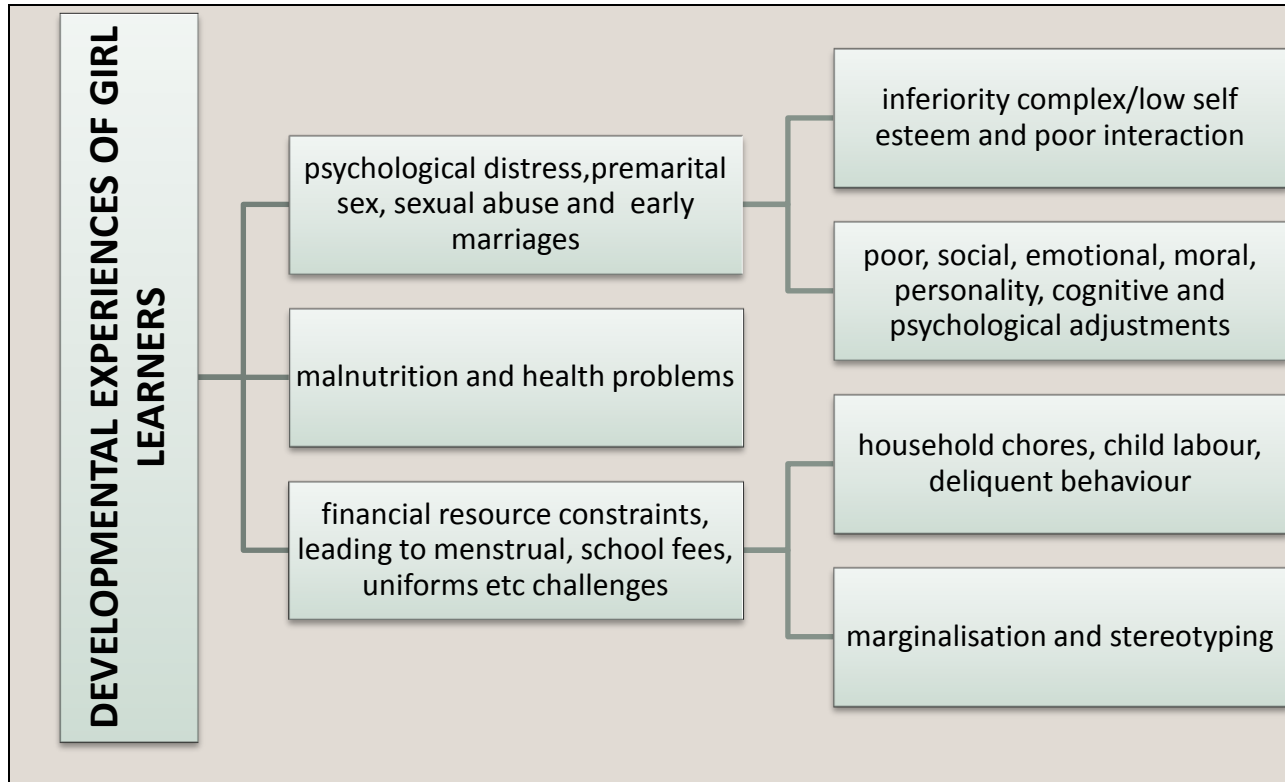
unaccompanied. Also, the time required for them to get to school and return home is precious time away from household chores, trading at the market, and working on the farm.

The headmasters interviewed pointed out that an unattractive school environment, poor infrastructure, crumbling school buildings, a lack of furniture, and insufficient toilet facilities were indicated as keeping girls from school. The problem with the disposal of sanitary pads at school, and sexual abuse emerged as some of the latest issues raised by the girls during the interviews and focus group discussions. Some girl learners complained that their parents did not give them ample time to study, and also failed to help them with their homework.

Findings from the three focus group discussions and the interviews with the girls, the teachers and the headmasters also indicated the following, namely that girls were socially looked down upon by their peers and teachers, that the family interactions were strained because of poverty, a lack of motivation, and the girl child not having enough time to study. It was observed that poor children attended poor schools without resources, and they had a low self-esteem. The girls were also seen to be the victims of cultural oppression. The teachers and headmasters who were interviewed confirmed that girl learners were oppressed, both at home and at school. The teachers and the researcher also observed that gender stereotyping and marginalisation at school and at the home are on the rise.

### 5.3.2 Developmental experiences encountered by girl children living in poverty-stricken households

#### 5.3.2.1. Common issues that emerged from the findings



**Figure 5.4: Developmental experiences encountered by girl children** (Field data, 2013)

As shown in figure 5.4, the common issues that emerged from the three focus group discussions and interviews were that poverty causes psychological distress, due to early marriages, premarital sex, and sexual abuse, which in turn, lead to poor interaction among peers, teachers and parents, an inferiority complex, a low self-esteem among the girl children, and poor social, emotional, moral, cognitive and psychological adjustments. During the interviews with the headmasters and the teachers, poor health and malnutrition, which causes stunted growth and thus affecting the holistic development of the children, were also noted to have a negative effect on the developmental experiences of girl children living in poverty-stricken households. Five (5) of the teachers and the three (3) headmasters who were interviewed said that the girls were affected mentally, physically, psychologically, emotionally, and socially leading to poor social

adjustment, and absenteeism from school, and restricted social interaction at and after school. This was said to have a negative impact on the academic performance of girl learners.

Thirteen (13) girl learners, the headmasters, and five (5) teachers concurred that financial resource constraints had an impact on the developmental experiences of the girl learners. The girls who participated in the interviews and focus group discussions mentioned the lack of sanitary wear and privacy, school fees, a shortage of uniforms and food, as leading to child labour and delinquent behaviour, in order to make ends meet. The researcher also observed that poor girl learners were stereotyped and marginalised by the teachers and other learners, both boys and girls, from affluent backgrounds.

Six (6) teachers and two (2) headmasters who were interviewed indicated that prostitution, drug abuse, sexual abuse, teen pregnancies, and early marriages, were noted to be detrimental to the development of the girl children, thus draining *ubuntu* among girl children. This was confirmed by the girl learners who participated in the three focus group discussions. Nine (9) girls who were interviewed also revealed that premarital sex, and early sexual activities led to health problems (HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases), but insisted that they would continue engaging in sex for money to make ends meet. Economic exploitation and engagement in criminal activities was also observed to be prevalent among poor girl learners. Seven (7) girl children, four (4) teachers, and the three (3) headmasters also mentioned the following, namely *kuzvarira* (planned marriages), a low self-esteem, stress and anxiety, a poor diet, health problems, the shortage of money for undergarments, and delinquent behaviour as factors affecting the academic performance of girl children.

### **5.3.3 Perceptions of the teachers in respect of girl children from poverty-stricken families**

#### **5.3.3.1 Common issues that emerged from the findings**

The majority of the teachers, five (5) out of the six teachers who participated in this study, and all the headmasters interviewed said that the girl children lacked self-motivation, and were naturally lazy. Some blame poverty for their poor academic performance, and that they were overburdened by household chores. Two (2) headmasters blamed the fact that the girls did not have a role model among the female staff members as affecting their academic performance.

Most of the girl learners were shunned due to their outward appearance, they came to school without proper uniforms, some even arrived at school wearing dirty uniforms, without shoes and jerseys. Hence they rarely took part in classroom and sporting activities, according to three teachers who were interviewed. All six (6) the teachers agreed that the girl children were labelled as slow learners who did not have any hope of succeeding in their learning. The teachers interviewed pointed out that the girls came to school with their books not covered; they had not done their homework, looked tired in class, always came to school late, did not participate in class, and had a negative attitude in respect of their schoolwork.

The teachers were observed to underrate them, and most lacked an interest in them. Thirteen (13) girls confirmed that they did not receive extra tuition from the teachers because the teachers were demotivated, due to the lack of incentives, and low remuneration. Four (4) of the teachers said that the schools had become examination-oriented; hence they did not have time for poor girl children lagging behind. In the three schools that formed part of the study, Rungwawe, Makanganwa and Gwadamirayi, the teachers indicated that resources were given to already advantaged children from affluent backgrounds, while those from poor families were sponsored for failure. These sentiments were also echoed by the three headmasters during the interviews.

Some pupils were denied the opportunity of becoming school prefects because they did not have uniforms, despite the fact that their peers had voted them to become a prefect at a school where the selection of the prefects involved both the teachers and the pupils. Four (4) teachers established that unhealthy girl students were difficult to teach; they also complained of the high mobility among girl children, leading them to change schools, thus complicating their teaching and learning. All the teachers and headmasters interviewed revealed that the girl children came to school without the basic school resources and that they changed schools often, thus compromising on content coverage and academic performance. Nine (9) girls said that the teachers stereotyped and marginalised them, since the teachers thought that poor girl children are not academically gifted. This study established that poor girl children are placed in lower bands or streams where they received the content which had been altered. Some of the issues raised by the teachers and the headmasters were that of stigmatisation because of the non-payment of

school fees, sexual harassment by classmates, by male teachers, and by males in general, which often resulted in pregnancy, and high drop-out rates.

The study also established that teachers generally do not receive adequate remuneration. The lack of incentives for school teachers, especially in the rural areas, was the cause of teacher demotivation. The primary data revealed that girls faced many challenges in attending school, in respect of school fees, school uniforms, and other school requirements.

Two (2) teachers and one (1) headmaster observed that some girl children were doing well in class, despite coming from poor backgrounds. The teachers mentioned the following as possible reasons, namely resilience, encouragement by the parents, assistance from parents, the timeously payment of school fees, positive family, peer and school interactions, the teaching of children at home, good parenting, and providing in the children's basic needs. Apart from the supervision of homework and motivating the pupils to learn, little mention was made of the home-based involvement of parents and those from the neighbourhood, involving home discussions, which are associated with the discussion of school-related activities, and home supervision, which involves monitoring the child's out-of-school activities.

It can be noted from the findings given by the respondents that some issues were repeated, leading this researcher to make use of themes in the discussion of the findings.

#### **5.3.4 Possible solutions as suggested by the respondents**

The following solutions were suggested by the respondents to attenuate the negative effects of poverty among learners:

- Teachers should give unconditional positive regard to learners, as postulated by Rogers in his Person-centred Theory.
- The Donor Community should provide school fees, stationery and food to learners.
- Schools should form social clubs that can help in paying the fees of disadvantaged girl children, e.g. it is advised that the Agricultural Department grow more crops so as to avoid food shortages for disadvantaged girl children.

- The introduction of Nutritional Gardens.
- There is a need to improve the teachers' salaries to boost their extrinsic motivation.
- The Government should pay the school fees of disadvantaged girl children.

These possible solutions suggested by the respondents during the interviews and focus group discussions, to some extent, informed the recommendations the researcher made in this study.



## 5.4 Discussion

The analysis of the empirical data yielded seven themes, as indicated in figure 5.5 below. The sub-headings represent the themes/categories that emerged, as the main or repetitive themes are also used to facilitate the presentation and the discussion of the findings.



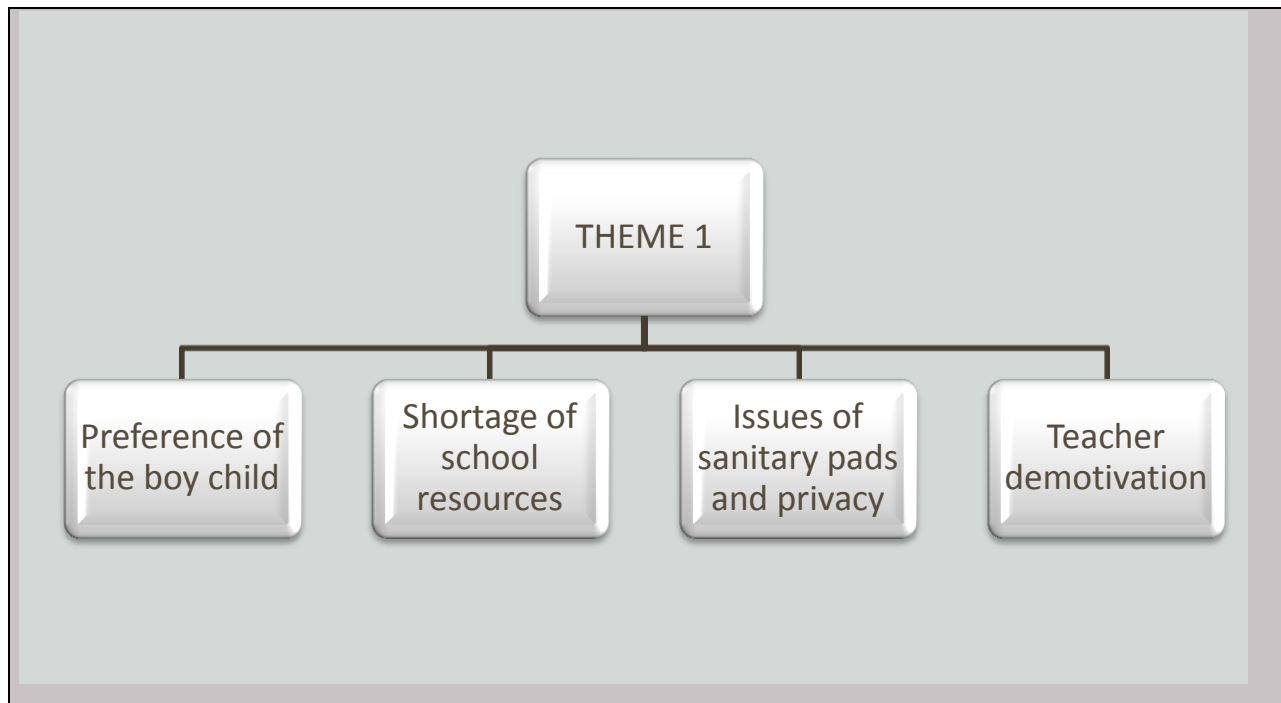
**Figure 5.5: Themes derived from the findings of the study**

The diagram above, figure 5.5, summarises the seven major themes that emerged from the findings of this study.

The thematic discussion of the findings follows, namely a discussion of each theme and sub-themes that emerged.

### 5.4.1 Theme 1: Financial and resource constraints

Sub-themes/categories that emerged from theme one (1) are used to facilitate the presentation and discussion of the findings. The emergent sub-themes/categories as shown in figure 5.6 below are:



**Figure 5.6: Sub-themes emerging from theme 1** (Field data, 2013)

#### 5.4.1.1 Preference of a boy child

Results from both the interviews and the three focus group discussions established that the direct and indirect costs of education are considered to be the major barriers in accessing secondary education for girls in the three schools studied. The researcher observed that the monetary costs of schooling continue to dominate the reasons for the drop-out of girl learners in the rural, mining and urban schools studied. The majority of the Form 2 girl learners from the rural secondary school who participated in this study indicated that poor households sometimes saw investing in girl's education as not worthwhile as it is expected that daughters leave their homes

upon marriage. One of the girls who were interviewed and who participated in the focus group discussions remarked that

*Many parents see the benefits of educating boys as more tangible and economic, saying that the majority of the parents think boys are a better investment; hence girls should remain at home to help with all the domestic chores and bear children.*

The teachers and headmasters who were interviewed agreed, also revealing that some parents in the Mapanzure communal area were sceptical to educating the girl child, since it is seen as a waste of the family's resources. In some communities gender bias starts from birth, where a son's birth brings happiness to the parents, and girls are seen as a stigma on the family (Chitiga & Chinoona, 2011; Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012; Kasayira & Chireshe, 2010). Primitive as this might sound, Watkins (2008:155) and the United Nations, (2003:143) confirm that high education costs have seen the male child receiving preference to continue with his education. In many cases people may argue that the girl child will get married, and that the boy child will need to support his family, hence the family always strives for him to get a career. In line with the above argument, UNESCO (2010:19) posits that educating daughters is seen as a monetary loss, thus parents prefer to educate their sons rather than their daughters. Integrated Regional Information Networks, IRIN (2011:1) also states that the Education, Sports, Arts and Culture Minister, Senator David Coltart, said that over 50% of young girls meant to go for secondary education in Zimbabwe were forced to drop out because of various reasons, the main being the unavailability of funds, and the society's preference to educate the boy child.

Implicit to the above, gender bias and the unavailability of resources, among the other determinants of academic performance, have taken their toll on the girl child's education. This bias for the sons' education is based on the notion of economic returns, where sons are seen as money-makers for the family. As the girls have to go to the other family after marriage, the parents sometimes preferred the dowry to the girl's education.

This researcher can therefore conclude that cultural reasoning and gender biased ideologies, marginalisation and stereotyping come to play in disadvantaging the girl child in her pursuit of education in the three schools studied. It should also be noted that the existing cultural

expectations, norms and values also influence the pattern of girls' participation in formal education.

#### **5.4.1.2 Shortage of school resources**

This study established that the financial costs of schooling are often high, making it difficult for poor parents to afford schooling for their girl children. The girls interviewed and who participated in the focus group discussions disclosed that the financial costs included not only school fees, but also other indirect costs, such as the costs of food, transport, writing paper/exercise books, textbooks, pens, sanitary pads, pocket money, and school uniforms.

In the interview, one teacher, TM2U made the following remarks:

*...expensive textbooks and school uniforms tend to be beyond the reach of many families. For example, the unit cost of form two English and Maths textbooks in June 2012 ranged between USD15-20 each. A complete uniform set would cost over USD 75.*

The three headmasters, HMU, HMR and HMM confirmed the above, saying that textbooks and uniforms were expensive, and often beyond the means of many poor families, thus negatively affecting the academic performance of girl learners.

The girl learner, G9R also indicated that:

*... there is a serious problem of textbooks at our schools; students depend entirely on the research notes given by the teachers, which in some instances are not very detailed..*

In support of the above, all the three focus groups, FGDU, FGDR and FGDM asserted that

*...vabereki vedu havana kuti tengera chero mabhuku okuverenga neekunyorera, vongoti vachatenga kana vava nemari (Our parents cannot afford to buy textbooks and exercise books, they always make excuses).*

The literature confirms and illuminates these findings. A study by UNICEF (2011) established that many schools lack textbooks and other supplies that enhance academic performance. Given

the above arguments, it can be argued that without good textbooks and other classroom resources, many teachers cannot necessarily improve the quality of teaching and learning in the schools. Studies indicated the positive effects of more textbooks that often appear to be bigger than those of additional teachers (Evans, 2004:47). The results also indicated that many classrooms did not have the appropriate subject-level books for the children. The pupils relied heavily on the teacher's research notes. This, however, depended on the thoroughness of the teachers' research notes. The problem of textbooks was confirmed in the observations. At one school which had serious problems in respect of textbooks, the pupils were not given even a single book to share.

Based on the findings of this study, concerning the issue of textbooks, the government, in partnership with UNICEF, has donated relevant textbooks for all levels to schools, at both primary and secondary levels, at a ratio of a textbook per child (1:1). Unfortunately the economic situation in the country saw these textbooks being sold on the streets, disadvantaging the needy pupils. Two teachers from an urban secondary school (Makanganwa), TM1U and TM2U, had this to say

*...as teachers who get very little from the government, we have no choice but to sell the books in the streets because one cannot teach whilst he/she is hungry. These UNICEF books have become a source of income to the majority of teachers and headmasters.*

TMM, from a mining school, Rungwave, confirms the above, saying:

*...it is true that our school was given textbooks, but more than half of the books donated to our school have since disappeared. Both teachers and learners steal to make a living. After all, textbooks are not as important as 'sadza' (staple food).*

The three headmasters who participated in this study also confirmed that a significant number of textbooks had disappeared from their schools, and they blamed the economic situation, forcing headmasters, teachers and pupils to steal and sell the books in the streets. This was observed to have a bearing on the academic performance of girl learners at the three schools studied.

PLAN International, an international non-governmental organisation, has been very instrumental in building libraries and classroom blocks in the rural areas, in an effort to improve the situation in the schools for all the learners, but financial constraints did not allow them to assist every school, and they did not assist the mining schools on the assumption that it is the mine's corporate social responsibility. The mines owe it to its workers to ensure that the schools at the mines are adequately staffed and furnished, in an attempt to cater for the basic needs of the workers' families (according to Maslow).

The findings of this study also revealed that in the three schools studied, because of financial and resource challenges, only one school had a school library which, however, did not have the number of books needed for children to learn effectively. At that school, (Makanganwa) the children were allowed only one monthly visit to the library. The result is that the learners visited the library only three times a term, and this was found not to be enough for effective learning. The rural secondary school, (Gwadamirayi) and the mining school, (Rungwave) did not have school libraries; the study established that there were no plans to construct libraries because they did not have money. This was noted to be a serious constraint and drawback in the education of the children, not only of the girl children in Zimbabwe. Despite challenges raised so far on the education of girl learners due to the shortage of textbooks, it can be argued, based on the findings of this study, that some children defied the odds and performed well because of the support they received from their parents and the good notes they got from the teachers. Given the above, to say all girl children from poor backgrounds and neighbourhoods underperformed at school as a result of the shortage of textbook will therefore be myopic and an underestimation of a rather complex issue.

In concurrence with the ecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner contends that a child develops within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding community. He (2006, 2008) asserts that there is a need to understand the multiple and interactive social, economic, cultural, and community-level factors, which alone and in combination influence the processes of development and the academic performance of the child.

Given the above, the development and academic performance of the girl child will be discussed from varied perspectives, taking into consideration the influence of everything surrounding her, and also other direct and indirect factors affecting her academic performance.

Findings from the interviews and focus group discussions also revealed that poor families have very few material resources, and that the children growing up with few resources tend not to do so well in their schoolwork, thus affecting their social, emotional, cognitive, and physical functioning. This is in line with the findings of Bergeson (2006) who asserted that poor children face both practical and material constraints concerning their social participation in education. The three headmasters who participated in this study stated that the demand for education may be quite sensitive to the cost of education, so that high transport costs and school fees may reduce the demand for education substantially, thus leading to the exclusion of girl children, negatively impacting on both the quality of education and on attendance rates of the girl learners. The majority of the girls who were interviewed and participated in the three focus group discussions, FGDR, FGDM and FGDU, indicated as follows,

*We lack basic school things such as writing materials, school fees, uniforms, school books, soap, pocket money, school bags and food to take to school. As a result, there are girls who end up sleeping with several men for USD 1 and to get basic needs like food, pocket money and soap. We are forced to risk our health as a result.*

This comment was reinforced and supported during the interviews when all the headmasters and teachers mentioned how the girls risked their virginity for food and money. The implication of the above is that the girls are being deprived materially, thus forcing them to indulge in sex in order to make ends meet, risking their health and academic performance. The girls were observed to withdraw from school, especially if their needs for supplies like school fees, shoes and uniforms were not met by their parents/guardians. These girls were also seen to have a low self-esteem, were not motivated, looked down upon themselves, and shunned school as a result. Numerous studies linking self-concept and academic achievement have been carried out in Africa. Mwamwenda (2010) concluded that a child who felt more confident and more self-assured would perform better in the primary learning examinations. This study, therefore, holds

the view that in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, academic performance will suffer as a result of the pupils' lack of confidence and low self-esteem.

