

**Zimbabwean adolescents' experience of their parents'
absence due to Diaspora**

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the subject

Psychology

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

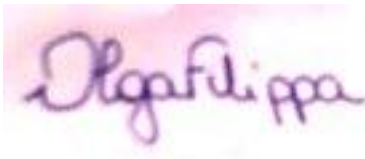
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March 2011

Declaration

I declare that **Zimbabwean adolescents' experience of their parents' absence due to Diaspora** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



15 March 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank the following:

My family and friends who have allowed me to achieve my dream through their love and support.

My wonderful supervisors, Dr. Elsje Cronje and Prof. Ilse Ferns, for their professional guidance and dedication to this work, from its inception to its conclusion.

The wonderful young people who took part in the study.

ABSTRACT

As a result of the Zimbabwean socio-economic and political crisis many have joined the Diaspora leaving their children behind in the care of others. Qualitative research in the form of in-depth semi-structured interviews carried out with seventeen adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans evidenced a number of emerging themes that illuminate how these adolescents view their situation, such as symptomology of depression, feelings of abandonment and rejection, conflicting feelings, lack of social support, the importance of communication, role changes and additions, materialism, challenges presented by relationships with caregivers, and vulnerability to sexual abuse and molestation. Most of the themes do not appear to be country specific but are shared by adolescent Diaspora orphans world-wide. Defence and coping mechanisms employed by these adolescents to cope with parental absence were also identified. Recommendations aimed at optimising their integration in society and suggestions for further research in this field conclude this study.

KEY WORDS

Adolescence

Defence and Coping Mechanisms

Diaspora

Diaspora orphans

Migration

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Zimbabwean Diaspora

Zimbabwe is still in the throws of the worse economic crisis since its independence in 1980, reeling from the effects of hyperinflation which reached, on 14/11/2008, an annual rate of 89.7 sextillion (10^{21}) percent, the second highest rate of inflation ever recorded in the world, according to Hanke and Kwok (2009), compounded by acute shortages of food, gasoline and most basic goods. The official adoption of hard currencies for transactions in early 2009 has helped stabilize prices, improve revenue performance, and impose fiscal discipline but it has not brought about much relief to the ordinary person, as wages and salaries have not adjusted to the high cost of living and inflation rates on U.S. dollar prices. Dr. Festo Kavishe, chief representative in Zimbabwe of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), speaking to Angus Shaw of Associated Press said that many adults were unable to provide normal care, food and schooling for their children (Shaw, 2008).

As a result of this, it is estimated that four million Zimbabweans — approximately one fourth of the population — have left to find work in neighbouring countries, or as far a field as Europe, the United States and Australia. According to Angus Shaw (2008), this has created a social phenomenon which he refers to as the “Diaspora orphans”, children of people working outside Zimbabwe left behind in the care of only one parent, or even relatives and friends. Many of these children are forced to deal with high levels of stress at home and difficult living conditions. Although Diaspora implies dispersion and scattering, whereas migration refers to moving to another country, both terms refer to leaving one country for another and, for the purpose of this study, they will be used interchangeably.

The residential and caring arrangements made for these children by their migrant parents vary significantly. Some are more disadvantaged and live in environments far from ideal and, according to Dr. Kavishe, these children are often experiencing an increase in verbal abuse, neglect and physical violence

(Shaw, 2008). In addition, Betty Makoni, Director of Girl Child Network Zimbabwe, a Non-Governmental Organisation advocating the protection of girls from abuse, said that one in every ten cases of reported child abuse involves a child whose parents have left the country (<http://www.alertnet.org>) and the staggering escalation in child rape figures of 42% since the previous year (as of January 2008) has been linked, by the United Nation's Children's Agency, to family tensions caused by the country's economic meltdown (<http://www.newzimbabwe.com>).

Some children are more fortunate, and find themselves in domestic situations which foster a positive environment in which they receive the necessary support from a family system that in part compensates for their parents' absence. However, parental absence, regardless of its *raison d'être* (reason for being), is invariably traumatic for most children who will tend to utilise a variety of coping or defence mechanisms to deal with it.