G2U, from Makanganwa secondary school mentioned that

*...handioni chandinoendera kuchikoro mazuva ose ndisina chero bhilo nepencil (I don't see the rationale of going to school every day when my parents cannot afford even a pen and a pencil). I always go to school with dirty uniforms, sometimes other students laugh at me.*

Given the above, keeping uniforms clean added an additional weekly financial burden on the family's meagre income. Measured against Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (as cited in Santrock, 2009), it can be argued that the deprivation of physiological needs like food, shelter, clothes, water and other basic needs among children will pose a threat to their holistic development. This researcher observed that in the three secondary schools the teachers and headmasters encouraged the learners to wear clean uniforms, to write clearly and neatly in their exercise books, and to ensure that their books were neatly covered.

A teacher, TFR, from a rural secondary school lamented that

*Some girl pupils were refused the opportunity of becoming school prefects because of the lack of uniforms despite the fact that their peers had voted for them to become one at a school where the selection of prefects involved both the teachers and the pupils.*

In support of the above, one headmaster, HMU, also indicated that

*Uniforms are a pre-requisite at any school. We will not hesitate to chase away students who come to school not wearing a uniform. All students should wear their uniforms daily. Parents are also encouraged to buy sports and club uniforms so that their children are presentable. Prefects are role models, thus they should wear uniforms on a daily basis...*

This comment was also reinforced and supported during the interviews when all the girl learners spoke about their personal school experiences. Furthermore, the three girl focus groups also concurred with the girls' experiences. As revealed by the verbatim reports above, financial



constraints and resources were noted to worsen the plight of poor girl children as they felt stigmatised and out of place at school. Teachers and headmasters therefore favoured and preferred girl children from affluent backgrounds who could afford uniforms in leadership positions. Headmasters were also observed to be fussy about wearing uniforms among learners thus making those who did not afford feel out of place. This study established that girl children who could not afford these uniforms felt inferior and therefore failed to self-actualise (as purported by Rogers and Maslow) because of the inferiority complex. This corroborates findings made by Chen (2009) and Chireshe et al. (2010) who posit that when a child does not get basic needs, the brain does not grow to its fullest potential at the expected time and therefore will lag behind intellectually. Thus, girl children living in poverty experience a lot of pressure to keep up with their peers. They describe problems with keeping up appearances (for example having presentable and clean clothes and uniforms, shoes, school bags, pocket money and instances of shame associated with poverty). This was observed to negatively affect their academic performance and dropout levels. The study established that the majority of the parents in the rural, mining and urban communities studied are poor and so cannot pay their children's school fees and other costs related to education such as school uniforms. During the three focus group discussions, FGDR, FGDU and FGDM, the girls lamented that:

*Many girls drop out of school due to failure to get school fees. Most of the times we are sent back home to collect fees and because there is no one at home, we end up loitering on the way home until other children join us from school. Most of us miss school especially during the first month of the school term because we are tired of being sent home.*

Some girls from the Rungwawe and Gwadamirayi secondary schools during focus group discussions, FGDU and FGDM further highlighted that:

*We end up sleeping with several men to get money for school fees, food and other basic needs. Some girls in our school get pregnant and decide to get married. Those who do not get married just stay at home with their babies. Cases of abortion are very high at our school as a result.*

Some girls who participated in this study, for example G3U and G11M, justified their being intimate with older men (sugar daddies) in the following words, namely that

*...kusi kufa ndekupi? Zviri nanai kufara nemadhara anobhadhara pane kufamba wakashama uye une nzara ( it is better to be intimate with rich old men to get money for basic needs than to wear dirty uniforms and starve).*

*There are no jobs nowadays; prostitution is a form of employment. It is better to die of AIDS than hunger.*

It is therefore plausible to argue that girl children as young as eleven years start to engage in sexual activities, thus risking their health and academic performance for food and other basic commodities. The study also established that because of their meagre incomes the parents of the girls from the three schools not only needed money to pay school fees, but also for other things in the home, for example, food. As a result, they delay paying the school fees and the children are consequently expelled. These children missed valuable contact and learning time, affecting their academic performance. It was observed in this study that dropping out of school due to poverty leads to stress, frustration, discouragement and maladjustment.

In Zimbabwe the government established the Social Dimensions Fund (SDF) to assist the vulnerable groups. However, it has to be seen if it actually reached the intended beneficiaries, particularly the girl learners. Studies by Kaseke (as cited in UNICEF, 2010) and by Chitiga and Chinoona (2011) indicated that the school fees scheme of the Social Dimensions Fund reached only about 25% of the target population, while the money for food only reached 3%. The government of Zimbabwe also selectively provides free school uniforms to school children in some parts of the country. The provision can be described as ‘selective’ because the government provides school uniforms only to ‘poor but brilliant’ primary school pupils as a means of ensuring primary education for all. Therefore, poor but not brilliant pupils cannot benefit from the initiative, unless they can prove their worth academically.

Measured against Rogers’ unconditional positive regard, it may be concluded that an individual’s self-actualising tendency can be thrown out of order when positive regard is withdrawn. Rogers’ unconditional positive regard implies that the teachers should accept the learners as they are,

whether boys or girls, intelligent or dull, and irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds. The government must see it as a responsibility to equitably distribute support to all who need it. If two pupils are poor, help must be given to both of them. Selectivity will only foster the exclusion that is being fought against. The government should be reminded that Zimbabwe's commitment to the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary and secondary school completion by 2015 may be dashed if the government continues with this selectivity.

The Government of Zimbabwe has tried to lower school drop-outs because of a lack of money for school fees and other basic needs by means of the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) which is currently being funded by UNICEF. This assistance focuses on paying school fees for orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) but it is fraught with irregularities, unfairness and corruption, where the Committee only elects non-deserving children instead of those who would actually benefit from it.

This study established that the fund does not cater for school uniforms, books or writing materials, yet these are the prerequisites (as illustrated by the verbatim reports of the girl learners, the teachers and the headmasters), seeing that a child is not allowed in school without a school uniform. In this regard the government is shooting itself in the arm as it defeats its own campaign of education for all. The government also pays out the BEAM-funds very late, making it difficult for schools to budget. In support of the above, Gaidzanwa (2012:1) criticises the limited budgetary allocations for the education sector by the government of Zimbabwe, suggesting that this not only kills the quality of education, but also defeats the many strides taken to achieve gender parity in education, as girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys where education becomes defunct.

It is evident from the findings of this study that the girls in the mining, urban and rural schools who formed part of the study, are psychologically and materially not supported by their parents. It should be noted that unless their basic needs are satisfied, everything else falls back (Maslow, as cited in O'Neil, 2011). Maslow continues to say that children who usually come to school without the basic necessities develop behavioural, socio-emotional, moral and cognitive problems. All their human capacities such as intelligence, memory and creativity are put to work in trying to satisfy their psychological and physiological needs (Maslow, in Kenrick, 2010).

Measured against Rogers' Person-centred theory, deprived children will inevitably develop a low self-esteem, conditional positive regard, insecurity, and an inferiority complex, will be withdrawn, and will end up being isolated by their peers. Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory also embraces the belief that when one part of the body (no matter how small and seemingly irrelevant) hurts, it will disrupt the whole body, until healing is brought to the injured part (Bee & Boyd, 2007).

This study established that there was a decline in the number of pupils registering for the O-level examinations, and in the number of subjects for which the pupils registered in the three schools. Also, a larger proportion of girl learners than boys could not sit for their examinations, or could only enrol for some subjects because of serious financial constraints. Lastly, the lack of money to pay for the education expenses, which included not only school fees, but also other indirect costs such as food, transport, writing paper, textbooks, pens, sanitary pads and school uniforms is just one of the many factors that limit the girl child to continue with their schooling and to do well in their studies. From the above it is clear that gender and poverty combine to produce highly significant educational disadvantages for girls in poor households.

#### **5.4.1.3 Issues in respect of sanitary pads and privacy**

The results from the interviews and focus group discussions also revealed that for the majority of the Form 2 girls who have reached puberty there is also the added cost of sanitary pads during menstruation. The access of the schools to water and sanitary facilities remains a challenge, with a safe water coverage of 77%, and sanitation of 51% in 2002 in Zimbabwe (UNICEF, 2010). One female teacher, TFR, from a rural secondary school (Gwadamirayi) stated that

*...Girls are known to leave school when they are menstruating if water and sanitation is not available in the schools. Something should be done to keep menstruating girls in school, especially those from poor backgrounds. Menstruating girls are at a critical stage, and therefore need a lot of support at home, the school and the neighbourhood.*

The girl learners who participated in the three focus group discussions also echoed the following sentiments, namely

*During menstruation, many of us do not have sanitary pads. They are expensive; they cost about USD 2 for a packet of 8 to 10 pads, and some use more than one packet a month. It's a lot of money and our parents cannot give us that kind of money. We are therefore forced to use tissue paper, newspapers, plastic papers, papers from exercise books, leaves and rags instead.*

In concurrence G6R, G7R and G8R, all from the rural secondary school, and G2U, G5U, G11M and G14M, from both the urban and the mining secondary schools, reported to have to make use of papers from old books, tissues, newspapers and rags as protection, and this made them feel very uncomfortable in class. Given the sentiments echoed by the girl participants in this study, these problems associated with menstruation and poverty negatively influence the girls' schooling, thus causing lower completion and poor attendance rates, culminating in poor academic performance. It should be noted that menstruation and its accompanying physical, psychological and hygiene requirements therefore have implications for the girl child's participation in education as regards access, retention, attendance, and the final completion of a grade.

The above observations confirm the findings of Burrows and Maunder (2004: 14) who posit that the lack of adequate water and sanitation, both at home and at school, prevented menstruating girls from attending school when menstruating. It can be argued that girls have a sense of being unclean when there is little clean water to wash themselves with, and this may influence them to stay away from school. Also, there are seldom private facilities at school for the girls to go to the toilet, or to wash the rags they use during their periods. One female teacher, TFR, from a rural secondary school lamented that they may also get infections if the water they use to wash the rags in is dirty, leading to more time off from school. Without water, proper hygiene cannot be ensured, and the absence of water means fewer toilets, and the less hygienic the facilities (UNICEF, 2010). Inadequate toilet facilities were observed to be worse in the rural secondary school (Gwadamirayi).

The majority of the girls who participated in the three focus group discussions and those who were interviewed echoed the sentiments below:

*There is also no privacy in the toilets, making it very difficult to attend school when menstruating. It's difficult to participate in sports and other activities at school because some of us do not have tight pants and often experience heavy flows.... These issues force us not to go to school.*

During interviews four girls, G6R, G7R, G13M and G9R, reported that during their periods they did not attend school for three to five days per month because they could not afford sanitary pads, and for fear of embarrassment. The headmasters and all the male teachers interviewed were silent on the issue of sanitary pads. Only two female teachers reinforced and supported the girl learners' sentiments. The girl learners, as indicated by G9U, pointed out that

*We face humiliation from other pupils when we spoil our clothes. Many girls experience abdominal pains during menstruation (jeko) and menstrual discomfort, back pains, swelling, cramping, mood swings and itching, but have no money to buy drugs. They cannot even afford anything to stop the pains. Our parents always say that the pains experienced during menstruation are normal; they show signs of womanhood which need no cure...*

This was also reinforced and supported during the focus group discussion with girls from the rural area when they spoke about their menstruation experiences. The female teachers interviewed in this study, TFM and TFR confirmed the above findings. The existing studies on barriers to girls' education tend to apportion less attention to sanitary towels and other aspects that surround menstruation and poverty (Mwangi, 2010; Burrows & Maunder, 2004: 15), yet they are important factors that need to be addressed if girls are to fully enjoy their right to education. Contrary to the remarks on the shortage of sanitary pads, privacy and problems associated with menstruation, one headmaster, HMM, indicated that

*Girls do not perform as per expectation, not only because of poverty-related variables but they lack female role models in the schools. Some unmarried lady teachers are a cause of concern among girl learners; hence girls tend to imitate bad behaviours like having many boyfriends, sleeping out, and beer drinking. The Ministry of Education should also do something about a dress code for lady teachers.*

This finding was, however, not common among the girl participants and most teachers who participated in this study. More research on this issue is therefore proposed by this researcher, since findings from previous researches have not established this school of thought.

It is therefore justified to conclude that the lack of girl user-friendly toilets, of water, and of proper sanitary facilities, and stigma and discrimination remain important factors that need to be addressed in order for girl children to fully enjoy their education. This may be done by exploring the impact of menstruation on the girls' schooling, especially in disadvantaged communities like the rural, mining and some parts of the urban areas that formed part of this study.

#### **5.4.1.4 Teacher demotivation**

This study also established that on the teaching side, the lack of motivation amongst teachers can also affect the quality of their teaching. Low remuneration, and poor benefits and working conditions may cause a lack in motivation. This is particularly relevant in the rural areas where the location may mean that the teachers are unhappy with their situation, and this can impact negatively on their teaching standards. Because of their poor remuneration, the study established that many of the teachers (especially Science and Maths teachers) have migrated to neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Mozambique, in search of greener pastures. The shortages in Mathematics and Science teachers may lead to overcrowded classrooms and high teacher-student ratio, and in addition, a lack of trained teachers to make up for the shortfall. In many cases this clearly leads to a drop in teaching standards. This was observed to affect both boys and girls in the three secondary schools.

One headmaster, HMU, revealed that some contributory factors of poor academic performance among girl children included urban bias in the distribution of qualified teachers, insufficient classrooms and teaching material, the low accountability of the teachers towards the parents and learners, and the absence of mechanisms to monitor and evaluate teachers. There is need for significant reforms and investments in education if we are to achieve universal access for all, and the underlying issues, whether cultural, social or economic, to be addressed. The teachers who were interviewed also revealed that the children from poor backgrounds fail to concentrate on the issues at hand, and that they lack participation in class and group activities, hence their

performance in their daily written work is negatively affected. The study also established that the children affected in this way do not perform well at school. Studies conducted by Cameron (2012) in Bangladesh and Vietnam support the views expressed by the teachers and students who were interviewed.

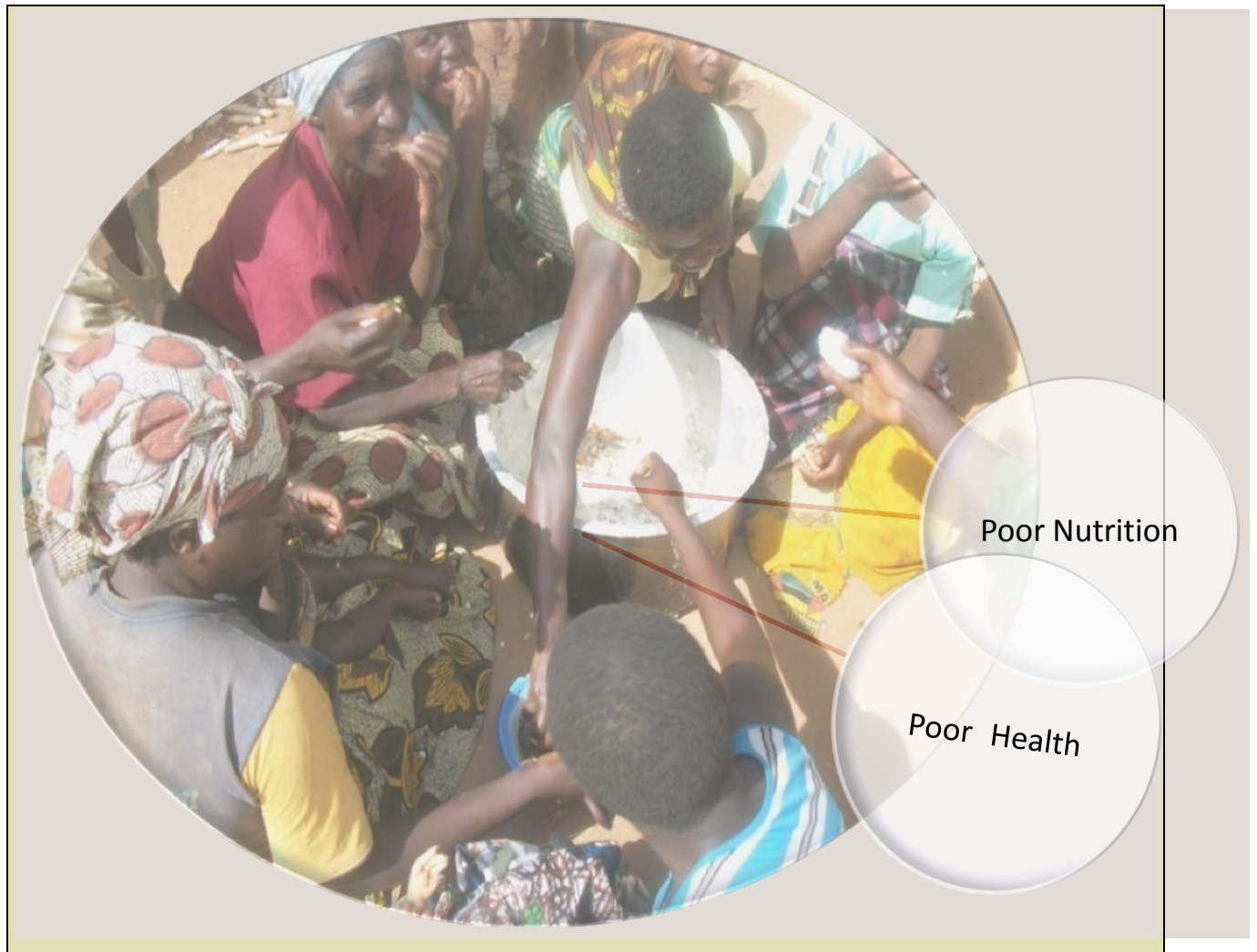
In Zimbabwe financial incentives have not been very successful at attracting better teachers to poor rural and urban schools. This is partly because of the extreme difficulty of teaching poor children, often in deprived circumstances, and the preference of good teachers to teach in more affluent schools. This makes holiday lessons for the rural schools non-existent, because the pupils cannot afford to pay the teachers. In four rural districts of Manicaland Province, during the August holiday in 2012, Plan International paid secondary school teachers USD\$10 per subject for ten days of the holiday for the five core subjects (Mathematics, English, Science, Shona and Geography), in an attempt to afford the disadvantaged girl students extra tuition. This endeavour shows that the organisation had realised the gap through research, implying that the plight of girls in Zimbabwe is a matter of international concern. Research confirms these findings. Many studies in developing countries have shown that access to education differs depending on income level (Mufanechiya, et al., 2012; Tope, 2012; Obure, et al., 2009). Mutekwe, et al., (2012) and IRIN (2011) also established that girls are lagging behind in enrolment figures as well as in academic performance in respect of Mathematics and Science.

Although most of these causes are poverty-related, it will be myopic to say that poverty alone affects the academic performance of girl children. There are also other causes such as the commitment of the teachers, the influence of the media, especially television, technology (especially, face book, internet and whats app) on the children and genetic factors of the learners.



## 5.4.2 Theme 2: Lack of nutrition/adequate food, and health issues

The diagram below, picture 5.1 summarises theme 2 and its subthemes.



**Picture 5.1: Theme 2 and its sub-themes**

(Field data, 2013)

### 5.4.2.1 Lack of nutrition/ inadequate food

The girl students who participated in the three focus group discussions (FGDR, FGDM and FGDU) stressed that the lack of nutritious food triggers an array of health problems in girl children, many of which problems can become chronic. Seventy three percent (73%) of the girl

children interviewed highlighted that they came to school without having had any breakfast, not even a slice of homemade bread (*chimodho*). Most of the girl respondents narrated that the lack of food and basic meals was a contributing factor in their dropping out of school. It was a major issue. The sentiments of G8R, GR10, G12M, G3U and G6R, as represented by G7R narrated that

*Sometimes we go to school without a meal. Some girls drop out of school because of not having any food at home. We sometimes only have one meal a day and sometimes go to bed without having had anything to eat. We eat low calorie and less nutritious food like black tea in the morning and 'sadza' and vegetables sometimes at lunch and/or supper.*

Another child, G11M, said they only had one meal a day while the pupils who participated in the focus group discussions, FGDR and FGDU, also lamented that they only have supper and breakfast. Those who said they had all the meals, highlighted that the amount of food given per person is not always enough, as shown in pictures 5.1 and 5.2. Girl learners from the three focus groups' concerns were also noted by such sentiments as

*Isu tinongouya kuchikoro tisina kana chatadya (We come to school on empty stomachs) ...Zviri nani tibise break time nokuti vamwe vana vanobva vatidadira nechikafu chavo (Break at school exposes us more and we feel stigmatised. We wish schools would remove break times), takapedzisira kudya madeko sadza nemuriwo (We last ate 'sadza' and vegetables last night).*

In most cases, based on the interviews with the girl learners, over 60% of these learners reported that they had had a very small meal the previous night. Less than thirty percent (30%) of the pupils were estimated to be taking food to school with them. The implication then, according to these figures, is that the majority of the children in the three schools ate virtually nothing at all when they got up in the mornings, and at all the times when they were at school. Research findings by Pollitt and Brown (2006), and Miller and Korenman (2004:238) indicated that underfeeding in childhood was thought to hinder mental development solely by producing permanent, structural damage to the brain. Malnutrition remains one of the major obstacles to human well-being and economic prosperity in developing countries (Ecker & Nene, 2012;

Stevens, et al., 2012). The most recent report from Save the Children stated that adults who were malnourished as children earn 20% less in academic performance, on average, than those who were not (Save the Children, 2012). Given such an argument, under-nutrition tends to limit the long-term intellectual development of the learners.

Those who said they had all three meals a day highlighted the fact that the amount of food they received per meal was not always enough. It also appears that the frequency of the meals was a problem, considering these admissions. This was observed to have a bearing on the academic performance of the children. Poverty and poor nutrition do not have to be that severe to negatively affect the child's development (Pollitt & Brown, 2006; Benson, 2012; Stevens, et al., 2012; Nabarro, et al., 2012). The Food Agriculture Organisation, FAO and World Health Organisation, WHO research also demonstrated that even the slightest forms of food insecurity can affect a young child's development and learning potential (Chilton, et al., 2007; Ignowski, 2012). In support of the above, a study carried out in Kenya on adolescents who did not regularly eat breakfast or suffer from poor nutrition revealed that they generally became lethargic and stopped interacting, thus their learning potential was severely lowered (UNESCO, 2011; United Nations, 2012).

Measured against Maslow's theory of motivation, Tay and Diener (2011:359) reported that "... a good way to obscure the higher motivations and to get a lopsided view of human capacities and human nature is to make the organism extremely and chronically hungry or thirsty". This implies that a child from a poor background will have problems in self-actualization because of hunger. Hunger is a deficit of a basic need for food, and Maslow gave it great prominence in the motivation of the learner. Santrock (2009) and O'Neil (2011) indicated that a higher motivation can only be attained when the basic needs have been fulfilled. It can be argued that the lack of physiological needs demoralises the girls' innate need to excel in schoolwork, and hinders their overall development. This, to a larger extent, was noted to affect the academic performance of the girl children in this study.

The extent to which the situation of the lack of food is detrimental in the rural communities is indicated in pictures, 5.1 and 5.2.



**Picture 5.2: Women and girls eating. Is the food enough to feed the family?**

Based on the kind and the amount of food the persons in the two pictures, 5.1 and 5.2, are eating, this researcher concludes that the two families did not have enough food to feed their families. Since the children are made to eat from the same pot or plate as their older sisters and parents, one can conclude that they have less to eat than their parents. This was observed to be the trend in most families living in dire poverty in the areas studied. This scenario was noted to be worse in the rural areas. Given the above, the problem of the shortage of food cannot be underestimated by this study; hence it has as its aim to examine the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl learners in Zimbabwe. It can be deduced from picture 5.1, taken in the Mapanzure communal area (the rural community where this study was done) that more than eight women and children shared the food from one pot. There is also evidence from the two pictures that the ‘sadza’ and relish were not enough, and that the young girls had to compete with the older women for something to eat. It can therefore be assumed that the young children who eat with their parents do not get enough to eat.

Good nutrition is fundamental for individuals to realise their physical, cognitive, and economic potential. It is the basis for individual and family well-being and human capital-formation and, as such, key to the economic and social development of the current generation and, even more so, of future generations (Rusinga & Moyo, 2012; Benson, 2012; Hoddinott, et al., 2012; SUN, 2012). Malnutrition lowers the children's performances in the school, increases the risk of disability, morbidity, and mortality, and thus contributes to the inter-generational transmission of poverty and illness (Ecker & Nene, 2012; Ecker & Breisniger, 2012; Nabarro, et al., 2012).

The teachers interviewed asserted that about 90% of their learners from poor backgrounds came to school without food, and failed to concentrate as a result of hunger. Instead of paying attention to the teacher, the hungry learner would be pondering about what to do so as to get the basic needs. The sentiments of the teachers interviewed, namely TFM, TMR, TM2U and TMM, were represented by TM1U who made the following statement:

*...When children experience food shortages and insecurity, their mental, cognitive and emotional states are altered, which can negatively affect their intellectual development. Children are often weak, drowsy in class and sick because of hunger. Children who walk long distances on empty stomachs fail to concentrate on their schoolwork, which thus negatively affects their academic performance.*

This also confirms the views raised by the three headmasters, HMR, HMU and HMM, during the interviews. The headmaster from the rural secondary school, Gwadamirayi, was more vocal about the issue that was being discussed; hence they exposed their plight more than other girl learners on the issues of poor nutrition. The IRIN (2011) report stated that malnutrition and poor health were great contributors of low retention and poor performance in school. The research participants indicated that food insecurity and malnutrition have a direct effect on a child's performance and achievement in school. The observations were made in both the rural and the urban communities. An argument that may be easier to substantiate is the fact that a hungry child is more likely to have a lower concentration level, a poor listening span, and problems in retrieving and accessing information than her/ his classmates who receive enough to eat. This may have an impact on the child's ability to perform in class. Therefore, eating breakfast, lunch and dinner on a regular basis leads to positive effects on a child's learning achievements,

according to two teachers interviewed. Good nutrition and food security are therefore positively associated with improvements at school, as demonstrated in all three the schools studied. It is argued that well-fed children are more likely to enrol in school overall and also do so at an earlier age than their peers who do not have sufficient food or food security (Maslow, in Mwamwenda, 2010).

In line with the above arguments, TFM posited that:

*... Food is a priceless teaching aid and learner motivator. Children who are well-nourished are more likely to enter school earlier, stay in school and have the ability to concentrate on lessons rather than the hungry ones. Children with food security tend to participate more in class and in sporting activities.*

This opinion was reinforced by findings made by the learners in their various focus groups, and all the teachers who were interviewed. The headmasters were also in concurrence with the findings. The observations made by this researcher and a number of teachers also confirmed the above findings. Conversely, a child whose education is threatened at an early age due to hunger is likely to have bad prospects in his future as an adult (Freud, as cited in Mwamwenda, 2010). Maslow believed that the higher-level needs can only be achieved if the lower-order needs have been satisfied first, thus a hungry person is not likely to be motivated to consider safety and affection until his or her hunger is satisfied. Rathus (2006:66) mentioned that, “All the needs in the hierarchy are innate to humans, but those higher in the hierarchy are weaker. They only direct action when all earlier needs have been satisfied”. The implication is that only when a person has enough to eat, and his or her physical safety is assured can he/she be motivated by a need to belong or a need for esteem. The most frequent criticism of Maslow’s theory, however, is that the systematic movement up the hierarchy does not seem to be uniform for all the people. In practice, this hierarchy is only approximate, and a person does not have to have his or her physiological needs fully satisfied before going on to seek higher needs.

The problems that food insecurity can provoke for the children’s schooling were made very plain by the teachers, headmasters and the Form 2 girls who were interviewed and who participated in the three focus group discussions.

It was clear, for example, from the teachers, headmasters and the girls who participated in the three focus group discussions and interviews, and also from observations, that at the urban secondary school (Makanganwa), because it practices hot seating, (a situation where some children attend school in the morning while others at the same school came in the afternoon because of shortage of resources) fewer girl children are in school after lunch than before lunch.

The researcher and the teachers observed that the children tend to miss after-lunch activities like club activities, sports and even lessons. Some teachers explained that a number of children often have a long way to walk home at lunch time. Because they do not have any food to eat and are hungry they fail to return to school. They do not have the energy to walk the distance back to school and spend the afternoon at school being hungry. Clearly then, food security has an impact on the attendance rates of children from the poorest households. This study also, however, established that the girl learners who do return to school after lunch are usually late. The children's concentration-levels in class are affected when they have not had enough food to eat. They are understandably more focused on this issue than on their lessons (Stevens, et al., 2012; Cameron, 2012; Lacour & Tissington, 2011). The School Feeding Programme (SFP) is consequently a good initiative, and can be used to boost the academic performance of poor learners.

The observations made by the teachers and this researcher confirmed that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds end up cheating, lying and stealing, especially food from their peers, or money to buy food. Since this behaviour is regarded as socially unacceptable by society, they end up being isolated from their significant others, and they may develop a low self-esteem. Their microsystemic and mesosystemic relationships, as propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner, are affected as a result. Rogers, a prominent humanist, claims that positive regard, which includes recognition, love and attention from significant others is important for the psychological growth of children. Conditional positive regard leads to the distortion of an individual's self-concept. This researcher also found that pupils with a low self-esteem are inactive, suffer from headaches and insomnia, have very high/low levels of anxiety, stress, and a low I.Q. They are mentally unstable, suffer from psychosocial distress, and underachieve in their

academic work. It was also observed that the children who were affected by poverty for a long time were more psychologically unstable than those who have experienced poverty only for a short while.

This study can conclude that the lack of nutrition is inextricably linked to a myriad of health problems. Assessing the child's nutrition and the health status of children living in poverty may therefore uncover factors that intensify the effects of poverty, or independently contribute to psychosocial problems (Bee & Boyd, 2007:38; Ignowski, 2012).

The instability and unpredictability of food in respect of children from poor backgrounds present the children with little interaction with peers and teachers and this, according to Bronfenbrenner, is the most destructive force in the child's cognitive development (Bronfenbrenner, 2008; Paquette & Ryan, 2001). This researcher noted that some NGOs, such as God's Garden, Vision Trust, Christian Care and Care International were sometimes giving food hand-outs to orphans, poor girls and vulnerable children at the rural school under study. Only an insignificant number of children, however, benefited. The researcher observed a lot of bias when food was distributed to both boys and girls at the rural school. The boys, by virtue of being boys, were given a lot of food. The girls were made to serve the boys first, and to eat later. This was noted to be the trend even among families. The food handed out was not sustainable, hence the poor children continued to suffer from malnutrition.

The same above-mentioned organisations conducted workshops on nutritional gardens and conservation farming, in order to boost crop yields in the areas where the three schools are located. They continued to provide fences for the gardens, and treadle pumps for pumping water, as well as giving their inputs. However, not all the families benefitted. Often it was a once-off arrangement where the beneficiaries were expected to maintain the sustainability of the projects. Most of the projects do not exist anymore because of a lack of input such as funding for the purchase of seeds, fertiliser and maintenance of the pumps. Implicit to the above, the cycle of poverty is not easy to break. One student, G8R, lamented that:

*When our garden was running, we always had different types of vegetables to eat, but ever since thieves stole the barbed wire protecting our garden, we are back to square*



*one. The goats went in and ate everything. We suffered such a huge blow that we didn't even have the seed to start afresh or money to replace the fence. Now we are back to square one...*

This situation reflects the circumstances discussed by the girl learners who participated in the rural focus group, FGDR, the teachers and the headmasters interviewed in this study. This state of affairs would eventually translate into more poverty at family, community and national level, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty and failure among the learners. From the above analysis, one can argue that, because of the problems at home, the girl learner's confidence is undermined at school. She will eventually give up or stop trying, and the vicious cycle will continue.

Despite high-level commitment in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other initiatives, most developing countries are likely to fail in achieving their nutrition-related goals, although there are large differences in nutritional achievements across countries (Stevens, et al., 2012).

#### **5.4.2.2 Health challenges caused by a lack of food**

The results from the interviews with the girl learners and the three focus group discussions established that there is a higher incidence of conditions such as asthma, respiratory infections, headaches, stomach pains, stress-related ailments, tuberculosis, poor vision, marasmus, rickets, kwashiorkor, coughs, diarrhoea, ear infections, and hearing loss among children from poverty-stricken households who are malnourished. This researcher observed that a myriad of these diseases affect the ability of the children to benefit from education and to function intellectually, socially and economically later on in their lives, thus it can cripple a society for a generation or more.

It was also observed in this research that children from poor backgrounds were stunted, namely had a low height for their age. The results from the interviews with the teachers and the headmasters revealed that children experience stunted growth if they are underfed. This confirms findings by Ignowski (2012), Donald, et al. (2010:156), Jensen (2007), and Lacour and Tissington (2011:552) who indicated that children living in poverty are much more prone to the

health risks and safety risks associated with malnutrition, disease, infection, and injury than are children who are not poor. Many of these health and safety risks cause physical, cognitive, neurological or sensory problems that are likely to cause disabilities and learning difficulties (Donald, et al., 2010:276). Thus, the children's level of attention and their ability to do complex intellectual work increase with the development of the sense organs as well as the brain.

Poverty-related diseases are detrimental to the academic performances of children. Children tend to miss lessons because of poverty-related illnesses; some fail to concentrate in class, thus affecting their academic performance. Health problems and nutrition deficits are ways in which poverty affects children's cognitive and school-related outcomes (Mwangi, 2010; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). 83% of the teachers and about 66% of the headmasters interviewed indicated that the greater the incidence of health issues among lower-income learners led to increased grade repetition, school absences, school drop-out, tardiness, illnesses at school, and high rates of undiagnosed and/or untreated health problems or disabilities.

This assumption was also reinforced and supported during the interviews with the girl learners and the three focus group discussions, when all the girl learners spoke about their health experiences. It should therefore be argued that poor health is detrimental to the cognitive development of learners. To worsen the plight of the learners, this researcher observed that many parents from poverty-stricken households could not afford to buy medicine or pay the medical bills for their children. The teachers and headmasters also observed that some children's school attendance was erratic because of various illnesses, thus negatively affecting their academic performance. In an interview one headmaster emphasised that a healthy learner is a productive learner. Many learners, however, are failing to maintain a healthy state due to, amongst others, a poor diet. Health is fast becoming a luxury which only those who can afford to pay the doctors, the medical bills, and for the medicines, can get. The question most people are asking now is, "Is the slogan, namely health and education for all by the year 2015 going to become a reality or remain a distant dream?" (Ignowski, 2012; Stevens, et al., 2012; United Nations, 2012).

The learners who participated in the following focus groups, namely FGDU and FGDM, complained of dirty, noisy and polluted neighbourhoods, and of shared toilets which were not regularly cleaned, implicating these for causing some of the diseases.

They are quoted as saying,

*...veduwe! ... Tinogara kune noisy, kwakasviba, kunonhuhwa uye kune matoilets mashoma asingasukwi* (we live in dirty compounds, where almost everything is shared, we suspect that should be the cause of the diseases).

This opinion was also reinforced and supported during the interviews with the girl learners, the teachers and the headmasters. Donald, et al. (2010) purported that children raised in poverty tend to miss school more often because of illnesses. These children are twice as likely to have impaired vision and hearing, and to suffer from iron deficiency, anaemia, and lead in the blood, which may impair the functioning of the brain. The teachers TMM and TMU confirmed the various ailments among children from poor backgrounds.

TMM said,

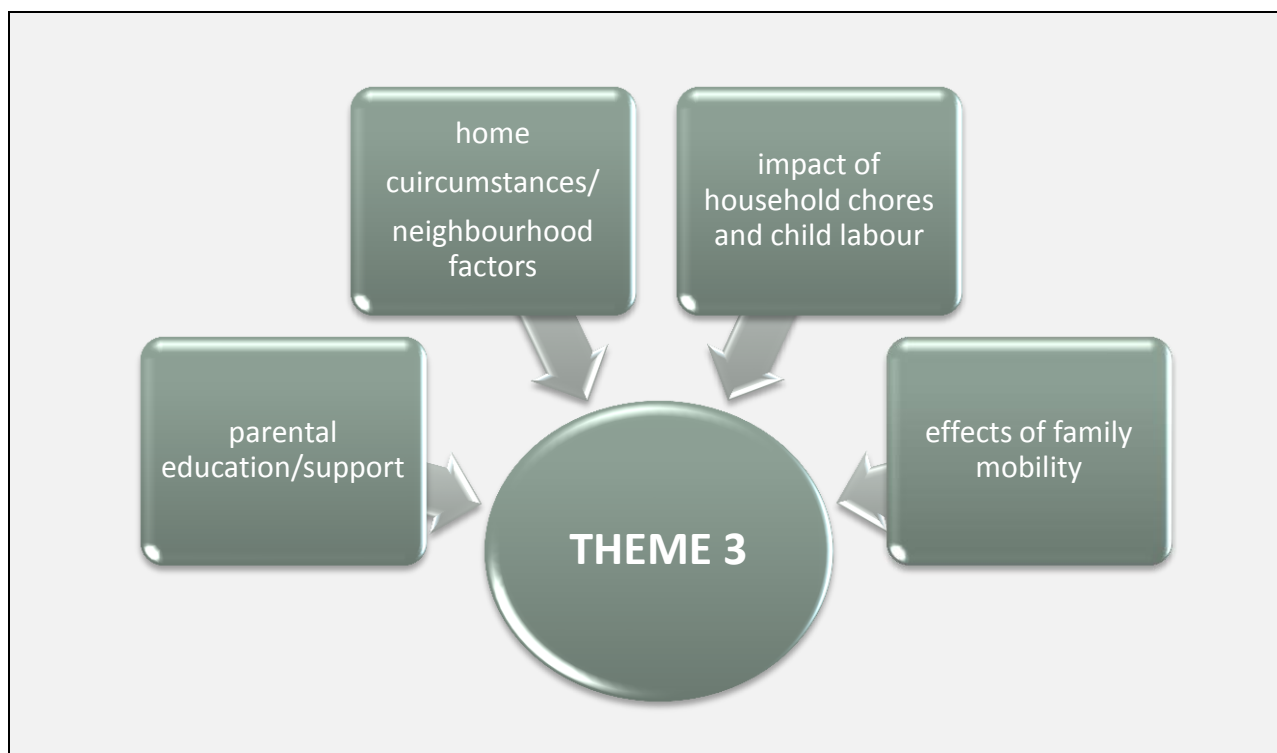
*...health problems among learners lead to high levels of stress and anxiety, headaches, insomnia, a low self-esteem, low I.Q., mental instability, psychosocial distress, as well as them underachieving in their academic work.*

These issues were also highlighted by the following girl pupils, namely FGDM and FGDU. Contributing factors indicated by the girl respondents included financial constraints, poor nutrition, unhealthy environmental conditions, and the inability to obtain appropriate health care. This study observed that those learners were usually stigmatised, labelled and looked down upon. They also developed an inferiority complex as a result. In support of the above, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory suggests that development of the girl child is explained in terms of relationships, for example, between a child and his/her environment (Boyd & Bee, 2006). Understanding the interactions of these systems is therefore important in understanding how Form 2 learners develop, and which factors lead to their failure. Genetically-determined child characteristics, such as sex, temperament and health risks, such as chronic medical problems and under-nutrition are examined in assessing the relationship between poverty and the children's psychosocial development (Bray et al., 2010; Witt, 2012). These characteristics may compromise the children's development because they affect the regularity or quality of proximal processes that operate within the microsystems (Luthar, 2009:26). By understanding

Bronfenbrenner's five-nested systems at work in the life of the girl learners, the researcher is not only looking at the causes, but also at possible solutions, especially in respect of the health issues affecting children from poverty-stricken households. Despite the problems indicated in this research, it should be noted that a lot is being done by the Government of Zimbabwe and NGOs in both urban and rural areas to counteract the health problems affecting the learners.

### 5.4.3 Theme 3: The home/school/physical environment

The diagram (figure 5.7) summarises the sub-themes for the home-based variables



**Figure: 5.7 Sub-themes: Home /school/physical environment**

(Field data, 2013)

#### 5.4.3.1 The effects of household chores

The study ascertained that the girls are losing out on education because they are needed at home to support their households by means of their work. This researcher and some of the teachers, TMR, TFM and TFR, observed that the situation was more unbearable in child-headed households where there was no mother on who the burdens may be shifted. The girls who participated in the rural focus group, FGDR, also revealed that the older girl children were, in

many cases, seen to take the role of the mother within the child headed households as they struggled to make ends meet in all efforts to resemble their mothers. The situation reflects the circumstances as discussed by Bowden (2002) and Michaelowa (2001, as cited in Lacour and Tissington (2011). The words of the girls below explain some of the challenges that they faced, and how they affected their participation at school:

*As girls we are given so much work at home that we cannot do our reading. We are overworked, and being exploited, while the boys' just roam the streets, and sometimes do their schoolwork. We do all the household chores, like washing the clothes, cleaning the house, feeding the young ones, looking after sick relatives and parents, cooking for the entire family, and fetching firewood and water before we go to school. We also sell vegetables, fruit, juice cards, and sometimes our bodies to supplement the family income. We do not have time to study and to do our homework.*

G6R, from a child-headed household in the Mapanzure communal area also lamented that

*There is too much pressure on us for taking the household responsibilities which even a much older person may not be able to handle. My academic performance is sometimes affected by unnecessary mistakes, a loss of focus in class and a lack of concentration due to too much stress from home.*

The girl learners from the rural focus group discussion, FGDR, expressed the issue of household chores more vividly than the learners from the urban and mining settings. The headmasters, HMM and HMR, and the teachers, TFR, TMM, TFM and TMR, also indicated that the girls were exposed to too much work, thus they did not have time to study and to do their homework. This negatively affected their academic performance. Nziramasanga (1999:177) confirmed that many girls and teachers admitted that the girl-child is overloaded with domestic chores when compared to her brother. Rao (2004:140) also indicated that when girls or women try to combine schooling with home apprenticeship, the choice between work time and study time may lead to family tensions, poor performance, poor lesson attendance and drop-outs. The teachers interviewed also emphasised the effects of the household chores on the girl learners, saying that there was little time for school and homework because of the amount of work around the house.

The expectation that girls will eventually marry and become housewives meant that mothers consider what the girls learnt at home as more important than what they learn at school. Therefore, the norm would be for the girls to stay closer to their mothers as they grow up and to learn household skills and behaviour that will prepare them for their future roles as wives and mothers. This is in line with the conclusions made by Connell (2010) and Chabaya, et al., (2009). These socio-cultural beliefs and poverty therefore cause the parents to see the formal education of a girl as a deviation from the accepted societal norms and practices; hence they are overburdened by household chores. Most Form 2 girl children, all five from the rural secondary school, three from the mining and three from the urban secondary schools, the headmasters and the teachers bemoaned the work-burden of the girls that do not allow the girls to attend to their schoolwork.

In this study a girl, G9R, from a rural school (Gwadimirayi) told the researcher in an answer to a question on whether it is fair for girls only to do most of the domestic work in the home, said

*Girls, because they are girls, should work for their families, since it is written in the Holy Bible (Proverbs, 31) that it is the creation of the mighty God and cultural that girls are made to do all the work in the home... Men are there to supervise women since they are the heads of the families.*

It should be noted that even the girl learners who participated in the rural focus group, FGDR, echoed the same sentiments. Implicit to the above, girls have been indoctrinated and socialised to believe that they are the persons responsible for all the household chores. The interview and focus group discussions revealed that this above assertion cuts across each other. Families are therefore reluctant to send their girls to school for fear that they will learn new values, and become less inclined to do domestic work. Thus, the girls do not perform as well as the boys at school due to, amongst other things, the gendered division of labour at home whereby girls get to do almost all the household chores. Research studies by Hlupo and Tsikira (2012), Chinyoka and Ganga (2011), and Watkins (2008) confirmed the above, saying that the learning barriers are high for girls because they carry a huge burden of domestic responsibilities. Women usually cook for the household and keep the house clean. It should be noted that in Zimbabwe, and in

Africa, culturally, the place of a woman is in the home, particularly in the kitchen, thus it is common knowledge in Zimbabwe that the women care for the family in every respect. They plan, prepare and cook meals, wash clothes, clean the home, and take care of the sick. The culture of Zimbabwe has a proverb which says ‘*Musha mukadzi*’; the interpretation is that women are the nest-builders. In simple terms it says that the women own the home and they are in control, as they determine what everyone should eat. Thus, the girl children spend too much time on domestic chores, compromising their academic performance. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that gender and poverty combine to produce highly significant educational disadvantages for girls in poor households.