Other variables influence the child's experience of separation. For instance, studies show that factors associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties in children over the separation period from their parents include inadequate preparation for separation, experiencing feelings of marginalization in the adoptive home, and being moved from one caregiver to another, as well as the length of parental absence (Christiansen, Thornley-Brown, & Robinson, 1982; Crawford-Brown, 1997; Douglin, 1995; Evans & Davies, 1997; Leo-Rhynie, 1997).

1.2 Effects of parental absence

Parental absence due to Diaspora is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, remittances from external earnings augment the family's spending power, resulting in increased educational outlays and a decreased need for child labour, as well as improved living conditions, thus benefiting the children left behind; on the other hand, Diaspora orphans may have to deal with age-inappropriate responsibilities and feelings of anxiety, loneliness and helplessness in addition to other psychological problems which may result in compromised academic achievement, acting-out behaviours and a spectrum of

other behavioural and developmental anomalies. A study by Mallett and others (cited in Patino, 2005), found that a child's psychosocial environment plays a role in the increased incidence of psychotic disorders in subjects with a history of migration.

These conflicting aspects of parental migration may well cause feelings of ambivalence in adolescents who may suffer a sense of desertion at being left behind yet, concurrently, may carry guilt regarding being ungrateful for what their parents are able to provide by working away from home. Bowlby (1951), in the context of children's violent fantasies on reuniting with their parents after a prolonged separation, mentions the fact that humans can experience powerful depression because of the hatred they may feel towards those they love and need. Similar feelings may also be experienced during the period preceding the time when a child is once again with his/her migrant parent/s, particularly at difficult developmental stages, such as adolescence, when children are especially vulnerable to external stressors. Adolescence, the time between the beginning of sexual maturation (puberty) and adulthood, (roughly considered to begin from 11 to 13 and to end between 17 and 21 years of age) is not an easy period as the adolescent experiences not only physical growth and change but also emotional, psychological, social, and mental transformation (Marcell, 2007).

According to Erikson, who maintains that personality development consists of a life-long process of having to negotiate a number of developmental crises in order to attain an individual's innate potential, adolescence is the time characterised by a search for identity (identity versus role confusion). Erikson (1963) further asserts that identity can be defined as the image people have of themselves and incorporates the notion that a certain link exists throughout one's life. Although at this time young people tend to clash with their parents and society in an attempt to establish an individualised and independent identity, it is important that they should view their home environment as a safe and stable base to return to in order to successfully negotiate this stage of development and attain the ego strength of reliability or fidelity. Failure to do so may result in role confusion, characterised by uncertainty about one's own

identity and a lack of loyalty towards one's social role or roles (Erikson, 1963; Erikson, 1968).

Therefore, parental absence will have effects on children, especially at a crucial period, such as adolescence, when it may well trigger long-term, negative psychological effects and both adaptive and maladaptive behaviours in an attempt on the part of the child to cope with the removal of important attachment figures and familial support system.

1.3 Mechanisms used to cope with parental absence

The continued and stable presence of parents/caregivers in a child's life has been generally seen as beneficial to optimal development and identity formation, whilst the removal of such figures may be perceived as a stressor and act as the trigger for a variety of coping or defence mechanisms, which may, in turn, become maladaptive and be the cause of developmental anomalies and psychopathologies.

Blatt and colleagues, using a psychoanalytic object-relational and Piagetian cognitive-developmental approach, postulate that interpersonal relatedness and self-definition are two core life-long, developmental processes which operate synergistically, thus the development of one enhances that of the other (Blatt, 1974, 1995b, 1998; Blatt & Blass, 1996; Blatt & Shichman, 1983; Blatt & Zuroff, 1992). Interpersonal relatedness refers to the need to establish relationships which are close, nurturing, stable and protective, whilst self-definition concerns the need to establish a sense of self which is differentiated, coherent, stable, realistic and positive – two characteristics which are primary features of optimal development (Blatt & Blass, 1996; Blatt & Shichman, 1983). Therefore, children who experience their parents (or primary caregivers) as providers of safety and security will be able to develop an enhanced and more complex and autonomous sense of self, in turn resulting in superior relational skills. On the other hand, parental absence at any stage could well disturb the balance between these two processes which will necessitate that the child will have to use some or other coping mechanism, otherwise it could result in psychopathology (Blatt, 1998). Two kinds of psychological mechanisms that

will be explained in this study are ego defence mechanisms, according to Psychoanalytic Theory and more positive coping mechanisms, proposed by Grasha (1983).