The literature confirms and illuminates these findings. A research study by Chung, DiernaStraatman, QuispeCórdova, Reynaga, Burchfield and Kavanaugh (2009:25) revealed that a woman who helps her family and her neighbours in the community is considered a role model and held in high regard. Notable however, is that children carry out different roles while helping, because of the gender stereotypes attached to roles which are labelled feminine and masculine. This, indeed, manifested itself when the girls interviewed in this study reported that they helped their parents with a lot of the domestic work, sometimes before and after school, because they are expected to do so. To a larger extent the girls from the rural setting reported being overloaded with work, also before they are allowed to come to school.

One girl from the rural setting, G6R, indicated

*I have to wake up as early as 4.00 am to water our garden, which is about 1km away. I fetch water from far away. I don't enjoy this. It's terrible when I'm menstruating because I have 'jeko' (abdominal pains associated with menstruation)... By the time I reach class I am so tired and in a lot of pain. I have problems concentrating in class and, indeed, I don't learn anything that day.*

This confirms Okeke, et al.'s (2012) findings that a higher priority is placed on girls' domestic workload than on their academic performance. Given the above, it is reasonable to conclude that poor performance and constant absenteeism are fuelled by the variables mentioned above, because they may lead to the girls repeating the grade which in turn, demolishes their self-esteem

and confidence, and they may eventually drop out. Although these challenges affect the rural children most, the situation is not so different from what happens in the urban poor settings.

Bronfenbrenner (2008) urges the educators to establish and maintain family-school dyadic relationships in order to enhance the pupils' learning. Without education the girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential; hence they will fail to self-actualise, as proposed by Rogers and Maslow, thus affecting their self-esteem, self-concepts, and academic performance (O'Neil, 2011).

The long hours children must work impair their intellectual development. It is unreasonable to think that children can learn when they are physically exhausted and mentally tired. This study established that for many girl children, the hours spent at school becomes a time to rest, not to learn. Since the girls are responsible for most of the household chores, little time is set aside for school and homework. When the two become too much to handle, Chinyoka and Ganga (2011) observed, school was the least priority. The time the girls spend doing household chores disadvantages them and affects their performance. Going to the library, attending group discussions, and actual reading or study time is greatly reduced as a result. This study also indicated that when the girls have time to read, they are so tired that their concentration-span is affected, and also their retention, attention, motor reproduction skills, motivation and academic performance.

#### **5.4.3.2 The effects of child labour**

This study also established that monetary constraints and the need for food, shelter and clothing drives children into the trap of premature paid labour. The rural girl children are seen working in the fields, gardens and sometimes herding cattle for food, and they are paid very little, while those in urban areas and mining towns sell at the markets. The girls were also seen engaging in informal trade after school, where they sell fruit and juice cards in the streets, and they spent time also on domestic chores to supplement the family income. Findings from this study revealed that some girls were temporarily employed as domestic workers.

In the interview G8R mentioned that,



*The children make an effort to survive but they do not seem to cope, especially in poorer places in the rural areas. We get weekend and holiday piece-jobs for fees but it is not enough. I have to work as a house girl during weekends and school holidays in order to earn cash for school fees.*

Unpaid child labour was also noted among families, where girl children engaged in domestic work, cared for siblings, sick parents and relatives in order to save on the family income. Eight out of the fifteen girls who participated in this study said that because their parents were poor, they did not have money to pay for maids, so they did all the household chores. Implicit to the above, the girl children were overburdened by domestic chores and informal labour which negatively affected their academic performance. Ben-Chendo, et al. (2012) conducted an investigation on household poverty and its effects on child labour in Nigeria, and his findings are in line with the circumstances in Zimbabwe. Togunde and Arielle (2008, as cited in Ben-Chendo, et al., 2012) stated that children from poor households who engaged in child labour activities faced hazards such as abuse and rape, which could affect their social, mental and physical development. Socially, children have been found to experience negative consequences to their educational development and performance.

This study also established that the parents, as their children, also worked at menial jobs, vending and temporary jobs, which took too much of their time. This researcher noted that the parents could not supervise their children's homework, thus exacerbating their academic pursuits. This breakdown in the learner's microsystem leaves the child with no tools to explore other parts of the environment (Berk, 2007). Without proper adult supervision or love, the children who engage in child labour may look for attention in inappropriate places, thus affecting their self-discipline (Donald, et al., 2010). It is also worth noting that the adults who engaged young children as workers, e.g. maids, are breaking the law, as well as denying the child her right to education.

UNICEF (2010) posits that child labour deprives a child of the basic right of education. In concurrence, ILO (2002, as cited in UNESCO, 2010) posits that child labour has been seen all over the world as a major obstacle impeding the development of the child in many aspects of development, including education. Research has shown that millions of children do not have access to secondary education despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward. In line

with the findings of this research, Chitiga and Chinoona (2011), Kaba and Musonda (2011), Saito (2011), and Okeke, et al., (2012) identified child labour, poverty and the lack of sponsorship, a quest for wealth, bereavement, truancy, broken homes, the engagement of children as house-helpers, as the factors or the clogs in the wheel of children's access to secondary education. Four out of six of the teachers interviewed alluded to the fact that throughout the term there would be a number of girl children from low socio-economic backgrounds absent from school for long periods because of child labour. In Zimbabwe this has become a common crime, particularly on account of the current socio-economic environment. There are, however, various organisations fighting against child labour by helping the children and imparting education in that part of society from where the majority of the child labour comes (ILO, 2003, in United Nations, 2012). This has done much to ease the problem.

In the light of the above, poverty is seen as a hindrance to the optimal functioning of Form 2 learners in Masvingo. Poor girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential, and to play productive and equal roles in their families, and elsewhere, in the larger society. The education of the girl child has a strong and very important role on the role of women in society. It is a means of drawing many women into the labour force as a means of reducing the vicious cycle of poverty. It may also be concluded that working children are the objects of extreme exploitation, in terms of toiling for long hours for minimal pay thus negatively affecting their academic performance.

#### **5.4.3.3 The circumstances at home/neighbourhood factors**

The study established that the home circumstances are often not conducive to learning for the girl children in the mining, rural and urban communities studied. As shown in table 5.6, it can be concluded that the girl learners live in large households, ranging from six to fourteen people. This clearly indicates that most of girl respondents are members of large households. This can be attributed to the extended family relations, the fact that many children characterise large households due to polygamy, and very high rentals associated with mining and urban households. The impact of large household size on the girl learner's education is that they do not have a place to do their homework and to study with their friends.

One headmaster HMU pointed out that,

*Financial strain limits the housing and neighbourhood choices available to low-income families, constraining these families to live in neighbourhoods characterised by high levels of crime and unemployment, low levels of resources, and a lack of collective efficacy and resources among the residents.*

In line with the above argument, the majority of the girl children from the three schools who participated in interviews and focus group discussions also indicated that their studies at home were affected by a lack of lighting, space to do homework, by spending much time on domestic chores, having no desk or table to work at, a shortage of books in the home, a noisy neighbourhood, and unsupportive parents. At the mine compound the researcher observed that people in the lowest-income bracket are generally offered the worst available forms of housing and sanitary facilities. These people significantly contribute to the mine's production and profits, but are left out in enjoying the fruits of their labour. Therefore the situation of housing, water and sanitation in the mines need urgent radical improvement, especially for the seemingly marginalised workers of the lower grades.

Bradley, et al. (2001:1861) found that being poor can affect almost every aspect of a child's home-life. Poor people are usually found living in informal settlements (although sometimes at close quarter to wealthy neighbourhoods), in order to avoid paying high rent, to make sure they are close to employment opportunities, and in some cases, because they are not legally entitled to buy property (Haughton, et al., 2010, as cited in Cameron, 2012). The provision of services such as education is practically non-existent, and the lack of infrastructure and services also have indirect effects on education, for example, on grounds of sanitation, poor health, and time needed to collect water (Cameron, 2012).

Some of the statements expressing such views posited by the girl students who participated in the three focus groups, FGDM, FGDR and FGDU, were that,

*kumba kwakaomesesa, nokuti hakuna kana magetsi, macandles, tinoverenga nomoto* (the situation at home is pathetic, we experience power cuts, our parents cannot afford candles and we sometimes use fire as light when doing homework.),

*tinorara muimba imwe tiri six* (we live in crowded homes, sometimes more than six people share a bedroom),

*...kumba kwedu kune basa rakawanda, hauzorori* (we do not have time to rest because of various household chores)

*...vabereki vedu havana kudzidza saka havagoni kutitisa basa rechikoro* (our parents are not educated, therefore they fail to help us with the homework)

*...takakombwa nemhuri dzinoita ruzha rwakawanda...*(our neighbours make a lot of noise, it is therefore difficult to concentrate on schoolwork).

The environments in which the children in this study live fell far short of what Cameron, (2012), Donald, et al. (2010), Ganga and Chinyoka (2010:126) and Bronfenbrenner, (2006) prescribed as an environment conducive to learning. The children reported that the shortage of space, overcrowding, and not having any privacy or room to be alone, caused arguments and tension, thus affecting family relationships, which in turn affect academic performance. A vicious cycle of poverty can be noted when poor children live in poor accommodation, attend poor schools, and are taught by inexperienced teachers with a low self-esteem and a low self-concept.

This reinforces the ideas brought forward by Bronfenbrenner (2008) who asserted that a lack of space, academic support at home, the parents' inability to afford rental, and overcrowded homes constrain children's interaction with others, leading to poor academic performance. Children in low-income families are reported to be less likely to spend time with their friends outside school, compared to their more affluent peers. It is difficult for these children to arrange social events. These home and school circumstances, as alluded to by Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem, may also feature insecure or unstable environments and financial insecurity, leading to anxiety and emotional stress (Chilton, et al., 2007). It is obvious that a poor physical environment is detrimental to the cognitive development of the learners. This, therefore, also has a bearing on the psychosocial development of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

The problem of limited space is observed to be compounded by low income. The teachers interviewed established that children who experience poverty live in physical environments that

offer less stimulation and fewer resources for learning. The situation reflects the circumstances discussed by headmasters interviewed in this study earlier on. This has been espoused by Bronfenbrenner, (2008) who purports that the neighbourhood is associated with child and adolescent school outcomes, above and beyond the effect of family poverty.

In an interview one teacher, TMU, said,

*Many poor girl children begin life at a disadvantage, due to low family income, low maternal education, single parents, poor parents, poor and noisy neighbourhoods, poor houses, unsupportive parents, the lack of resources, or a combination of these factors.*

This confirms also what was said by all three the headmasters in the interviews. The FGDM revealed that the low-income mining workers lived in squashed and squalid conditions, where the men mainly lived with the children, while the mothers were in the rural areas. Some men drank beer every day and played guitar to relieve themselves from stress of failing to provide for their families, leaving their children to all sorts of abuse, with no one to look after them, because this is the nature of the society. At the end of the month all the money goes towards paying for the beer.

Measured against the ecological perspective as espoused by Bronfenbrenner (2006, 2008), the girl child's development is a culmination of many direct and indirect influences, which either facilitate or impede her individual potential. Using Bronfenbrenner's nested system-approach, the impact of poverty on the children's academic achievement, and the role of supportive parents are examined in three environments, namely the family/home physical environment, the neighbourhood, and the school (Bronfenbrenner, 2008). Supportive parenting is conceptualised as a proximal process within the child's mesosystem that moderates the influence of poverty in these three environments. Components within the microsystem include individuals such as parents, siblings, teachers, friends, and other significant individuals who share a substantial amount of time with the child. These have a tremendous effect on the academic performance of the girl child. Thus there is every reason to believe that there exists a perpetuation of deprivation. The culture of poverty reigns supreme, since poverty breeds poverty. The level of disadvantage may become exacerbated because of the lack of a cognitively stimulating or safe

home environment, conflicting parent-child interactions, a poor school and poor neighbourhood conditions. This reinforces the findings of Donald, et al. (2010).

According to the ecological theory, if the relationships in the immediate microsystem break down, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of his/ her environment. This notion is supported by Atkinson (2008) who asserts that the instability and unpredictability of family life is the most destructive force in a child's development.

Poor girl students may face conditions in their homes that leave them with little time and energy for their studies. This study established that poor girl students are likely to have parents, family members and neighbours who are also less educated, as shown in table 5.6. The literature confirms and illuminates these findings. Such learners will not be able to get much guidance for their education at home. This situation may further be aggravated if they have only one parent, or the parents are too busy to spend time with their children. This concurs with the findings by Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (2007) and Donald, et al. (2010) who asserted that poverty is strongly correlated with a range of home background variables that affect academic performance. These home circumstances may also feature insecure or unstable environments, often leading to emotional stress and school drop-out among the girl learners. In support of the above, Berk (2007) also established that what happens in the family or peer group can influence how children respond at school, and vice versa (the mesosystem), thus a lack of support from the family has a negative impact on the cognitive development of girl learners.

From the above discussion it may be seen that the home has a great influence on a learner's psychological, emotional, social and economic situation, thus affecting his or her academic performance. The importance of the home environment or family on the girl learners' academic performance cannot be underestimated, since the family is the source of basic inspiration (Bronfenbrenner, 2008). This indicates that parents have an important role to play in the academic performance of their children. The parents' attitudes towards school may lead to a high or a low level of support they give their children. In Zimbabwe the parents are responsible for assisting their children with homework. This simply means that the level of education of the parents affect the way they assist their children, and this may have an adverse effect on the child's performance. The attitudes and behaviour of the significant others of the child, such as

the parents, siblings, relatives, and peers have been seen to affect the academic attitude of the girl child. These significant others are also the first socialising agents who will have an effect on how the girl child reacts to life situations, and perceives academic achievement. Children from poor families have, in many cases, been seen to lack educational goals (Atkinson, 2008). Broken families, single-parent families, and child-headed families may have a traumatic effect on the children. Usually children from such backgrounds may have emotional problems which may hinder good academic performance (Chindanya, 2012). Thus, the family background plays a pivotal role in building the character of the child and in enhancing academic performance.

#### **5.4.3.4 The effects of the family's mobility**

Findings from the interviews revealed that children from poor backgrounds move from town to town, village to village, and from school to school as their parents search for work, or rush around to make ends meet. The focus group discussions, FGDM and FGDU, also indicated that many families do not earn enough money to afford decent housing, thus changed accommodation regularly. Some parents kept moving from place to place in search of employment and cheaper rental, thus the children were bound to change schools, and friends and teachers, compromising their education. This finding is in line with research done by Jeynes (2007), which established that children who changed schools often performed poorly than children who spent more years at one school. According to Cameron (2012), the process of family migration can disrupt the children's education directly, especially seeing that migration is often cyclical, involving repeated journeys between the rural origin and the urban destination. This observation is reinforced in studies conducted by Mufanechiya, et al. (2012).

Mobility was noted to be high among the mining and urban secondary school learners from poor backgrounds. The situation was observed to be rather stable at the rural day school studied. Teachers from the mining and urban schools also complained of the high incidence of mobility among children from poverty-stricken households. The learners interviewed, G1U, G2U, G4U, G13M and G14M, revealed that they sometimes lived for a period of a month at a place, and therefore were people of no fixed residence. On the other hand, the girl learners from the rural setting emphasised that they had not changed schools since their parents had permanent homes.

Despite the fact that their parents did not change residence, their teachers were very mobile. Some teachers did not spend more than a term at one school, as they continually changed schools searching for better schools in urban areas. This was observed to have a negative effect on the education of the girl learners. It was noticed in this study that poor children attended poor schools, which are poorly endowed with material resources, and are taught by demotivated and negatively-labelled teachers. In the interviews the teachers highlighted the fact that they were continuously making frantic efforts to be transferred to better schools. Throughout the period of this research, the teachers complained that they never got incentives (in form of money) which their counterparts stationed at affluent schools received on monthly basis. This was noted to compound the plight of Form 2 learners in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

Migrant families may also face bureaucratic obstacles, such as a refusal to admit children in the middle of a school-year, non-recognition of education attained in the rural place of origin, the demands for birth or examination certificates that migrant families may not have, and selective admission, based on household registration. Short-term migration, as appeared to be the case for a substantial number of households in Vietnam, may pose particular difficulties in terms of the disruption of education, possibly requiring programmes that supplement the main school system (Cameron, 2012).

Observations have also indicated that the families involved in this study had children who spent a number of months on their own whilst the parents were away seeking a means of survival. In the urban and mining communities, the researcher noted that the families had adopted a rather *laissez faire* parenting attitude where the children were sometimes left to do as they wished while the parents left for neighbouring countries like South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania or Zambia in search of greener pastures (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011). The teachers observed that girl children from poverty-stricken families were often left at home to fend for themselves and their younger siblings while their caregivers worked elsewhere. As a result, the teachers complained that the parents did not have the time to supervise their children's homework, thus compromising their academic performance. This breakdown in the learners' microsystem leaves a child with no tools to explore other parts of the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2008). Without proper adult



supervision or love available, girl children may look for attention in inappropriate places, thus affecting their self-discipline (Donald, et al., 2010).

One of the headmasters, HMM, had this to say about the learners' parents, namely

*...tinotsva kwese. Kuti tirege kuenda, vana vanofa nenzara. Kuenda Joni kunounza school fees, rent, nhumbi nechikafu.....* (they have no option but definitely need to get to Johannesburg and/or other neighbouring countries in order to work for food, school fees, rent and clothes).

Implicit to the above, findings from the focus group discussions and interviews with the girl learners indicated that the mobility of the parents was noted to be high, even within the country, in their search for jobs, school fees, money for rental, to pay the bills, to buy uniforms, and food for the children. This scenario seemed to be affecting the children's intellectual capabilities, and their emotional, social, physical, and moral development. This finding is in concurrence with the findings by Bowen and Bowen (2008:221) on poverty and its psychosocial effects on the development of the child. This reinforces Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory which also stressed the importance of the child's microsystem and mesosystem in his/her schooling. The children's microsystems will include any immediate relationships or organisations they interact with. How these groups or organisations interact with the child will have an impact on how the child grows; the more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to grow (Boyd & Bee, 2006; Cole, et al., 2009; Engle & Black, 2008). So, if conditions at home and at school are not conducive to learning, the learners' academic performance will be negatively affected. Donald, et al. (2010:40) indicated that the mesosystem is a set of microsystems that continuously interact with one another, so what happens in the family or peer group will influence how the child responds at school, and vice versa.

Changes of residence and the frequency of these moves were observed in this study to impact on family dynamics due to disruptions in social support. The girl children had to move with their parents, making dropping out of school a temporary or permanent procedure. The teachers established that school attendance was often irregular amongst children whose parents are very mobile; hence being transferred to a new school becomes the norm. This study also established

that moving often prevents the learners from developing consistency in their lives. This collaborates with the research done by Bee and Boyd (2007), and Bronfenbrenner, (2006; 2008) who indicated that mobility also compounds the difficulty these children have in making friends, who then manifest their problems by acting out, exhibiting aggression, depression, regressive behaviour, inattentiveness or anxiety. All these factors were observed to have a negative impact on the academic performance of the girl child.

The teachers interviewed reported that the girl children whose parents are very mobile often came to school with no records from their previous schools, and it may even be difficult to track the records. The teachers have no idea what these students have learned.

One teacher, TFM, said,

*Even if placement is successful, these children will most likely move again within the school year, making it difficult to teach them. They lose a lot of valuable teaching and contact time...*

TMU also indicated that,

*It is also challenging to help these students to learn at least something of value while they remain in their classes because of their high mobility. The mobile learners show all the signs of stress which hinder their academic performance. Stress makes the brain fail to assimilate and accommodate the taught and learnt information.*

In support of the above, two headmasters, HMM and HMU, indicated that those children who constantly change schools are at a disadvantage because they tend to miss valuable contact time as they move from one place to another, from one town to another, and from one school to another. This assumption was also reinforced and supported during the interviews when the headmasters discussed how many children are disadvantaged by the high mobility of the parents. The constant changing of schools by learners affects them in many ways, especially in respect of their academic performance. This reinforces the findings of Conger and Donnellan (2007), as well as Engle and Black (2008), who established that the frequent changing of schools by the learners is detrimental to their academic performance. It is therefore challenging for the schools to place these children in classes and to offer them the additional services they may need.

The sentiments of the girl children who were interviewed were narrated by G12M, who pointed out that,

*...it's difficult to make friends in the class because we always change schools. We also have problems in getting used to the teachers... Teachers do not like us; they have a negative attitude towards us. We have been called all sorts of names by the teachers as a result. The teachers do not give us extra tuition, even if we tell them that we did not cover the work at our previous school. We lag behind as a result ...*

This observation was reinforced and supported in the words of FGDU and FGDM. Based on Rogers' humanistic theory, there exists a need for teachers, headmasters and other learners to empathise with the girl children from poverty-stricken households who change schools regularly. The teachers should also accord the same girl learners unconditional positive regard in order to raise their self-esteem, their self-concept and confidence, in order to enhance their academic performance. The girl learners were observed to behave in a manner that was hostile, or they were totally withdrawn, due to previous attempts to make friends. With regard to both the academic and the social aspects of school, they may develop and *I do not care*-attitude. The teachers also mentioned that, whilst some children, due to poverty and high mobility end up dropping out of school, it should be noted that moving is a very emotional event for children. Combining this issue with the multitude of other issues faced by mobile and homeless children and the impact on their emotional, social and cognitive development can be overwhelming (Bronfenbrenner, 2008).

The school attendance of children whose parents are very mobile is often irregular. Being transferred to a new school becomes the norm. The findings from the interviews and focus group discussions revealed that mobility compounds the difficulty these children have in making friends, thus negatively affecting their academic performance.

#### 5.4.3.5 The parents' level of education

**Table 5.7: The parents' level of education**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Degree	0
Diploma	0
Advanced level	0
Ordinary level	4
Zimbabwe Junior Certificate	6
No formal education	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>

(Field data, 2013)

The table 5.7 summarises the parents' level of education.

This study also explored the parents' level of education to determine the extent to which their education has impacted on the girl child's schooling. The education level of the parents is noted to be of paramount importance, since it was indicated in this study to determine the nature of the jobs of the parents, the number of children they have, the family size, their socioeconomic status, their attitudes and general beliefs concerning the girls, and the income level of the family. The size of the family was also observed to have an effect on the child's education. Depending on the child's position in the family, and gender, this may have a positive or negative effect. The parents' levels of education have also been observed to have an impact on their children's schooling and their way of life. Some of the girl children in the study lived in child-headed households (CHH), and some with guardians, while others lived in single-parent households. This explains why only to twenty two (22) instead of thirty (30) parents were referred to in this section. In the fifteen (15) households studied, the girl children who were interviewed and who participated in the three focus group discussions revealed that their parents/guardians did not

have degrees, diplomas or advanced-level qualifications. Four (4) parents had done Ordinary level, six (6) had completed the Junior Certificate (Form 2), and the majority, namely twelve (12) did not have any formal education. Most of the parents did not have any opportunity of attending school.

The majority of the mothers did not receive any education. The mothers who had received some level of education were significantly in the minority; only two (2) mothers had been to school to ZJC. With reference to table 5.7, the level of education of the parents in the mining, rural and urban areas was generally low. This indicates that the majority of the adult population amongst these rural, urban and mining households are uneducated, hence the reason why most mining and urban mothers live in the rural areas, tilling the land, while the girl child is left to take the role of the mother, and start supervising the home prematurely. It is therefore essentially important that the teachers have an understanding of pupils' and parents' backgrounds in order for them to be able to adequately determine the best learning methods for the pupils, and how to include the parents in the children's education, as espoused by Bronfenbrenner (2008).

The parents' financial constraints and level of education were regarded as constituting a barrier to parental involvement in their children's education.

One teacher, TMR, said that,

*Most of the parents are too poor to pay their children's fees and levies on time...that is, if they pay at all. That is why they prefer not to set their foot in the school-yard. They are afraid that the school authorities will remind them of their children's school fees.*

The three headmasters echoed the same sentiments. This implies that some parents shunned the school because they were afraid of being asked about the money they owed the school. The financially constrained and uneducated parents were not meaningfully involved in their children's education. This observation reinforces the findings by Chindanya (2012) who established that parents who are better educated are more likely to send their children to school than those who have little or no education. This comment is also supported by Juma et al. (2012) whose study revealed that the educational experience of the parents is transmitted to their

offspring, and that educated parents with a high income are able to provide their children with a good home environment, as they are able to provide all the necessities of the school, and to pay extra tuition fees. Hereby they encourage the better performance of the girls, because they understand the value of education and its benefits for the child. The findings further concur with the findings in studies by Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2002), namely that the parents' level of education could play an important role in determining a child's intellectual performance and academic achievement. Research has shown that if the parents see that the education is of a poor quality, or if they do not think the education is relevant to their children, and then they would be unlikely to send their children to school (Bray, et al., 2010).

One parent remarked (informally interviewed),

*Ini handina kumboenda kuchikoro zvachose asi handina kumbofa. Nhasi uno ndinoshanda kumugodhi uko saka chinoshamisira pachikoro chii? Kana angokura otouya kumugodhi* (I am not educated but I did not die. Today, I am working in the mine, so what is so special about school? When my daughter grows up she will come to work at the mine).

It is argued that it is in the households where parents are better educated that education will be most valued, and hence the education rates overall will be higher.

The sentiments of the teachers and headmasters who were interviewed are summarised by what HMM said, namely

*...A lack of adult education is the most significant factor impeding school enrolment, participation and academic performance. The parents should have at least a minimum education to supervise the homework of their children to end the vicious cycle of poverty and failure among families.*

The literature confirms and illuminates these findings. Ganga and Chinyoka (2010) argue that parents with little education, in comparison to those with professional degrees, feel less able to assist their children with homework, are less able to communicate with teachers, and feel out of place at school. Research by Mayer (2007), and Chung, et al. (2009) suggest that the parents'

education, particularly the mother's, often has a significant impact on whether or not their children go to school, and subsequently how regularly the children attend school, and whether they drop out or retake. The findings that posit that the parents' level of education influences the academic achievement of the girls are consistent with Juma, et al.'s (2012). In support of the above, a teacher, TFR, indicated that some children view this lack of emotional support and guidance as more harmful than inadequate food. More research is called for, then, to ascertain the extent to which the parents' level of education and the lack of food affect the academic performance of the learners.

Measured against Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, parental school involvement is also beneficial, because families and schools establish appropriate behaviour that is reiterated to the children at home and at school (Bronfenbrenner, 2006, 2008). Conversely, the learners whose parents do not care about their school-work tend to perform poorly. It appears that children whose parents regularly communicate with their children, check their homework, and have high expectations for their children positively influence the learners' educational outcomes.

The study also established that issues like the supervision of homework were viewed by the teachers as beyond the educational capacity of uneducated parents, although this view is contestable, since uneducated parents can still do quite a lot in terms of the children's homework. Owing to their limited education, some parents thought that school-matters were best left to the teachers who were trained to deal with them, and who were also paid to do so. Zoppi (2006:16, as cited in Chindanya, 2012:188) affirmed that some parents think that their own lack of education precludes them from participating in their children's education.

As one school teacher, TMM put it,

*Poor, uneducated parents literally surrender their children to the school and expect the school to handle all matters relating to their children's learning.*

This observation was stressed by another teacher, TMR from a rural day school, who said,

*...uneducated parents cannot help children with their schooling simply because they have no capacity to do so. It's unfair to bother their parents with our homework because they don't know the stuff...*

The researcher and a number of teachers observed that the majority of the parents had problems supervising the homework, even at primary school level. The situation was even worse when they had to supervise the work of Form 2 learners. The need to capacitate parents so that they may meaningfully participate in their children's education is evident from these responses. Poor parents were constrained also by their limited education, as much as they would want to help. It was equally true that the parents with a higher educational level were better qualified than the less educated parents to help the children with homework (Mansfield, 2009:21, as cited in Chindanya, 2012:214).

Evaluated against Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, in order to understand the girl child's development and academic performance, it is critical to consider the influences of the microsystem, the exosystem, and the proximal processes. The parental level of education, behaviours such as warmth, communication style, control and discipline style, and both the parental as well as the child's temperament affect children's behaviour. Poor, uneducated mothers are more frequently depressed than well-to-do mothers (Pearson, 2010, Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Depressed mothers may be emotionally and physically unavailable to respond and attend to their children's needs. The lack of income may create psychological distress and poor coping abilities, leading to ineffective parenting practices. Some psychological and economic distress may impact on the quality and quantity of parent-child interaction as parents cope with poor living conditions.

This researcher has come to the conclusion that because the parents are often overstressed in trying to meet the daily needs of their families, the resulting depression and negativity often lead to insufficient nurturing, disengaged parenting, and difficulty in focusing on the needs of the children. The researcher observed that all of these challenges in poor communities, taken together with the impact of lower levels of parental education, result in the children having little or no assistance with homework, and less motivation to learn.



It should be noted that poverty and a low level of education among parents has been found in this study as a major barrier, which has blocked the way the parents perform their parental duties, giving their full attention. Furthermore, economic deprivation leads to depression and stress in the parents, and ultimately the dysfunction of the family. So, parental stress directly affects the children as well.

One teacher, TFR, said that,

*Low-income families tend to use authoritarian parenting styles that are based on parental control, rather than reciprocal, interactive styles that promote emotional development and social competence. Economically deprived parents struggle for the survival of their families. They are often unable to pay attention to the importance of parental care.*

FGDM established that the parents' involvement in the girl child's schooling had more effect on the child's academic success than did socioeconomic status. Thus, if the low-income parents of children want their children to succeed, they must get involved in their children's schooling. In support of the above, Trawick-Smith (2007, as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 2008) asserts that parents under the stress of poverty, may be less effective, more punitive, and less warm towards their children. Bray, et al. (2010) assert that parents who are poor are likely to be less healthy, both emotionally and physically, than those who are not poor. It was observed in this study that girls fail to try as a result of their parents' lack of encouragement; some even drop out of school as a result. Family poverty and the low parental level of education are, therefore, a hindrance in the optimal functioning of Form 2 learners in Masvingo.

Despite coming from poor backgrounds, some teachers noted that some girl students defied the odds and excelled in their academic performance. Other factors like resilience, inborn factors and family support and motivation come into play. Closely related to Bronfenbrenner's model, is Rutter's Pathway Model (Rutter, 2008:16), which endeavours to explain that children born in poverty can have self-righting tendencies, making them much more resilient to pressures of poverty. Because of the self-righting tendencies, some girl children end up believing that they are to remain poor, and so can be accustomed to poverty and live with it. There is therefore the need

for researchers explore the impact of resilience on the academic performance of girl learners from poor backgrounds.

#### **5.4.4 Theme 4: Premarital sex and early marriages**

The study established that early marriages are commonly found in the Mapanzure communal area, mining towns and urban areas. TFR, (a teacher from Mapanzure communal area) mentioned that some of the girls voluntarily entered into the marriage to escape poverty, while some were forced to do so under the (kuputsa or kuzvarira) tradition. *Kuputsa or kuzvarira* is a form of marriage where a young girl, sometimes as young as from birth is given to another family in exchange of either food or livestock. TMR and TFR said marrying off young girls was a tradition in some parts of Zimbabwe, especially those which are still backward and remote. People in rural areas perceive a girl child as a source of wealth and would readily give the girl away in marriage to raise funds for the boy child and the family. Research by Kapungu (2007) attests to the above.

Some of the girls interviewed mentioned that,

*...our parents arrange for marriages of their daughters to the people of their choice in our culture to get bride wealth and protect our virginity and purity. This have become very common in most rural and urban areas because of poverty, leading to early marriages and school dropouts among girls, as our parents prefer food, money and groceries from old men thus compromising the education of their children.*

This observation was also reinforced and supported in the interviews when the headmasters and teachers spoke of the experiences of children who engage in early pregnancies and premarital sex. Furthermore, participants in the three focus group discussions agreed with the above comment, saying that the parents believed that marriage was an effective tool for safeguarding the health of children and upholding the family honour. According to Mwilu (2010) in Hlupo and Tsikira (2012) in many African communities cultural provision is made for the parents to marry off their daughters when and to whom they chose (*kuzvarira* in Shona). Girls as young as twelve, thirteen or fourteen years have found themselves married off as the third, fourth or even fifth wives to polygamous men, who are old enough to be their grandfathers. It was established

that this practice also manifests itself in the relevant communities, though largely under a different banner. The peak of such marriages was during economic meltdown of 2008 in Zimbabwe. The major reason behind the continued practice was the parents' desire to cushion themselves during drought and economic turmoil. The other reason is grounded in some parents' belief that marrying off their daughters is a manner of ensuring their future security. Related to this is the fact that the parents are securing a guardian, not only for themselves, but also for the other children who, in many cases, are the siblings of the one being married off. This was observed to have a detrimental effect on the schooling and academic performance of girl learners at the three schools studied.

The practices of the early-age marriages of girls are continued, despite the legal stipulations for the age of marriage. After these marriages, it was observed in this study, the girls had to stop their education, because a woman has to care of her husband's family and her own children. In many families in the rural areas, two teachers confirmed, it was the tradition to marry the daughters off at a very young age. As soon as their daughters are sexually mature the parents arrange their marriages, so that the girls may not get trapped and get involved in so-called 'awful' practices, such as in free sexual relationships with someone, and then become pregnant. The early-age marriages of the girls are not only considered as a shield for the girl against male sexual attention, but also as the ultimate protection in the eyes of parents. Along with this, these practices are the one way to ensure that a girl or woman is 'protected', or placed firmly under male control; that she may be obedient to her husband, and work hard for her household. The parents may genuinely feel that their daughters will be in safer hands with a regular male guardian. Thus, early marriages are arranged in order to avoid the possible shame, which may be brought on herself by the girl involving herself in premarital sex with the school boys or teachers at school (Kachere, 2010).

These early marriages perpetuate the cycle of poverty because the girl child is denied education, the very thing that can break this cycle of poverty. Her marriage would yield children who would be subjected to the same cycle, as she would not be an educated parent who can understand the importance of education for her children. It therefore becomes a vicious circle of poverty.

One headmaster, HMR, confirmed that underage marriages were rife in his area, affecting the education of the girl children, and exposing them to HIV/AIDS at a tender age. According to Sachiti (2011), many child brides are not rescued from such marriages, and end up in nasty situations, like teenage motherhood, and the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. In line with this view, Mwilu (2010) cites the case of a thirteen year-old Yemeni girl who died from internal bleeding after intercourse with a sixty-five year-old man. This is a gory example of the vulnerability that young girls can be exposed to by 'forced' early marriages. Zimbabwe is no exception. Quite a number of deaths, associated with this vulnerability, are not reported. At the brunt of the suffering is the girl child. In terms of vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, this cannot be excused, as these wealthy men are not tested before taking in the young girls as wives. After all, the young girl would not have been sensitised on the essence of HIV testing. If she had at all, she would have been too weak to ask her husband to do so.

The young girl would have been literally thrown on the death bed. Although there is evidence in the Global Aids Response Progress Report (2012) to support the assumption that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe is on the decline, it is still a major concern in the wellbeing of the people. It was furthermore established that though the culture of silence surrounding sex may fade due to some sensitisation programmes, the plight of women and girl children was further exasperated because of economic dependence (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012). In the light of the above it may be stated that poverty reinforces harmful cultural practices, such as intergenerational sex and early marriages for girls, which are detrimental to their cognitive and intellectual development, as well as to their academic performance.

Recently released research by a former Senator, Sheila Mahere in Zimbabwe, indicated that early marriages are a social ill that threatens to derail the government's bid to fulfil its Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of increasing access to education, as girls continue to drop out of the already constrained education system (Global Aids Response Progress Report, 2012).

One headmaster, HMU, lamented that:

*Early marriages threaten national economic development, as bright and intelligent girls are forced out of school to become cheap labour and child bearers in their homesteads. Most of the girls become farm labourers on their husbands' farms.*

These sentiments were also echoed by the teachers interviewed in this study. The early marriages of the girls are therefore a barrier to their education. On the other hand, this study also established that some girls from poor backgrounds willingly enter into marriages with older men with the tacit approval of their parents.

One girl respondent G3U, explicitly said

*Taida chikafu, nhumbi dzekupfeka uye kuti vamwe vana vamai vake ava vaende kuchikoro.* (we needed food, clothes and money to send my siblings to school).

One of the girls interviewed said

*...kufara nemadhara ane mari kuri nani pakufa nenzara uye kutambura,* (it's better to be intimate with older men in order to get food, clothing and money than to experience a serious lack of basic commodities).

They continued to say that

*...vabereki vedu vanoti kurudzira kutsvaka mari nenzira dzose...*(our parents do not mind if we became intimate with older men and engage in prostitution as long as we bring money and food home).

These sentiments were also echoed and reinforced by the girls who participated in the three focus group discussions. This study also established that many girls perceive marriage as an escape route from family poverty, while the common cultural practice of charging bride wealth brings quick and substantial income to her family. The repercussions are too ghastly to contemplate on the part of the girl child because of the gross violation of her rights, as that forces her into circumstances she did not choose and is hardly ready for, psychologically and physically. According to Kachere (2010), these effects include disrupted childhood, trauma and difficult

child birth that in many cases result in death. Poverty is a curse under these circumstances. Kachere (2010) continues by citing the case of a 14 year-old girl from Chakari (a mining town in Zimbabwe) who was forced into two marriages by her parents. This girl is not alone in her plight, as the girl respondents in this study narrated a story of girls who had fallen prey to affluent polygamous men. This issue of marrying off young girls violates the Child Protection and Adoption Act. The most disturbing fact is that these violations go unreported because they are done in the guise of culture and religion. The girls are seen as important sources of income for their families. This means that marriage is given more priority than education by the parents from poverty-stricken households.

This study also established that *Chimutsamapfihwa* continues to be a flourishing cultural practice by means of which young girls may replace a dead sister in marriage. Marrying-off young girls is believed to appease the spirits, or to settle long-standing disputes between families. The girls are also being given to their living sister's or aunt's husband, when the aunt or sister fails to conceive. All this was observed to be more apparent in poor families in rural communities. The majority of the pupils indicated that in these cases pregnancy and marriage were a consequence of poverty and also the major reasons for girls being withdrawn from school. The study also established that girls from poor households may also be more likely to engage in sexual survival strategies to secure support for their schooling and that of the boys, risking pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and the curtailment of the education. This confirms Baden's (2008) findings that girls too, in some instances, may finance other children's education.

A study on child prostitution in Mozambique in 1994 and 1995, established that some girls were earning money through sex-work in order to pay for their own schooling, often with the approval of their parents (Baden, 2008). In many Asian countries the daughters' earnings are used to pay for the sons' education (Watkins, 2008: Baden, 2008). It should be noted that education is the right of every child everywhere, and key to transforming her life and her quality of life of the community. It should be realised that education promotes national development and social order. If the girl learners do not go to school, the rate of prostitution, theft, rape, and other forms of crime will more than likely increase.

The problem of early and unplanned pregnancy affects the girls almost exclusively because of the cultural practices which expect them, instead of the boys, to care for the unwanted/unplanned child. The unplanned pregnancy rates are of great concern because teen mothers and babies face increased risks to their health, especially in respect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Also, their opportunities to build a respectable future are diminished, according to a teacher from one of the schools. Thus, in this respect, parenthood is a leading cause of school drop-out among the girls.

The teachers and the headmasters interviewed were of the opinion that prior to 1996, a girl who fell pregnant at school in Zimbabwe faced expulsion, with no possibility of re-admission into the mainstream school system after giving birth. She could, however, further her education through the informal education system. According to the Secretary's Circular Minute no. 35 of October 1999, girl pregnancy at secondary school level was misconduct and a disciplinary issue, punishable by exclusion from school. However, the girl could regain entry elsewhere after giving birth. This caused the girl child to lag behind at school. Consequently the girl would suffer at home and at school, because the Zimbabwean culture is conservative with regard to pregnancy at school. It is not surprising that the Nziramasanga Commission (1999), which looked into the entire education system, discovered that a high percentage of drop-outs in the schools consisted of girls, and most of them due to pregnancy. The Commission expressed great concern about the ill-treatment the girl child was given by the school administration and the education authorities. Thus, in August 2010 the government of Zimbabwe amended the disciplinary code and granted the girls maternity leave of up to three months, instead of automatic exclusion for those who fell pregnant as a result of consensual sex.

From the aforementioned, it is seen that early marriages affect the girls' education. The girls are either taken out of school, or the opportunity to attend school is taken away from them. Early marriages inevitably deny girls of school-going age their rights to education, which is crucial for their personal development and their effective contribution to the future wellbeing of their families and societies. The lack of access to formal education means that these girls are also denied the needed technical know-how and professional skills that is a pre-requisite to their attaining jobs that can earn them a good living. The study also established that illiterate girls who are abandoned, widowed or divorced, or even who are victims of growing urban and rural

poverty are forced into commercialised versions of their work as wives, namely cleaning, cooking, and child- minding. They even stand the risk of entering into the commercial sex trade.

It is apparent from this study that early marriages, premarital sex and the practice of the girls marrying young is a violation of the children's basic rights to a safe childhood, education, good health, thus, perpetuating gender disparities among learners. Despite all the Conventions, for example the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Zimbabwean law does not even have any definition of what 'early marriage' means, hence the girls' plight is exacerbated.

#### **5.4.5 Theme 5: Sexual abuse/harassment**

The researcher established that the prevailing high unemployment rates in the three communities studied are bringing about adult labour migration, which often leads to the increasing phenomenon of households composed of children without parental guidance. It often happened that the children are left under the supervision of older children, or under the care of extended family members whose supervisory role was observed be limited. The views of the girls who participated in all three the focus group discussions views are presented by G2U, who shared that

*...Both sporadic and prolonged absence of parental guidance brought about by short business trips to South Africa, Botswana and other neighbouring countries lead to an increased risk of girl children dropping out of school to care for their younger siblings thus risking abuse from guardians, relatives, teachers and people in our community.*

In concurrence with the above, the teachers observed that the girls in the towns often became victims of sexual abuse by their guardians and close relatives, and subsequently fall pregnant. High cases of sexual abuse were also recorded in the rural and mining areas, where children were abused by relatives, and to a larger extent, by their guardians. The literature confirms and illuminates these findings. This corroborates the findings by Chabaya, et al. (2009), Connell (2010), Boyd and Bee (2006), Cole, et al. (2009), and Engle and Black (2008), who purport that adolescent sexual abuse and parenthood is higher among poor teenagers and girl children raised in poverty. Further, an increased likelihood of smoking, prostitution, teenage pregnancies, and illegal drug use is associated with poverty among girl children (Kapungu, 2007). Drug abuse was



also mentioned in the study by Kapungu (2007), yet the stipulation by the United Nations Convention indicates that, “States shall protect children from the illegal use of drugs and involvement in drug production and trafficking” (United Nations, 1989, in United Nations, 2012). Some children in this study complained of sexual abuse, although the United Nations (1989, in United Nations, 2012) state that it is expected from the states to protect children from physical or mental harm and neglect, including sexual abuse or exploitation.

Findings from the three focus groups and the interviews with the girls highlighted the fact that abusive behaviour towards girls by older male pupils and male teachers, and by adult men (sugar daddies) in the vicinity of the school, seeking sex in exchange for money or gifts, was common. In the three schools some of the teachers were noted to take advantage of these poor girl learners, thus asking for sexual favours from vulnerable girls. In return, in some instances, the girls were given book covers, pens, pencils, exercise books, and favours in class. Furthermore, a number of the headmasters and teachers were of the opinion that some girls engaged in child prostitution, particularly with truck drivers along the Harare-Beitbridge highway, mainly at business centres.

HMU said that:

*Some girls are prioritising money instead of thinking of the future. We see, hear and read of school girls who are having relationships with commuter omnibus crews in exchange for free rides. Love of money is too much among these girl learners hence I feel they also invite abuse from men.*

Additionally, the teachers interviewed also concurred with the interviewed girls’ experiences. The girls who participated in the three focus group discussions refuted the above claims, saying that men, especially teachers, senior boys at school, sometimes headmasters, and rich people in their communities took advantage of their desperation for food, money, and other basic needs. The teachers pointed out that some girls were seen to be more at risk of engaging in various forms of abuse, alcoholism, and sexual encounters. About 33% of the girls smoked, and took drugs. They abused drugs and smoked as defence mechanisms to help them cope with poverty-related problems. This implies that poverty has drained *unhu/ubuntu* among the poor Zimbabwean girls.

A teacher from the mining school, TMM, expressed the view that,

*The economic hardships experienced by the girl learners from poverty stricken families and the economic meltdown have created the dog-eat-dog state of affair, thus directly and indirectly causing learning barriers among girl children.*

This statement brings to mind the recent press reports of the defunct Shabanie and Mashaba mine workers who were hiring out their wives and daughters in prostitution because of the economic situation (Sachiti, 2011). Educators can use Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to assess problems in a girl child's life and aid her with rebalancing with her environment (Cole et al., 2009; Engle & Black, 2008). The three focus group discussions and interviews with the teachers established that girls who live in poverty are more at risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV infection.