Ego defence mechanisms, as proposed by Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory, are subconscious processes mainly associated with the anxiety produced by conflict and involve some degree of distortion of reality and self-deception in an effort to deal with stress. Although, in the short-term, these may be considered desirable, in the long-term they are generally unhealthy. Some of the major ego defence mechanisms that may be employed by adolescents to deal with parental migration are repression (forcing threatening thoughts out of consciousness), displacement (expressing feelings on a substitute object), denial (refusal to accept certain aspects of reality), rationalisation (finding acceptable excuses or justifying actions), regression (behaving in ways typical of an earlier stage of development), isolation (a form of dissociation) and sublimation (channelling unacceptable impulses into other acceptable activities, such as sport or art) (Gross, 1993). Identifying such defence mechanisms in Diaspora orphans may assist adolescents to consciously replace them with more positive coping mechanisms before they become entrenched. (These defence mechanisms will be described in more detail in a subsequent chapter).

Coping mechanisms, as described by Grasha (1983), on the other hand, are conscious ways of trying to deal with stress and anxiety in a positive manner. These processes use thoughts and behaviours to search for available problem-solving strategies, to seek help from others, to acknowledge feelings and to set goals and objectives. Eight main coping mechanisms are proposed: objectivity, logical analysis, concentration, empathy, playfulness, tolerance of ambiguity, suppression and substitution of thoughts and emotions. Adolescents who employ these mechanisms to deal with their parents' absence, as opposed to resorting to defence mechanisms, should be better adjusted, display little or no pathology and generally have a more positive attitude to themselves and others. (These mechanisms will be described in more detail in a subsequent chapter).

1.4 A need for research on Zimbabwean adolescents

Possibly attributable to the current socio-economic and political turmoil in Zimbabwe, no official figures are available on the number of individuals who have departed the country in search of financial stability for their families, or the children left behind, making it difficult to assess the extent of the problem. However, on estimated figures mentioned previously (1.1.), it seems that a large number have left Zimbabwe. Even in South Africa, attempts at estimating the number of Zimbabwean immigrants currently living there have failed, according to a paper presented by the University of Witwatersrand (2007), and researchers have resorted to conjectures when estimating these figures. International migration trends may also differ from one country to another and may not be applicable to the Zimbabwean context, thus the need for detailed investigations in this respect is evidenced. Furthermore, not much is known on the successful and unsuccessful coping mechanisms that children employ under these circumstances and themes that pervade their experience as no studies appear to have been carried out in Zimbabwe.

There seems to be a dearth of empirical and, especially, qualitative research available on the effects of Diaspora on Zimbabwean adolescents, and how these youngsters perceive their situation. Some empirical studies in other countries have attempted to establish how absence affects children in a number of spheres, such as academic performance, as in the work by Engel, Gallagher and Lyle (2006) who investigated the effects of military deployment of parents in the United States. Another study by Codjoe (2007) presented data to show that the home environment and parental encouragement contribute to academic success of Canadian-Caribbean adolescents, but they have not provided insights on the way these children view their situation. Smith, Lalonde and Johnson (2004) carried out qualitative studies on the effects of parental separation on Caribbean children, but these are retrospective and focus on problems encountered by these children following reunion with their migrant parents. These studies, however, show that parental absence does affect adolescents and, because of the number of people who have left Zimbabwe, point to the need for country-specific research.

1.5 Aim and methodology of this study

The aim of this study is to explore the way in which Diaspora orphans view parental absence by identifying themes, structures of meaning and any coping or defence mechanisms that may be employed by adolescents to deal with their unique living circumstances. By making use of qualitative methodology and an interpretive/phenomenological approach the researcher proposes to collect a rich spectrum of information regarding these children from their subjective perspectives. A number of semi-structured interviews will be carried out with Zimbabwean secondary school students identified by their institutions as having migrant parents. Students from both private and state schools will be used in the study in order to cater for the widely differing socio-economic status (SES) of the families in question, as it is anticipated that SES will affect the caring arrangements made for these children and, in turn, affect their experience. Children of both sexes will be included in the study in order to obtain as wide an array of opinions as possible and to enable the researcher to compare findings by gender. It is anticipated that the use of a number of defence and coping mechanisms will emerge from the interviews carried out, and some may be more prevalent than others, for example rationalisation, as children would be inclined to justify parental absence to themselves and others.