One teacher, TFM, said

*...girls from ages the ages of 13 to 16 years are three to four times more likely to have an STD than a male of the same age.*

Furthermore, a headmaster asserted that girls who live in poverty are more at risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV infection because of their promiscuity, and need for money and other luxuries. In line with the above argument, UNICEF, (2010) posits that comparisons of the heterosexual AIDS rate for 15 year old men and women show the rate for young women is more than ten times higher than the rate for young men. The study established that the abused child is affected in many ways, such as a low self-esteem, and a desire for unconditional acceptance. It was also observed in this study that many of the children who experience some form of abuse carry with them the negative and permanent consequences which affect their academic performance.

This research established that sexually-abused children felt angry, dirty, and betrayed by adults who are meant to protect them. They also felt rejected, since no one believed them when they tried to speak out. They developed fear, since the abuser might have threatened them, and they feared that the abuse may continue. Some interviews with girl learners revealed that the sexually-abused child had mixed emotions, namely love and hate for the perpetrator, who might be a

trusted adult. The teachers also observed a sudden change in the behaviour of children involved in commercial sex, early sexual activity or sexual abuse. Some of the girl children were observed to develop guilt feelings and anger. They also felt dirty and unloved, and they developed self-blame. At school the children also tended to become shy, withdrawn, reserved, and insecure and the ones who were normally shy and quiet would become aggressive, and would go looking for trouble with adults or the other children. They became depressed and started avoiding other people. They would also experience isolation, have few contacts with friends, and engage in few social activities. A low self-concept develops as a result, which may negatively affect their academic performance. Some children feel that they are worthless, and they begin to act out behaviours that confirm their worthlessness. This observation is in line with a research by Chinyoka and Ganga (2011), who found that children who develop a negative self-concept experience some form of distress, causing them to perform poorly at school.

Research done by Ganga and Chinyoka (2010) also revealed that when a girl is abused, she normally does not develop a high self-esteem, and craves attention to gain acceptance. Often the affection is found with someone, who will then abuse her all over again. These children were observed to have trouble socialising, and are often not accepted into groups. Observations made by the teachers and the researcher confirm that children from low socio-economic backgrounds have poor listening and concentration spans, thus negatively affecting their academic performance.

The implication of the observations is that girls affected by poverty are often highly vulnerable to HIV-infection. Their risk for infection arises from the early onset of sexual activity, commercial sex, and sexual abuse, all of which are precipitated by economic need, peer pressure, and drug abuse. This research found that girl children from poor backgrounds tend to do little to protect themselves from HIV-infection. The pressure for survival, by means of meeting their basic needs, tends to outweigh their future-orientation required to avoid infection.

However, the school teachers interviewed in the three schools revealed that in many instances there was no evidence to substantiate accusations of abuse, mainly due to the absence of willing witnesses. The culprits do not usually write letters to the girls or the parents. Also, they may enter into a private agreement with a teacher for recompense. The second major difficulty in

dealing with sexual abuse cases in schools is that the lack of clear guidelines on what constitutes ‘improper association’ leaves room for different and inconsistent interpretations of the concept and the application of disciplinary measures. The school heads interviewed called for more explicit guidelines which deal with sexual abuse in schools, rather than the current reliance on instruments (school policies) relating to sexual offences in general, and vague definitions of ‘improper association’.

#### **5.4.6 Theme 6: Stigmatisation and stereotyping**

The teachers interviewed in the three secondary schools indicated that girls continued to be seen as the weaker sexes, who are unable to cope with the intricacies and gruelling demands of learning, especially of Mathematics and the Sciences. They continued to say that the girl children lacked self-motivation, and that they are naturally lazy. Some blamed poverty for their poor academic performances. They were also overburdened by household chores. Most of them are shunned due to their outward appearances; hence they rarely take part in classroom and sport activities, according to three teachers who were interviewed. All the teachers agreed that girl children from poor families are labelled as slow learners who do not have any hope of succeeding in their learning. Five out of the six teachers said that poor girl children came to school with their books not covered; they did not do their homework, looked tired in class, always came to school late, did not participate in class, and had a negative attitude in respect of their schoolwork. The researcher observed that some of the sentiments raised by the teachers showed that poor girl children were looked down on, and that the teachers had a negative attitude towards them. Thus the teachers were observed to underrate them, and mostly lacked an interest in them. The three headmasters shared the same sentiments. The researcher concluded that they still held on to the patriarchal views of believing that boys are better than girls in all respects.

On the other hand, the girls who were interviewed and who participated in the three focus group discussions totally dismissed the above assumption as mere speculations by the male teachers who did not appreciate specific issues surrounding girl learners from poor backgrounds. In the interviews with the headmasters and some teachers it was also established that the girls themselves felt they did not have the intellectual ability to perform on the same level as boys.

Based on the above findings, it would be reasonable to conclude that some girls are their own enemies as they look down on themselves. This was observed to have a negative impact on their academic performance.

The stereotype becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy where ultimately in tests and examinations, the girls do not perform as well as their male counterparts. Chabaya, et al. (2009) remarked that the school, intentionally and sometimes out of ignorance or omission, marginalises girls and their performance. Snowman and Biehler (2011) asserted that one crucial Rogerian assumption is that positive regard or loving warmth is a fundamental human need. An individual's self-actualising tendency can be thrown out of order when positive regard is withdrawn. Hayes (2008) views positive regard as love, attention, and respect that comes from significant others and those in authority. According to Rogers (in O'Neil, 2011), individuals naturally value positive regard. Positive self-regard is self-esteem and a positive self-image, that show the value which the individual attaches to him- or herself.

In this study, Rogers' unconditional positive regard implies that the teachers should accept their learners as they are, whether boys or girls, and irrespective of their socioeconomic backgrounds (Santrock, 2009). This reflects the need to accept pupils unconditionally. Girl students need to be listened to genuinely when they bring concerns. Empathy also helps the teacher to understand the areas where pupils need help to develop into fully-functioning human beings. The argument is that teachers tend to create self-doubt and sustain it among girls regarding their performance by not providing them with enough attention and support in the classrooms. A girl who participated in the FGDU mentioned that

*...teachers tend to favour children from well to do families because they are representable, healthy, supportive, and bring learning resources to school. We also experience peer rejection, an inferiority complex and conflicting peer relations than those from a high SES.*

This corroborates the findings from the interviews with the girl learners and the observations made by the teachers and the researcher. The teachers are, therefore instrumental in shaping the

self-concepts of the learners. They need to be genuine, warm, and loving, and empathise with their learners to help them self-actualise, as purported by Rogers (as cited in Berk, 2007). The researcher established that high levels of academic failure were recorded among girls in the three schools studied because of their diminished self-confidence, due to stereotyping and labelling. The negative stereotypes that existed initially in their environment ultimately become internalised into their repertoire of meaning-making, to the extent that they behave and perform as expected. Thus, research has even claimed that the cognitive abilities of girls are genetically and inherently inferior (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, 2003). A thorough investigation is necessary to explain how girls across different contexts tend to consistently under-perform, and ultimately leave school early if the 'biological inferiority' thesis referred to above is inadequate. An alternative explanation for the underperformance of girls emanates from research that blames public schooling for this phenomenon.

During interviews, thirteen girls confirmed that they did not receive extra tuition from their teachers, since the teachers are not motivated, due to a lack of incentives and low remuneration. Four teachers said that schools had become examination-oriented; hence they did not have time for lagging poor girl children. The three headmasters confirmed and supported the view that teachers had a negative attitude towards learners from poor backgrounds. In the three schools studied, the researcher observed that the resources (textbooks and exercise books) were given to the advantaged children from affluent backgrounds, while those girl learners from poor families are sponsored for failure. The researcher also observed that girl children from poverty-stricken households usually felt stigmatised and had an inferiority complex, thus affecting their participation in class and their academic performance.

Some girl participants expressed the same sentiments as those expressed by G3U below, namely

*...living in poverty involves being stigmatised and marginalised, stereotyped negatively, and excluded by the teachers and other students from affluent backgrounds. Maticha anotionera pasi, havatifariri, vanoda vane zvinhu ( teachers look down on us, they do not care about our welfare; they always prefer learners from affluent backgrounds).*

In support of the above, the girl learners who participated in the three focus group discussions also established that stigmatisation and discrimination were mostly practiced at school (by teachers, headmasters and other learners) and at home (by parents and other siblings) as they narrated the treatment they got from their teachers for not paying their school fees on time.

They said,

*... They used to call us names and told us to pack our books and leave the classroom, amidst laughter from our fellow peers. Vanondipa zita rokuti vaya vanodzidza mahara* (they called us names, namely those who want to learn for free)

Such stereotypes conflicted with the girls' own sense of self, which included positive aspects of their friendship and family networks, as espoused by Bronfenbrenner. The girl learners felt resentful at being looked down on. Not many studies have specifically examined girl children's stereotypes and prejudices. The limited research in this area suggests that children have prejudices about wealth and poverty from an early age, and hold antagonistic attitudes towards socioeconomic groups they see as different (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012; Mahlomaholo, 2010). This has led the Minister of Education to declare it illegal for a school to dismiss pupils from school for the non-payment of fees. It was considered not fair to turn away a child when it is the parents' responsibility to pay the fees. The school is supposed to follow legal channels in recovering the fees while the child is still at school, because once he or she has been allowed, it is illegal to dismiss him or her, as this may cause untold embarrassment.

From the above analysis it seems that the poor girl children are viewed as inferior, even less than human, to a certain extent, consigned to a 'them' or 'out-group' status, and then treated accordingly (Lott, 2002). As a consequence, the poor girl children may experience feelings of shame and embarrassment, and have trouble viewing themselves in a positive light (Rogers, in Chauhan, 2010). The girl child is said to be a fully-functioning organism when her attempts to self-actualise are not being interfered with.

The self-esteem suffers when there is a big difference between one's ideal self and self-image. Anxiety and defensiveness are common when the self-image does not match with the true self

(Schultz, 2009). While conditional positive regard results in incongruence, leading to denial, frustration and maladjusted behaviour, unconditional positive regard leads to self-actualisation. The person becomes the real self. When the girl learner receives unconditional positive regard it means that she is accepted as she is with her specific needs, which are not measured against others' (Santrock, 2009). Educators who are aware of Rogers' concept of conditions of worth, which postulates that people may deny their true selves for the sake of being approved by others, will encourage girl pupils to believe in themselves. They will be encouraged to appreciate their individual differences and to note that others will ultimately accept them if they first establish sound self-images.

Alternatively, 15% of the children interviewed indicated that poverty can become a source of motivation to succeed. One student mentioned that there were many children seemingly from poor families who have achieved academically. Four (4) of the girl learners, two from a rural school, G10R and G8R, and also G1U and G3U from an urban secondary school, were noted to excel in their studies despite labelling, stigmatisation, and coming from poor backgrounds. The teachers interviewed concluded that they developed resilience, and self-efficacy, and benefited from the support from parents, neighbours, and their peers. This confirms Bronfenbrenner's (2008) view that the education of a learner is affected by a myriad of factors, including the child's microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. Bernard (2012) concluded that resilient children have high expectations, have a meaning in life, goals and inter-personal problem-solving skills. All of these factors work together to prevent the debilitating behaviour that is associated with learned helplessness.

Poverty may affect the emotional well-being and sense of identity of some girl children, with them feeling stereotyped by others and stigmatised. Strong and supportive relationships with the family and friends act as a buffer for the children against the impacts of poverty, while those children without such relationships appear the most depressed and pessimistic (Bronfenbrenner, 2008).



#### 5.4.7 Theme 7: The location of the school, travelling time, and safety issues

The interviews and the focus group discussions revealed that the distance between the home and the school often affects school enrolment, retention, completion of school and academic performance.

Table 5.8 summarises the distance to school per girl respondent.

**Table 5.8: Distance to school per girl respondent**

<b>Respondent (s)</b>	<b>Distance to school (KM)</b>
G1U	2
G2U	7
G3U	0,5
G4U	3
G5U	8
G6R	10
G7R	7
G8R	3
G9R	8
G10R	7
G11M	6
G12M	2
G13M	1
G14M	9
G15M	5

(Field data, 2013).

Table 5.8 above indicates that the girl informants, G13M and G3U, representing two girls, walk 0.5 to 1 kilometre from their homes to school daily. G1U, G12M, G4U and G8R, representing four girls, walk 2 to 3 kilometres from their homes to school daily, while G15M, G11M, G10R, G7R and G2U, representing five girls, walk 5 to 7 kilometres from their homes to the school. Respondents G5U, G9R and G14M walk 8 to 9 kilometres to school, while G6R only walks 10 kilometres to school. This data shows that most of the schoolgirls walk at least 0.5 to 10 kilometres from their respective homes to school. It should be noted that only the one way distance to school has been shown, the implication is that the girls walk double the distance

shown per day to and from school. Since the parents were poor, seven (7) out of ten (10) children from the mining and urban areas could not afford transport fees. The situation was even worse in the rural areas where all five (5) the families could not afford transport fees, and there was no provision for transport in the rural areas.

Of the children interviewed and who participated in the focus group discussions the majority stated that they had to travel very long distances to get to school. Although this statement is impossible to quantify, it does demonstrate that for many children getting to school is considered an issue. This corroborates with findings by Mufanechiya, et al. (2012), Watkins (2008), and Baden (2008). The teachers revealed that some children travelled between 30 minutes to two (2) hours to reach school. It was observed that the largest numbers of children did not attend school regularly as a result. So, it may be said that the further the distance from school a household is, the higher the proportion of households where children do not regularly attend school.

As shown in table 5.8, some secondary school children walk long distances of up to 10km. The distance doubles for the to and fro journey.

A teacher, TMR, pointed out that:

*...children who walk long distances to school arrive late, hungry and tired, all of which deplete their concentration, retention, attention, motor reproduction and motivation. When they walk back home, they have limited time to do their homework.*

The headmasters HMM, HMU and HMR, and all the teachers also established that tired and hungry girls demonstrated the following traits in class which impeded their learning, thus negatively affecting their academic performance:

*Always half asleep during lessons, frequently asking to go to the toilet, displaying signs of stress and anxiety, attention- deficit problems, quickly forget/short memory, displaying moody tendencies, high absenteeism, lazy and lethargic.*

All these factors negatively influence their performance at school. According to Santrock (2009) the children who often develop such traits tend to underperform in class because of a negative

self-concept and high levels of anxiety thus affecting their attention, retention, motor reproduction and their motivation to learn. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory has been proven beneficial in providing insight into all the factors that play a role in the psychosocial growth of a child. It shows how all the factors are intertwined and impact on the child's development cycle. This model provided the ability to see how the girl children's lives are balanced between every aspect of their environment.

The consequence of the above is that these children end up dropping out of school, repeating the form, and demonstrating disciplinary problems. Some girls sought accommodation closer to their schools in order to continue with their schooling. In order to pay for their rent, some of them said they resorted to sex. The girls, however, considered lodging away from home a risky endeavour.

Due to the nature of the girls' work at home, which they had to do before going to school, the distance to school caused most of them a lot of problems. The far distance prevented the parents from sending all their children to school. Therefore, in most cases, the distance impeded enrolment, especially of the girl child. Issues of the safety and security of the schoolgirls were concerns for the parents, and they were less likely to allow their daughters to attend school if they had to travel long distances.

A girl informant, G7R, had this to say about the distance to school, namely

*I live very far, about 9km from the school; it takes more than two hours on foot to attend school every day. This makes me late for school, and tired, and I cannot concentrate in the classroom.*

Similarly, a teacher informant, TMU, noted that

*Since schools are located far away between towns, and since children have to walk these distances, girls are weak when compared to boys to survive these long distances.*

In the light of the above, most girls' attendance of lessons was observed to be erratic. This is in line with the results of studies by Mufanechiya, et al. (2012), Boyd and Bee (2006), Cole, et al., (2009), and Engle and Black (2008). It should be noted that the parents were not comfortable

with sending their daughters far away to school, since most schools are far from where they live. This was observed to increase the likelihood of non-enrolment or non-attendance, and dropping out after enrolment. Therefore the long distances to school were a concern for the schoolgirls, and for their parents. This could then be considered to be one of the many obstacles in respect of the girls' enrolment and completion of school.

This study also established that in some instances the girls stayed with members of their extended family, some of whom had offered them accommodation or money in exchange for sex, until they were old enough to walk the distance. To some extent the schools have therefore become high-risk sites for HIV-infection. The girls who attended the urban school were also accosted by older men as they travelled to and from the school, at bus stops, and in the market place. This observation reinforces the findings in the studies by Mufanechiya, et al. (2012), namely that the girls found it difficult and sometimes unsafe to travel long distances to attend school. For poor households in the rural, mining and urban areas these safety concerns may be increased, due to the fact that the children from the poorest households are often the furthest from the schools, specifically secondary schools. The girls found it dangerous and sometimes unsafe to travel long distances to attend school, therefore a lot more has to be done to facilitate access to schooling for as many girl learners as possible. More affluent people in the urban settings are often better located to gain access to schools, as there are sometimes few schools in the poorest rural areas of Zimbabwe.

While some learners in this study complained about travelling long distances to school, over 50% of the girl learners did not consider it an issue. The learners were observed to show a lot of resilience. More research needs to be done on this issue to ascertain the extent to which long distances to school affect academic performance.

Lastly, the other factors that precipitated against good results identified in all the three schools include personal attributes, problems that the learners created for themselves, and external problems. These were noted by this researcher as difficulties beyond the control of the children. It was mainly school teachers and headmasters who cited personal attributes as the key causes of the learners' poor results. They mentioned the lack of ability, being playful, not concentrating in

class, disobedience to school authorities, and committing to intimate love relationships that could result in early pregnancy.

## **5.5 Summary**

This chapter presented evidence to answer the question on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child, in Zimbabwe. The study examined and evaluated the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe and suggested sound educational policies, measures and solutions to minimise the consequences caused by poverty on the academic performance of the girl child.

The analysis of the empirical data yielded seven themes, financial resource constraints, the lack of nutrition and health issues, the home/neighbourhood and school conditions, premarital sex and early marriages, sexual abuse/harassment, stereotyping and stigmatisation, and the location of the school and travelling time.

The next chapter gives the summary, conclusions and recommendations in relation to the results, and will aim to answer the main research question as well as the sub-questions. Recommendations for further studies will also be proposed.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This concluding chapter will establish whether the data collected shed light on the research problem, and answered the sub-questions indicated in chapter one. A summary of findings on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child will also be highlighted. It is confirmed in this chapter that the research problem has been addressed and the research aims achieved. The chapter also focuses on the conclusions drawn from the theoretical framework, the literature reviewed, the methodology and the qualitative data presented and discussed in chapter five. Thereafter, the recommendations which emanate from these findings will be made for future studies on poverty and the academic performance of girl learners. The recommendations would assist the government, NGOs, teachers, parents, girl children, religious, and cultural leaders, and all interested parties to make informed decisions when dealing with girl children from poverty-stricken households with the aim of enhancing their academic performance. Matters requiring further research are also included.

#### **6.2 Summary**

This study explored the effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

The researcher will discuss brief summaries of the five chapters of this research, drawing out salient issues that were of significance in the study. Thus, the summary will highlight the synopsis of the study.

##### **6.2.1 Chapter one**

This chapter presented the context of the problem, focusing on the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions and the significance of the study. The assumptions of the study were also outlined. The chapter highlighted and expounded on the

definitions of the operational terms which featured prominently in this study. The chapter established that poverty has, and will continue to precipitate enormous suffering for countless children in Zimbabwe, because of drought, land reforms, and political and economic sanctions levelled against Zimbabwe by the Western countries, thus adversely affecting children's health, intellectual capabilities, academic achievements, emotional, physical, moral, behavioural, and social development (Moyo & Yeros, 2007:104). The background to the study also established that even though the Zimbabwe Millennium Development Goal no. 1 aims to eradicate poverty and hunger by 2015, a number of girl children continue to be faced with many psychosocial challenges that are somehow perpetuated by the rising Total Consumption Poverty Line (TCPL) or Poverty Datum Line, for most people in Zimbabwe. The research aims to close the gap between the boy child and the girl child in relation to academic performance.

### **6.2.2 Chapter 2**

In chapter two (2) the theoretical framework which informed this study was outlined. The study was informed mainly by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the humanistic perspective. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory suggests that a person's surroundings, including his/her home, school, workplace, church, neighbourhood, culture and government, all have an influence on the way the child develops (Witt, 2012; Donald, et al., 2010:38; Berk, 2007). Bronfenbrenner (2008) suggested that the development of the individual is a culmination of many direct and indirect influences, which either facilitate or impede individual's potential, and consisting of five nested structures, namely microsystems, the mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. This theory has provided the ability to see how the girl children's lives are balanced between every aspect of their environment. Educators can therefore use this model to assess problems in a girl child's life and aid in the rebalancing with her environment.

The humanist school of thought also informed this study, especially the contributions of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Basically, humanists believe in the goodness of the individual, his/her ability to make choices and purposefully work towards being the best he/she can be (being a fully-functioning individual, or self-actualisation). The key concepts underlying Rogers' theory discussed in chapter two are unconditional positive regard, empathy,

congruency/genuineness, freedom of expression, and self-concept. These are necessary and sufficient conditions for the promotion of the learning of girl children from poverty-stricken backgrounds.

On the other hand, Maslow proposed a theory of needs based on a hierarchical model, with the basic needs at the bottom and the higher needs at the top (the physiological, safety, love, esteem, cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualisation, and transcendence needs). The central point in Maslow's theory, as noted in this research, is that people tend to satisfy their needs systematically, starting with the basic physiological needs and moving up the hierarchy. He believed that the higher level needs can only be attended to if the lower-order needs have been satisfied first, hence, a hungry child is not likely to be motivated to self-actualise until his or her hunger is at least partially satisfied.

### **6.2.3 Chapter 3**

The chapter on the literature review (chapter three) explored the literature on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child. A number of authorities and research studies were consulted to explore these psychosocial effects on children in Zimbabwe and the world over, thus establishing the relationship between poverty and academic achievement among girl children.

The negative effects of poverty on children's development has been examined by numerous researchers over the past years (e.g. Ben-Chendo, 2012; Cameron, 2012; United Nations, 2012; Chireshe, et al., 2010; the World Bank, 2012; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 2007; Saito, 2011; Chitiga, & Chinoona, 2011; Kaba & Musonda, 2011; Jensen, 2007; McLoyd, 2008; Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011; Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010; Donald, et al., 2010; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; and Connell, 2010). Poverty is associated with higher rates of academic failure or grade retention (Stevenson, 2012; Cameron, 2012; Okeke, et al., 2012; Kaba & Musonda, 2011), and higher incidences of school drop-out (Connell, 2010; Brantlinger, 2011). Adolescent parenthood is higher among poor teenagers (Chabaya, et al., 2009), and children raised in poverty have poorer employment records as adults than children from well-to-do families (Abebe, 2009:41). Furthermore, an increased likelihood of smoking, prostitution, teenage pregnancies, and illegal



drug use is associated with poverty among girl children (Kapungu, 2007:9). More research is, however, essential for educators charged with making informed decisions on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.