Due to the present world-wide financial crisis and migratory labour trends, the incidence of Diaspora orphans may become progressively more widespread, affecting even countries previously exempted from the Diaspora phenomenon, as unemployment rates skyrocket everywhere. In Zimbabwe, no short-term solution appears in sight as the current socio-economic and political problems are far from being resolved and this could mean an increase in the number of migrant parents and, consequently, in the children left behind. It is therefore important to gain greater insight into the problem by investigating how parental absence is experienced by secondary school students and how these children view their circumstances. Increased knowledge of these children's life view and ways of coping will enable researchers to formulate recommendations aimed at facilitating the development of interventions, on the part of parents,

caregivers and educational establishments, for dealing with these adolescents' unique needs.

1.6 Following chapters

In the following chapters, an in-depth literature survey will highlight how parental absence can affect children during adolescence, as well as the need for qualitative information on these youngsters. Details on how the research was carried out, together with selected transcripts of interviews will be presented as well as in-depth analyses of data. Themes and structures of meaning emerging from the interviews, together with coping and defence mechanisms will be presented and comparisons will be carried out by gender and socio-economic status (SES). Finally, recommendations will be put forward in order to facilitate these children's integration in their society and to maximise the positive aspects of their experience.

1.7 Conclusion

Many Diaspora orphans are in mainstream education, but their plight remains unvoiced and little is done to help them, especially because many parents fail to notify the schools of a change in family arrangements due to parents leaving the country. Furthermore, as little information exists on their experiences, it is difficult to provide guidelines for educational establishments and for caregivers aimed at assisting those that may fail to cope successfully with their individual circumstances. Increased knowledge of the phenomenon will assist schools and other establishments to develop specific interventions targeted at assisting those who have been negatively affected, such as a more equitable system of assessment and streaming of these children. Emerging themes, identified by the present research, may further prompt the development of additional measures to ensure that the Diaspora orphans of Zimbabwe receive as much support as possible from their scholastic and domestic environments to facilitate and maximise their individual optimal development.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and the Conceptual Framework on Diaspora, Adolescence, Coping and Defence Mechanisms

2.1 Diaspora

Diaspora, originally a term which referred to the dispersion of Jews outside of Israel from the 6th Century B.C., when they were exiled to Babylonia, has been universally adopted to mean a dispersion of people from their original homeland (Hornby, 2000). The Diaspora phenomenon is not new, as people have always tended to migrate to places where conditions are more favourable, following both legal and illegal routes.

In ancient times, many people left Greece for Asia Minor and Italy and there were migrations of entire populations in the early Middle Ages. With the discovery of America, countries such as Spain, France, Portugal, the Netherlands and Sweden sent out large numbers of emigrants. In more recent times, many left overcrowded Europe, where wages were low, for new lands. It is estimated that between 1830 and 1930 as many as twenty million people emigrated from Europe (Hammerton, undated). Zavoli (1981) quotes figures of twenty-six million Italians having left their country between 1876 (when the first official migration figures were recorded) and 1970 due to socio-economic hardships, such as high unemployment rates and landed proprietorship*. Many of these migrants left their families behind and remitted money to them in the hope of alleviating their sufferings. The same trend is still seen today in many parts of the world, for example, the influx of Mexican, and other Central and South American workers into the United States of America. When children are left behind, they are sometimes referred to as "Diaspora orphans" (Shaw, 2008).

* *Landed proprietorship (latifondismo): a system whereby large tracts of land are owned by one individual, forcing small-scale farmers to rent land and making it very difficult for them to earn a decent living from farming.*

2.2 Incidence of migration

Estimating figures of children left behind is an ominous task, as working with migration statistics is inherently complicated due to criteria and methods differing in each country. Furthermore, as migratory channels are varied, and include both legal and illegal ones, the figures are further confounded. Some researchers, such as Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen (2007) attempted to circumvent the problem by deriving the number of children left behind from the number of labour migrants through household surveys. By following this system, they found that in South Africa 25% of all households had a member who was a migrant worker, a figure which increased to 40% for rural areas. Regardless of methodology, the figures are staggering world-wide. Bryant (2005) estimated that in Thailand some half a million children up to the age of 14 are left behind by their migrant parents. In the Philippines, three to six million children are affected, representing 10% to 20% of Filipino children, and approximately one million children in Indonesia.