#### **6.2.4 Chapter 4**

This chapter discussed the research approach, the research design, the population, the sample, sampling techniques, the instruments used to collect the data in this research, and the data analysis procedures. The qualitative phenomenological design was adopted for use in this study because of its flexibility; it is good at surfacing deep issues, and making voices heard (Maxwell, 2006) and was thus found suitable to explore the effects of poverty on the academic performance of girl children in Zimbabwe.

The study was carried out in three secondary schools in Masvingo district, one in a rural, one in an urban, and the other in a mining area. The target population comprised of learners doing Form 2, three headmasters and also twenty four teachers teaching the pupils nine different subjects. The total number of learners doing Form 2 is one hundred and seventy (170). The target population was therefore one hundred and ninety seven (197). A sample of fifteen (15) girls, five (5) from each school, three (3) headmasters, one (1) from each school and six (6) teachers, two (2) from each school was drawn.

The data were collected by means of three focus group discussions, observations and interviews. During the interviews and the focus group discussions, non-verbal responses were observed and noted, many questions were asked, aided recall questions were allowed, and follow-ups and probing questions were asked for elaboration or in order to seek clarification. In addition, the researcher explained or rephrased the questions if the respondents were unclear about them. Observations were valuable in counter-checking and verifying the information collected by means of the interviews and the focus group discussions (Strauss & Corbin, 2010; Creswell, 2010).

In order to make sense of the collected data, the researcher applied Tesch's open coding method of data analysis to identify themes and categories (as shown in figure 4.5). This identification of themes provided depth to the insights about understanding the individual views of the girls,

headmasters and teachers. The analysis of the data, and the presentation and discussion were in the form of detailed descriptions, using narrative vignettes and direct quotes from the interviews and focus group discussions.

Strategies were applied to counteract validity threats. To eliminate researcher bias, a strategy of triangulation was applied. The researcher triangulated the data by using a literature study, a theoretical framework, and focus-group interviews. Information was obtained from the individuals in their respective focus groups and settings, using different sources, cross-checking, and verifying the sources of information (Conrad & Serlin, 2012:380). Furthermore, a strategy of 'member-checks' was used to overcome the threat of misinterpretation of the data. The participants' responses in the interview and the tentative interpretations thereof were taken back to them for confirmation of their thoughts and views, in order to make the results plausible (Holloway, 2011; Mitchell, 2012).

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the Masvingo Provincial Education Office, the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture, Zimbabwe, as well as from the headmasters of the selected schools. Further permission was sought from the University of South Africa, College of Education, and Ethics Committee, from the parents of the selected girl learners, the teachers and the girl children. The participants were assured of their anonymity in the research report. They signed consent forms and were informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary.

### **6.2.5 Chapter 5**

The findings and discussions were done in line with the research questions. The analysis of the empirical data yielded seven themes, namely financial resource constraints, the lack of nutrition and health issues, home/neighbourhood and school conditions, premarital sex and early marriages, sexual abuse/harassment, stereotyping and stigmatisation, and school location and travelling time. Sub-headings representing the themes/categories that emerged as the main or repetitive themes were used to facilitate the presentation and discussion of the findings.

In chapter 5 the results and findings were discussed in relation to the literature that was reviewed and the theoretical framework which informed the study (Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the humanistic perspective, ideas brought forward by Rogers and Maslow). The data

were divided into seven main themes, which were further divided into categories and sub-categories. The participants and the data were also coded.

### **6.3 Synthesis of the findings**

#### **6.3.1 Financial constraints**

The study revealed that the monetary costs of schooling led to drop-out among girl learners in the rural, mining and urban schools studied. The results from both the interviews and the focus group discussions established that the direct and indirect costs of education acted as major barriers to accessing secondary education for the girls in the three schools studied, since the parents saw investing in a girl's education as not worthwhile, as they expected the daughters to leave the house upon marriage. This assumption was reinforced and supported in research that confirmed that females in developing countries typically receive less education than their male counterparts (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012; UNICEF, 2010; Manwa, et al., 2010:147). Williams, et al. (2010:14) indicated that high education costs have seen the male child getting preference above the girl child to continue with his education. In many cases people argued that the girl child would get married, and that the boy child will need to support his family, hence the family always strives for him to get a career. Primitive as this may sound, a number of girls still face this dilemma in Zimbabwe and in most African countries. Gender disparities intensify in secondary education, as cultural attitudes reinforce the norm that girls do not need further education after primary school.

The study also established that the girls' schooling was affected by financial costs that include not only school fees, but also other indirect costs, such as the cost of transport, food, writing paper, textbooks, pens, school uniforms, and sanitary pads. The majority of the girl children who reached puberty lacked sanitary pads since they are expensive, and were noted to be beyond the reach of many girls. As a result, it was revealed in this study, they used tissue paper, newspapers, and plastic papers, papers from exercise books, leaves, and rags during menstruation. These made the girls feel uncomfortable throughout their menstruation period, leading to poor concentration in class, absconding from lessons, and in some instances, missing lessons. This observation was in line with findings by Burrows and Maunder (2004: 14).

There was also no privacy in the toilets at the three schools, making it very difficult to attend school when menstruating. The girls also faced humiliation when they spoiled their clothes. Findings from the interviews and the three focus group discussions revealed that many girls experienced abdominal pains during menstruation (*jeko*) and menstrual discomfort, back pains, swelling, cramping, mood swings, and itching, but had no money to buy medicine to relieve the pain. Drugs were also noted to be beyond the financial reach of many girls, thus worsening their academic plight. It was clear from the findings that the girls in the mining, urban and rural secondary schools were not supported psychologically and materially by their parents, thus affecting their academic performance in so many ways.

### **6.3.2 Stigmatisation and stereotyping**

This study also established that on the teaching side, the lack of motivation amongst teachers affected their teaching quality; low pay, poor benefits and working conditions caused the teachers to lack motivation. This was particularly relevant in the rural areas and poor urban schools. Because of poor remuneration, the study established that many of the teachers (especially Science and Maths teachers) have migrated to neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Mozambique in search of greener pastures. This was observed to affect both the boys and the girls in the three secondary schools studied. Highly qualified and experienced teachers were seen to avoid poor schools because of the greater difficulty of teaching poor children. This corroborates with findings made by Obure, et al. (2009) and Masitsa (2006).

On the other hand, it was observed in this study that poor children attended poor schools, which were poorly endowed with resources, and they were taught by demotivated and negatively-labelled teachers. The teachers also had a negative attitude towards the learners from poor backgrounds, thus exacerbating their plight. In the light of the above, living in poverty involves being stigmatised, marginalised, and stereotyped negatively (Cozzarelli, et al., 2001:220), and excluded (Lott, 2002:105). In essence, the poor girl children are viewed largely as inferior (even less than human, to a certain extent), consigned to a ‘them’ or ‘out-group’ status, and treated accordingly (Lott, 2002:107). As a consequence, poor girl children may experience feelings of shame and embarrassment, and have trouble viewing themselves in a positive light (Chinyoka,

2011:88). This study established that the teachers of low-income learners tend to perceive such pupils less positively, have lower achievement expectations from them, provide them with less positive attention and fewer learning opportunities, as well as less positive reinforcement, for instance for good performance. Because of the teachers' attitudes towards the girl learners from poor backgrounds, they develop a negative attitude towards school and perform poorly as a result.

The researcher also established by means of this research that high levels of academic failure were recorded among girls in the three schools because of diminished self-confidence, due to the stereotyping and labelling of the poor girl child. The negative stereotypes that existed initially in their environment ultimately became internalised into their repertoire of meaning-making, to the extent that they behaved and performed as expected. Thus the girl learners became frustrated, demotivated, and demoralised leading to poor academic performance.

### **6.3.3 Poor nutrition and health issues**

The girl respondents stressed the fact that their lack of nutritious food triggered an array of health problems, many of which could become chronic. The greater incidence of health issues among lower-income learners led to increased absences from school, grade repetition, school drop-out, tardiness, incidences of illness at school, and high rates of undiagnosed and/or untreated health problems or disabilities. Many of the respondents narrated that the lack of food and basic meals was a contributing factor in them dropping out of school. The majority of the children in the three schools ate nothing at all for breakfast, and all the time when they were at school. This was noted to have a negative effect on the children's listening span, caused attention deficiencies, poor retention, motor reproduction, concentration problems, and difficulties in respect of school attendance, motivation, and academic performance. In support of the above, Stevens, et al. (2012), Ignowski, (2012), Bolger, et al. (2005:1120), and Costello, et al. (2003:2026) together with Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (2007:12) indicated that a vicious cycle of poverty can be noted, where the children from poor backgrounds suffer from malnutrition, poor physical and mental health, socio-emotional problems, all causing poor academic performance. It is therefore not easy to break the cycle of poverty among poor children. This, however, does not rule out the fact

that some children have resilience and will continue to excel, despite coming from impoverished backgrounds.

#### **6.3.4 Home-based factors**

This study established that the circumstances at home were often not conducive to the learning of the girl child in the mining, rural, and urban communities studied. This corroborates with the findings by Grimm (2012), Kapungu (2007), Chinyoka and Ganga (2011), Chabaya, et al. (2009), and Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (2007). The majority of the girl children from the three schools indicated that their studies at home were affected by the lack of lighting, space to do homework, by them spending much time on domestic chores, having no desk or table to work on, a shortage of books in the home, and unsupportive parents. The problem of limited space in this study was observed to be compounded by the parents' low income. The parents' levels of education have also been observed to have an impact on their girl children's schooling. It was indicated to affect the jobs they did, the family size, socioeconomic status, attitudes and the general beliefs of the parents. Issues like the supervision of homework were viewed by the teachers as beyond the intellectual capacity of uneducated parents. The findings from this study revealed that because poor parents are also overstressed in trying to meet the daily needs of their families, the resulting depression and negativity often lead to insufficient nurturing, disengaged parents, and difficulty in focusing on the needs of the children.

The study revealed that the girls were losing out on education because it was expected from them to support their households by means of their labour. The situation was rather unbearable in child-headed households where there was no mother on whom the burdens may be shifted. The girl child struggled to do her duty in trying to resemble the mother, doing all the household chores, like washing clothes, cleaning the house, feeding the young ones, looking after sick relatives and parents, cooking for the entire family, and fetching firewood and water before going to school. They were also seen to sell vegetables, fruit, juice cards, and sometimes their bodies to supplement the family income. The long hours the girl children spend working impair their intellectual development, because they cannot learn when they are physically exhausted and mentally tired. Since the girls are responsible for most of the household chores, little time is set aside for school and homework.

The study also revealed that children from poor backgrounds' academic performance is negatively affected by their often changing of schools as their parents search for work, or rush around to make ends meet. Some parents kept moving from place to place in search of employment and cheaper rent, thus the children were bound to change schools, friends and teachers, compromising their education. The mobility of the parents was noted to be high, even within the country, in search of jobs in order to be able to pay the school fees, the rent, the bills, and to buy uniforms and food for the children. This scenario was observed to be affecting the children's intellectual capabilities, their emotional, social, physical and moral development. The girl children had no choice but to move with their parents, making dropping out of school a temporary or permanent situation. The implication is that school attendance was often irregular amongst children whose parents moved around a lot. This affected their academic performance.

### **6.3.5 Early marriages and sexual abuse/harassment**

This study established that early marriages were deep seated in most Zimbabwean communal areas, mining towns and urban areas. Early marriages inevitably deny girls of school-going age their rights to education, which is crucial for their personal development, and their effective contribution to the future wellbeing of their families, and the society. Girls from poor households also engaged in sexual survival strategies to secure support for their schooling, and that of the boys, risking falling pregnant, and of contracting HIV/AIDS. The consequence is the curtailment of their education. The problem of early and unplanned pregnancy affects them almost exclusively because of the cultural practices which expect girls, instead of boys, to care for the unwanted/unplanned child. While cases of *kuzvarira* (planned and/or forced marriages) were noted in this study, the majority of the respondents indicated that their marriage was voluntary. In the light of the above it can be said that the implication of this study is that the children affected by poverty are often highly vulnerable to HIV-infection. Their risk of infection arises from the early onset of sexual activity, commercial sex, and sexual abuse, all of which are precipitated by economic need, peer pressure and drug abuse. Thus early marriages were observed to be a cause of drop-out from school by the girls, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of poverty among poor families.

The researcher also observed that abusive behaviour towards girls by older male pupils and male teachers in the three schools and by adult men (sugar daddies) in the vicinity of the school, seeking sex in exchange for money or gifts, was common. Some girls engage in child prostitution particularly with truck drivers along the Harare-Beitbridge highway, mainly at business centres, in order to make ends meet, that is, to get cash to buy food, soap, uniforms and transport to and from school. Research by Hlupo and Tsikira (2012); Okeke, et al. (2012); Brantlinger (2011); Sachiti (2011); Kachere (2010); Mwilu (2010) and the Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry (1999) attest to the above situation. The abused girl child has a low self-esteem, and a desire for unconditional acceptance. Thus girl children who experience some form of abuse can carry with them negative and permanent consequences which can adversely affect their academic performance.

#### **6.3.6 Distance travelling to school**

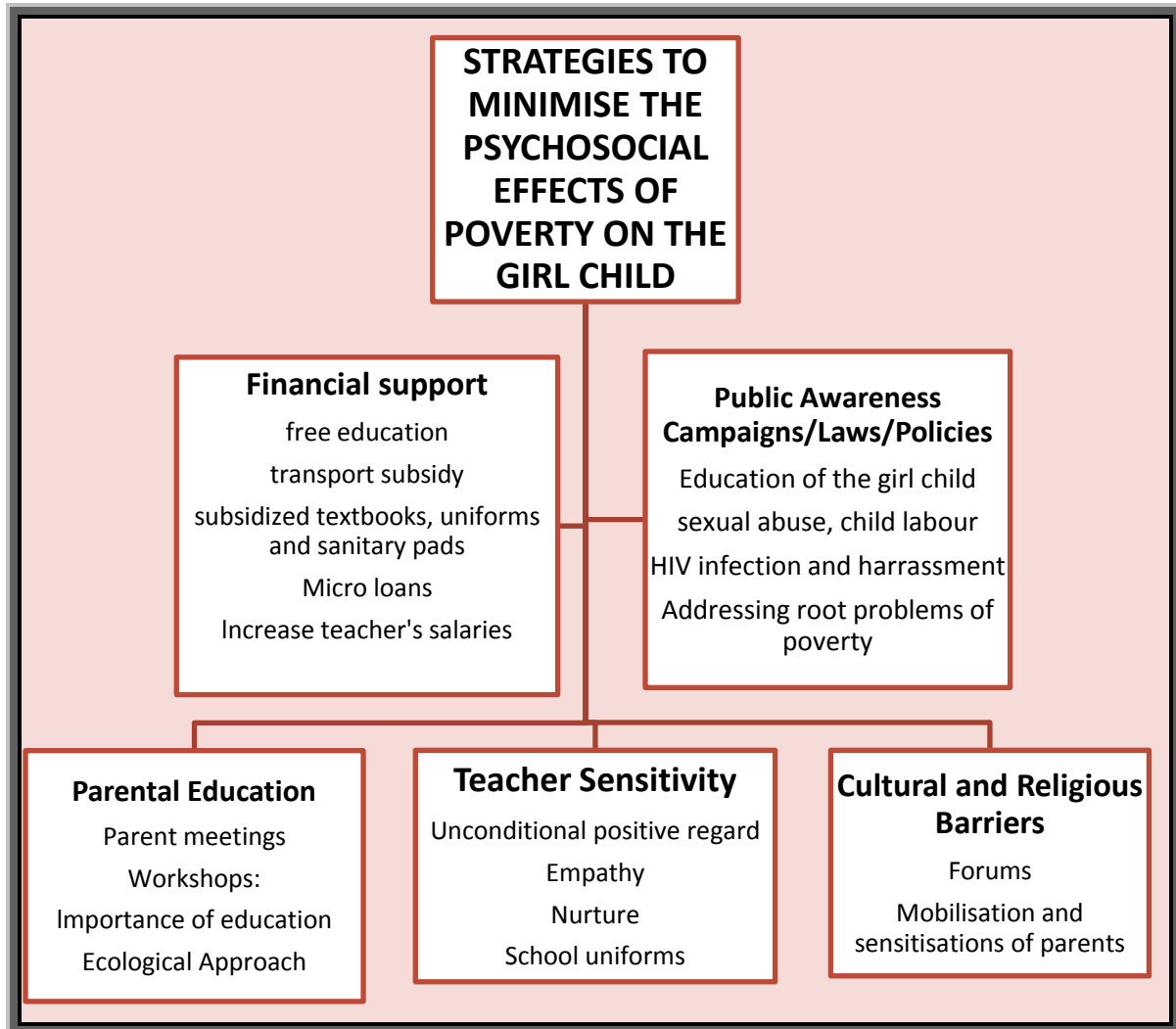
This study also established that some children travelled between 30 minutes to two hours to reach school on a daily basis. It was observed that a large proportion of girl children do not attend school regularly as a result of the long distances to school. Due to the nature of the girls' work at home, which they have to do before going to school, the distance to school causes them a lot of problems, and thus have negative effects on their academic performance. Issues of the safety and security of the schoolgirls were observed to be of great concern to the parents. The parents were consequently less likely to allow their daughters to attend school if they have to travel very long distances, thus impeding enrolment and school attendance.

In spite of the overwhelming effects of poverty on the girl children's education and development, two teachers indicated that there was a significant number of children in low-income families who thrived at school on grounds of their own resilience, the motivation of their parents and teachers, their self-efficacy, and sponsorship from donor communities and members of their extended family. This assumption was reinforced and supported by one headmaster who participated in this study. To say, however, that all children from poor backgrounds will underperform will therefore be an underestimation of a rather complex issue. More research should be done to ascertain to what extent resilience factors affect the academic performance of girl learners.



## 6.4 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings made in this study, the following recommendations and suggestions are made as summarised in figure 6.1:



**Figure 6.1:** Summarising strategies to minimise effects of poverty on girl learners

### 6.4.1 Recommendations from this study as derived from fig 6.1

- ❖ It is critical to address the effects of poverty as experienced by children. In Zimbabwe collaborative work is needed among all stakeholders, especially in revisiting the root causes of poverty, namely socioeconomic instability, political unrest, the land problem, and the issue of international sanctions against Zimbabwe.

- ❖ In order to alleviate poverty, the government should generate more employment opportunities for as many people as possible. Also, there should be the possibility of providing small loans (micro-credit) to the poor families, which may help them to establish their own businesses to help families to become self-sustained.
- ❖ The government should make basic education affordable for all children, especially for girls. Reducing the costs associated with education, including school and transport fees, the cost of textbooks, the provision of sanitary pads and uniforms to girls, will most likely improve the school attendance of poor girl children.
- ❖ The government, NGOs, and church organisations should mobilise and sensitise parents, and religious, cultural and community leaders, to address the cultural and religious barriers to girls' education. Community leaders should create a forum where matters concerning formal education are discussed periodically. This will go a long way in removing the stigma and labels attached to the education of girl children.
- ❖ Public awareness campaigns need to be done on the value of educating every individual, boy and girl, and also allowing those who had entered into premature marriages to go back to school to break the cycle of poverty. Children's schooling retains children's connectedness to peers, teachers and the school. Keeping children at school will educate them about HIV infections, child labour and abuse.
- ❖ The need also exists of parenting education to improve the academic performance of children. Educated parents are aware of the importance of education and will thus send their children to school, irrespective of their gender, unlike uneducated parents. The education of parents through workshops, regular parent meetings at schools will also capacitate them to be in a position to help their children with their homework.
- ❖ Policies, laws and community-based monitoring systems should be put in place to eliminate child labour and sexual abuse.

- ❖ The government and teachers could be sensitised and trained to provide support for children from impoverished backgrounds. The teachers need to be warm, supportive, genuine, empathetic, and nurturing and give unconditional positive regard towards learners who are psychologically unstable due to poverty, so as to raise their self-confidence, self-direction, self-esteem and self-image. Every effort must be made to ensure that the affected children through the use of psychological services and social welfare have stable, family-based care and adequate social support.
- ❖ The government also needs to increase the teachers' salaries. Paying the teachers market related salaries can impact positively on improving their attitudes towards their jobs.
- ❖ Poverty is thus a societal problem that must be addressed by the microsystems of school, the families and the neighbourhood, the mesosystems (linkages) and the exosystems, as well as the macrosystems (political, ideology).

#### **6.4.2 Recommendations for further study**

Based on the findings, further research is recommended in respect of the following:

- ❖ There exists a need to explore the impact of household chores on girls. It would be interesting to further explore the cost benefit analysis of household chores in families, with the aim of finding to what extent girls are affected by these household chores. A study on the boy child's impact on the household chores is also called for.
- ❖ There is also a need for more qualitative research on secondary and primary school learners on the impact of menstruation on the academic performance of girl children from poverty-stricken households. It will also be interesting to explore the girl learners' views and perceptions regarding menstruation and sanitation on academic performance.
- ❖ The need also exists to explore the impact of teacher incentives and motivation on the academic performance of primary and secondary school learners.

- ❖ Finally, although it is important to understand the underlying issues that affect the plight of the girl child, it is equally important to look at why many girl children exposed to such risks manage to rise above them (the resilience perspective).

### **6.5 Limitations of the study**

Unfortunately the data-collection process coincided with an industrial action by the teachers. Hectic and brisk schedules in the secondary schools led to the situation where the researcher sometimes failed to get hold of the intended respondents. Numerous visits to the schools were, however, done to gather the relevant information from the teachers and pupils. Interviews and focus group discussions were done over and over until a level of data saturation, where no new points were raised.

The researcher noted that because of low remuneration, the teachers in many schools were not motivated to participate in the research. Generally they had a negative attitude towards academic research work. Besides this plight, the researcher still persuaded respondents to give reliable and valid responses. The respondents were assured that the purpose of the study would be educational and that any norms, values, beliefs and responses within the instruments would be confidential.

Time constraints also militated against the researcher's operations. Due to the limitation in respect of time and resources, this study only focused on three secondary schools in Masvingo district (mining, rural and urban secondary schools). The selection of the three schools and the classes were carefully and purposefully done to ensure that the findings were valid and authentic.

## 6.6 Conclusion

This study presented evidence to answer the question on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe and suggested sound educational policies, measures and solutions to minimise the consequences caused by poverty on the academic performance of the girl child.

The study established that poverty affects the girl child's psychosocial development across multiple contexts including the family, the home, the neighbourhood, and the school and has detrimental effects on her socio-emotional and cognitive functioning, and academic achievement. It was found that many girls leave school early due to poverty-related variables like long distances to and from school, household chores, financial constraints, a lack of motivation, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, poor mental and physical health, delinquent behaviour, stress, stigmatisation and marginalisation, causing behavioural and socio-emotional problems, and developmental delays.

Home-based variables, such as the lack of lighting, limited space to do homework, too much domestic chores, the shortage of books, and unsupportive parents impact negatively on the girl learner's academic performance. The issue of premarital sex and early marriages, as a means of generating an income for the family, is common in lower-income households. Getting married at an early age does not allow the girl child to continue with her schooling. In this study it was also found that financial and resource constraints led to girl learners attending poor schools where the quality of education was compromised, hence the plight of the girl learners was further exacerbated. The girl learners also encountered problems in obtaining sanitary pads during menstruation, thus jeopardising their academic pursuits. The girl learners are very often exposed to being stereotyped and marginalised. Teachers tend to have higher expectations of boys than of girls when it comes to academic performances. All pupils need to be accepted unconditionally. This stereotyping and marginalisation impacted negatively on the girl learners' self-confidence, hence leading to high levels of failure in school. The parents very often have to go to other towns or to neighbouring countries to seek employment, thus leaving the girl child to take the responsibility for her siblings. Older men in the community tend to exploit the situation by offering gifts or money in exchange for sex, thus exposing the girl child to sexual abuse and

harassment. Furthermore, often due to the absence of adults, girl children tend to display delinquent behaviour. Because of the location of the school girl learners sometimes have to walk long distances, hence spending valuable time travelling, and this compromises their safety.

Despite the negative effects of poverty on academic performance highlighted in this study, this researcher also ascertained that poverty should not be an excuse for education practitioners to expect less from the girl learners from impoverished households. While it is true that they do indeed come to school with numerous issues and challenges that interfere with their learning, there is a need for teachers, headmasters and all interested parties to focus on their learning, in an effort of finding ways to help them overcome these challenges, and to gain the most they can from their education. Denying the girl child access to education is endangering the efforts to realize the internationally-agreed Millennium Development Goals. Their education is likely to be their one chance to break the poverty cycle and to escape from it. It is therefore one of the best reasons for them to succeed in their schooling.

In the light of the above, children raised in low-income families are at risk of academic and social problems, as well as poor health and well-being, which can, in turn, undermine their educational achievement. In spite of the overwhelming effects of poverty on the children's education and development, some teachers and headmaster pointed out that a significant number of children from low-income families have thrived in their academic performance. They emphasised the importance of self-efficacy and resilience among girl learners, and the financial, material and psychological support of the parents as contributing to the success of the learners.

The study was informed mainly by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the humanistic perspective. By understanding Bronfenbrenner's five nested systems, and the Humanistic school of thought (Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow) at work in the life of the female learner in Zimbabwe, this researcher focused not only on the challenges experienced by the female learner from poverty-stricken households but also on the wider community as well. Possible solutions are being sought in the form of recommendations as a way forward to overcome the plight of the girl learner.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDICES 1

Great Zimbabwe University  
P.O Box 1232  
Masvingo

28 February 2012

The Regional Director  
Ministry of Education Sports and Culture  
Masvingo Province  
Masvingo

Dear mam

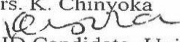
**Re: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN THREE  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MASVINGO.**

**TOPIC : PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON THE ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE OF THE GIRL CHILD IN THREE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN  
MASVINGO, ZIMBABWE**

I am hereby asking for permission to conduct an educational research on the above stated topic in three secondary schools in Masvingo district. The information which participants will provide will be treated in confidence and will be used for academic purposes only.

Thank you in advance for your contribution to this study.

Yours faithfully

Mrs. K. Chinyoka  
  
PHD Candidate- University of South Africa (UNISA)



Faculty of Education  
Department of Teacher Development

P O Box 1235  
MASVINGO  
Zimbabwe  
Tel: 263 (0)39-252720  
Fax: 263 (0)39-253504  
E mail: [masu@comone.co.zw](mailto:masu@comone.co.zw)

Off Old Great Zimbabwe Road  
MASVINGO, Zimbabwe

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## GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY

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Date: 01 March 2012

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

MRS. KUDZAI CHINYOKA is a bona fide lecturer at Great Zimbabwe University currently studying a DED in Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA) She is specialising in Psychology of Education and currently doing a research on:

### TOPIC: PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF THE GIRL CHILD IN ZIMBABWE

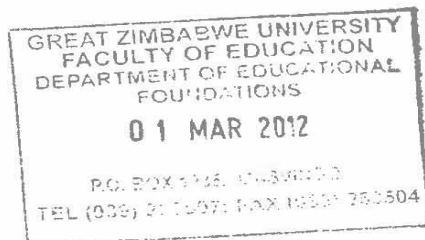
Could you please assist her in her research. The information which participants will provide will be treated in confidence and it will be used for academic purposes only.

Thank you in advance for your contribution to this study.

Yours Sincerely

A. Chingombe (Mr)

*A. Chingombe*  
Chairperson



5  
ALL communications should be addressed to  
"The Provincial Education Director for Education  
Sport and Culture"  
Telephone: 263585/264331  
Fax: 039-263261



ZIMBABWE

Reference:

Ministry of Education Sport and Culture  
P.O Box 89  
MASVINGO

02 August 2012

**The Secretary**  
**Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture**

**Att: Mr Muzawazi**

**RE: PERMISSION TO CARRYOUT RESEARCH: MRS K. CHINYOKA : PHD**  
**CANDIDATE :UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA (UNISA) :MASVINGO**  
**PROVINCE**

The above matter refers.

The bearer Mrs K. Chinyoka , PHD Candidate at University of South Africa is seeking permission to carry out research in Secondary schools in Masvingo Province.

Topic : Psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in three secondary schools in Masvingo , Zimbabwe.

The application is supported therefore permission is sought.

*for* C.T. DUBE  
**PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR: MASVINGO**

all communications should be addressed to  
"The Secretary for Education, Sport, Arts and Culture"  
Telephone: 734051/59 and 734071



Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture  
P.O Box CY 121  
Causeway

03/08/12

Telegraphic address :  
"EDUCATION"

Fax:  
794505/705289/734075

MRS K. CHINYOKA  
GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY  
Box 1232 MASVINGO

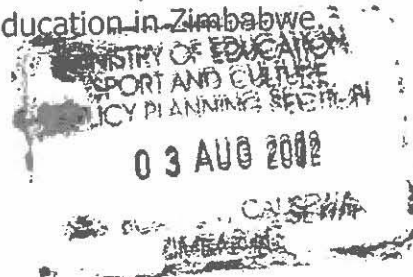
**RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT, ARTS AND CULTURE.**

Reference is made to your application to carry out research in the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture institutions on the title:

PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF THE GIRL CHILD IN THREE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MASVINGO

Permission is hereby granted. However, you are required to liaise with the Provincial Education Director responsible for the school which you want to involve in your research.

You are also required to provide a copy of your final report to the Ministry since your study is instrumental in the development of education in Zimbabwe.



*T.L. Mudenha*

T.L. Mudenha

For: **SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION, SPORT, ARTS AND CULTURE**



ALL communications should be addressed to  
"The Provincial Education Director for Education  
Sport and Culture"  
Telephone: 263585/264331  
Fax: 039-263261



ZIMBABWE

Reference:

Ministry of Education Sport and Culture  
P.O Box 89  
MASVINGO

07 August 2012

**To Whom It May Concern:**

**RE: PERMISSION TO CARRYOUT RESEARCH: MRS K. CHINYOKA : PHD  
STUDENT : UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA : MASVINGO DISTRICT :  
MASVINGO PROVINCE.**

The above matter refers.

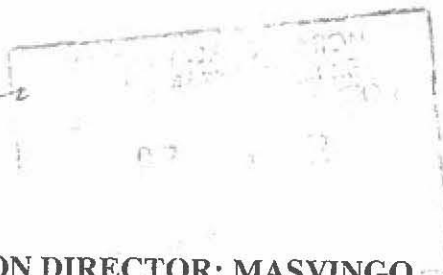
The bearer, Mrs K. Chinyoka has been granted permission to carry out his research in the following secondary school in Masvingo District :

Ndarama High School  
Temeraire High School  
Mapanzure High School

The title is Psychological Effects of Poverty on the Academic Performance of the Girl Child .

Please do assist her wherever possible.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "C.T. Dube".



*for* **C.T DUBE**  
**PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR: MASVINGO**

## APPENDIX VI

### CONSENT FORM FOR THE PARENTS OF THE GIRL LEARNERS

#### For Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

**Research topic: Psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.**

**Name of researcher/student: Chinyoka Kudzai**

**(PHD-student in Psychology of Education)**

**Student number: 47300140. University of South Africa (UNISA)**

**Email: [chinyokak@gmail.com](mailto:chinyokak@gmail.com) Cell number: +263 773 551 922**

My name is Mrs Kudzai Chinyoka, and I work at Great Zimbabwe University as a Lecturer in Educational Psychology. I am doing research in respect of a study entitled **Psychosocial Effects of Poverty on the Academic Performance of the Girl Child in Zimbabwe**. I am student at the University of South Africa (UNISA). I hereby ask for permission to interview your child. I will ask your daughter for her agreement as well. Both of you have to agree independently before I can start with the research.

You do not have to decide today whether or not you agree to have your child participate in this research. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information, and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you are welcome to ask me.

#### **Purpose of the study**

This research aims to close the gap between the boy child and the girl child in relation to academic performance by determining the extent to which the girl child's academic performance is affected by poverty.

### **The selection of the participants**

Girl children are especially vulnerable to the effects of poverty and socioeconomic processes, hence the need to explore their psychosocial effects on the girl child's academic performance.

### **Voluntary participation**

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to decide today. You can think about it and tell me later what you decided.

### **Duration of the interviews and focus group discussions**

The interview as well as the focus group discussion will take about an hour of her time. All in all am asking for about 2 hours of your child's time once a week for a month. The above will take place outside of school hours.

### **Risks and discomfort**

Any risk or discomfort, including any limits to confidentiality, will lead to the psychosocial counselling of the learners.

### **Benefits**

There will be no immediate and direct benefit for your child or for you, but your child's participation is likely to help me discover more about the effects of poverty on the girl children, so that mitigation measures can be proposed.

### **Incentives**

Your daughter will not be provided with any payment to take part in the research.

### **Confidentiality**

The information that I will collect from this research project will be kept confidential. Any information about your child will have a code on it in the place of her name.

### **Sharing of the research findings**

At the end of the study I will be sharing my findings with the participants and with the community. We will do this by first meeting with the participants and then with the larger community. A written report will also be given to the participants that they can share with their families. I will also publish the results in order that other interested people may learn from my research.

### **The right to refuse or to withdraw**

Your child may stop participating in the discussion/interview at any time that you or she wishes, without any harm to either of you.

### **Consent**

I have been asked to give my consent for my daughter to participate in this research study which will involve her completing one interview and participating in a focus group discussion. I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it, and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily for my child to participate in this study.

Name of parent or guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent or guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX VII

### CONSENT FORM FOR THE GIRL LEARNERS

#### For Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

**Research topic: Psychosocial Effects of Poverty on the Academic Performance of the Girl Child in Zimbabwe.**

**Name of researcher:** Mrs. Kudzai Chinyoka

**Student number: 47300140. University of South Africa (UNISA)**

**Email: [chinyokak@gmail.com](mailto:chinyokak@gmail.com) Cell number: +263 773 551 922**

My name is Mrs Kudzai Chinyoka, and I work at Great Zimbabwe University as a Lecturer in Educational Psychology. I am doing research for a study entitled **Psychosocial Effects of Poverty on the Academic Performance of the Girl Child in Zimbabwe**. I am a doctorate of education student at the University of South Africa (UNISA). I hereby ask your permission to participate in focus group discussions and interviews. This research aims to close the gap between the boy child and the girl child in relation to academic performance, thus determining the extent to which the girl child's academic performance is affected by poverty.

Your confidentiality is guaranteed; only pseudonyms will be used in this research. At the conclusion of the research project, I will be presenting or publishing the results of the study. After the completion of the study I will destroy all the data.

There are no risks involved in your participation, and there will be no direct benefits to you.

Your parent or guardian must also give permission for you to participate, but no information will be shared with anyone outside the study. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Your signature below will indicate your understanding of this form and your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for future reference. If you do not wish to participate, please hand in the form unsigned.

Signature of girl the child \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the girl child \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person giving consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX VIII

### CONSENT FORM FOR THE TEACHERS/HEADMASTERS

Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during or after your participation in this research.

**Research topic: Psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe.**

**Name of researcher/student: Chinyoka Kudzai (Doctoral student in Psychology of Education).**

**Student number: 47300140. University Of South Africa (UNISA)**

**Email: [chinyokak@gmail.com](mailto:chinyokak@gmail.com)**

**Cell number: +263 773 551 922**

I am Mrs Kudzai Chinyoka, and I work at Great Zimbabwe University as a Lecturer in Educational Psychology. I am doing a research for a study entitled **Psychosocial Effects of Poverty on the Academic Performance of the Girl Child in Zimbabwe**. I hereby ask for your permission to participate in this study.

#### **Purpose of the research**

This research aims to close the gap between the boy child and the girl child in relation to academic performance by determining the extent to which the girl child's academic performance is affected by poverty.

#### **The selection of the participants**

Targeting teachers will provide collaborative data about the performance of the pupils and the impact of poverty on the pupils' academic performance.

#### **Voluntary participation**

Participation is voluntary.

#### **Duration of the interviews**

An interview which will take about 1 hour of your time once a week for four weeks.

#### **Risks and discomfort**

No risks or discomfort, including any limits to confidentiality, is anticipated.

**Benefits**

There will be no immediate and direct benefit to you, but your participation is likely to help me discover more about the effects of poverty on girl children so that mitigation measures may be proposed.

**Incentives**

You will not be paid to take part in the research.

**Confidentiality**

You may stop participating in the interview at any time that you wish. Your identity will be treated as confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in the study.

**Sharing of the research findings**

At the end of the study, I will be sharing my findings with the participants and with the community. I will do this by meeting first with the participants and then with the larger community. A written report will also be given to the participants that they can share with their families. I will also publish the results, in order that other interested people may learn from my research.

**Right to refuse or withdraw**

You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate.

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study.

**Name of Teacher/Headmaster** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Teacher/Headmaster** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX IX

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE GIRL LEARNERS

#### **Psychosocial Effects of Poverty on the Academic Performance of the Girl Child in Zimbabwe**

##### **Theme 1: Home-based variables**

1. Explain how a girl child's home-based variables affect her academic performance.
2. Describe the nature of the job done by your parents. What are the sources of income of your family?
3. In your view, is the income adequate enough to support your schooling? Explain.
4. Explain how the neighbours affect your academic performance?
5. What behavioural problems are shown by girls from poor backgrounds?

##### **Theme 2: The effects of poverty on the girl child**

6. How does poverty affect the girl child's education?
7. Explain how poverty affects girl children's academic performance.
8. How does poverty influence girl children's day-to-day activities?
9. What are the possible causes of school drop-outs of girls at secondary school level?
10. Explain how poverty affects the self-esteem of girls at secondary school level.
11. Which factors hinder the academic performance of girl children from a low SES?

##### **Theme 3: The developmental experiences of girl children from poor backgrounds**

12. What are the developmental challenges faced by the girl children which impede their academic performance?
13. What psychosocial constraints are faced by girls in their schooling?
14. What are the effects of poverty on the well-being of girl children?



**Theme 4: The views and perceptions of the girls on their academic performance**

15. How do teachers relate to girl pupils from poverty- stricken households?

16. How does poverty affect the teaching and learning of girl children from poor backgrounds?

**Theme 5: Possible solutions suggested to attenuate the negative effects of poverty on the girl child**

17. What should be done to reduce the effects of poverty on the girl child?

18. What suggestions can be given to improve the academic performance of children from poor backgrounds?

## APPENDIX X

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE TEACHERS/HEADMASTERS

#### INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, from 2000 to 2010, Zimbabwe has experienced immense hardships, which resulted in the virtual collapse of its economy and education system. In 2008 inflation rose to unprecedented levels of over a billion percent per annum. As a result, the government could hardly pay its own workers. Using your personal experience as a teacher, please answer these questions as honestly as possible.

#### Personal data

1. For how long have you been teaching?
2. Which post do you hold?

#### Theme 1: The psychosocial effects of poverty on the girl child

3. Explain how poverty affects girl children's academic performance.
4. Which factors hinder the academic performance of girl children from a low SES?
5. What are the possible causes of girl school drop-outs at secondary school level?
6. In your opinion, how does poverty affect the enrolment of girls?
7. Explain how the girl child's home based variables affect her academic performance.
8. What type of schools is attended by poor children? Explain further
9. Explain how poverty affects the self-esteem of girls at secondary school level.

#### Theme 2: The developmental experiences of girl children from poor backgrounds

10. How does poverty affect the children's psychosocial development?
11. What are the developmental challenges faced by the girl children which impede their academic performance?
12. What psychosocial constraints are faced by girls in their schooling?
13. What are the effects of poverty on the well-being of girl children?

**Theme 3: Views and perceptions of teachers on the academic performance of girl children**

14. How do teachers relate to girl pupils from poverty- stricken households?
15. What are the views and perceptions of teachers on the academic performance of girl children from a low socioeconomic background?
16. What are the adverse effects of poverty on the motivation of teachers to do their work?
17. How does poverty affect the teaching and learning of girl children from poor backgrounds?

**THEME: 4 Possible solutions suggested to attenuate the negative effects of poverty on the girl child**

18. What should be done to reduce the effects of poverty on the girl child?
19. What suggestions can be given to improve the academic performance of children from poor backgrounds?
20. Suggest measures one can employ to fight the root causes of poverty among women in Zimbabwe.

## APPENDIX XI

### FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE GIRL LEARNERS

#### PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF THE GIRL CHILD IN ZIMBABWE

Welcoming remarks by the researcher as the facilitator

The sessions will be relaxed. A comfortable setting, refreshments, and sitting round in a circle will help to establish the right atmosphere. The sessions may last from one to two hours. Disagreements within the members of the group could be used to encourage the participants to elucidate their point of view, and to clarify why they think.

#### **Ground rules:**

The following are some recommended guidelines or ground rules used by the researcher to help to establish the group norms:

- Only one person talks at a time.
- Confidentiality is assured; what is shared in the room stays in the room.
- There are no right or wrong answers to any questions. The respondents merely give ideas, experiences and opinions, which are all valuable.
- The researcher will listen to all sides of an issue, both the positive and the negative.
- English, Shona and Ndebele are allowed.
- Responses will be recorded and also notes taken by the assistant researchers.

In this research study these ground rules were presented to the group, and displayed throughout the discussion on a flip chart that is hung on a wall in a clearly visible location.

#### **Questions that guided the researcher**

##### **Theme 1: The psychosocial effects of poverty on the girl child**

1.Explain how the girl child's home-based variables affect her academic performance.

2. How does poverty affect the girl children's education?
3. Explain how poverty affects the girl children's academic performance.
4. How does poverty influence the girl children's day-to-day activities?
5. Which factors hinder the academic performance of girl children from a low SES?
6. In your opinion, what are the possible causes of girl school drop-outs at secondary school level?

**Theme 2: The developmental experiences of girl children from poor backgrounds**

7. What are the developmental challenges faced by the girl children which impede their academic performance?
8. What psychosocial constraints are faced by girls in their schooling?
9. What are the effects of poverty on the well-being of girl children?

**Theme 3: The views and perceptions of the girls on their academic performance**

10. How do the teachers relate to girl pupils from poverty-stricken households in terms of classroom interaction and co-curricular activities?
11. How does poverty affect the teaching and learning of girl children from poor backgrounds?

**Theme: 4 Possible solutions suggested to attenuate the negative effects of poverty on the girl child**

12. What should be done to reduce the effects of poverty on the girl child?
13. What suggestions can be given to improve the academic performance of children from poor backgrounds?

## APPENDIX XII

### THE TEACHER'S/ EDUCATOR'S OBSERVATION GUIDE

(For use during the three focus group interview sessions and in 10 selected lessons in terms 2 of 2012).

#### SECTION A

**Instruction:** Place a tick  in the appropriate space

BEHAVIOUR TO OBSERVE	YES	NO
1) Reports late for classes almost every day.		
2) Prefers to isolate herself when it is time for cooperative learning.		
3) Uses defence mechanisms to cover up for homework not done.		
4) Attention span varies throughout the lessons.		
5) Slower to present answers for orally given tasks.		
6) Stressed outlook.		
7) Fails to complete class tasks.		
8) Complains mostly of home responsibilities.		
9) Homework is not supervised at home.		
10) Complains of headaches and other diseases.		
11) Has a negative attitude towards schooling.		
12) Can cooperate if scaffolded during group-work.		
13) Play with peers does not last long due to sibling interruptions.		
14) Younger siblings cling to their elder sister during break and lunch times at school.		
15) Good at manual tasks.		
16) Often not motivated to learn.		

17) High drop-outs are common among girls in the school.		
21) Girl children work very hard to pay school fees if not on BEAM funding.		
22) Very few girls enrol at secondary school.		
23) Topics related to HIV and AIDS, sexual abuse and poverty induce anxiety.		
24) A number ends up discontinuing school.		
25) Very little support from the extended families if the children decide to stay there.		
26) Helplessness and mistrust evident in the learners.		
27) Negative academic self-concept.		
28) Girls from poverty-stricken households relate positively to their teachers.		
29) The teachers give more attention to the pupils from poor backgrounds.		
30) Hunger and ill-health affect their performance.		
31)The learners exhibit behavioural problems.		

**SECTION B**

Write down any other effects of poverty on the girl child’s academic performance that you observed and that were not indicated in the section above.

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## Research Ethics Clearance Certificate

This is to certify that the application for ethical clearance submitted by

**K Chinyoka [4300140]**

for a D Ed study entitled

**Psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic  
performance of the girl child in Zimbabwe**

has met the ethical requirements as specified by the University of South Africa  
College of Education Research Ethics Committee. This certificate is valid for two  
years from the date of issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CS le Roux'.

Prof CS le Roux  
CEDU REC (Chairperson)  
[lrouxcs@unisa.ac.za](mailto:lrouxcs@unisa.ac.za)

18 February 2013

Reference number: 2013 FEB/ 4300140/CSLR