In Zimbabwe, no recent official figures are available (we only have estimations as mentioned in Chapter 1). In a background document prepared for a meeting on 27 November 2007 at the University of the Witwatersrand, hosted by Lawyers for Human Rights, the Wits Law Clinic, and the Wits Forced Migration Studies Programme, it is pointed out that although much attention has been paid to estimating the number of Zimbabweans currently in South Africa, most of the commonly quoted statistics, which range from one to three million Zimbabweans, are extrapolated from ungeneralisable data (including deportation numbers, border crossing statistics or asylum statistics) or are based on conjecture (University of Witwatersrand, 2007). Since 2007, the incidence of migration from Zimbabwe has considerably exacerbated, implying even greater numbers at present. Although these figures are not conclusive, they suggest that parental migration affects tens of millions of children globally and possibly even several million in Zimbabwe alone.

2.3 Effects of parental absence

The effects of parental absence are many fold and impact on diverse aspects of the lives of those affected by the experience. In view of the vast number of

children who are left in their home countries while their parents join the Diaspora, it is vital to investigate this topic further.

2.3.1 Dearth of African research on parental absence

According to Wagaw and Achatz (1985), little research has been carried out in Africa to assess the influence of both family life and marital status on child development. Studies specifically on the effects of Diaspora, and more specifically carried out in Zimbabwe, could not be found. Studies that could be found were done on broken homes or where parents were divorced. An example of such studies is that of Wagaw and Achatz (1985) who hypothesized that African adolescents from broken homes would experience a number of problems in social relations and group activities, reduced popularity, and, in the academic context more fluctuation in performance and more disciplinary problems when compared to peers from two-parent homes. To test this, they interviewed 8th to 11th grade students from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. They found that overall the social and academic profile of children from broken homes differs from those of intact ones, with students from the former generally at a disadvantage. It was noted, however, that effects varied depending on age, gender and socio-economic background. In view of the above, it can be surmised that parental absence due to migration could have similar effects as children's home circumstances are altered when a parent leaves to work elsewhere.

2.3.2 Economic and socio/economic effects of parental absence

Migration is a pervasive phenomenon which has been extensively researched because of its socio-economic impact on both the host countries and the countries of origin of those involved. A significant example is the Chinese emigrant community who, between 1985 and 2000 accounted for 70% of China's foreign direct investment, boosting the country's rapid economic growth for that period by working outside the country and remitting portions of their income back home (Sward, 2009). In 2006, approximately US\$300 billion were sent to migrants' households in their countries of origin from migrant workers all over the world (IFAD, 2007). Although this represents enormous developmental possibilities for impoverished countries, the economic

considerations do not necessarily outweigh the cost to the family as the basic structure in society. Silver (2006) found that anticipated financial gains obtained from migration often outweigh psychological costs when families decide whether their members should leave their countries of origin and Lane (2000) observed that individuals from countries where migration is widespread tend to pursue economic gain at the expense of family solidarity and intimacy.

Although international migration is mostly regarded negatively as the loss of skilled workers by third-world countries, growing evidence shows that it has positive effects on social and economic development in those countries. According to the World Bank (2003), remittances have become a rising source of external funding for developing countries. In a paper presented by the Economic Commission for Africa (2006) at the United Nations Secretariat in Turin, Italy, in 2006, the economic benefits of the Diaspora to the countries of origin were outlined, including its impact on children's education. In another study, Lachaud (1999) found that Zimbabwean families where one (or more) members work outside the country tend to have higher levels of educational attainment as compared to households without migrants. This is due to the fact that foreign currency earnings from Diaspora populations remitted back to the country of origin make a significant difference to a family's income, resulting in the ability of households to pay for food, other necessities and especially for schooling/education.

In a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America and the World Congress of Sociology, in 2006, Lu and Treiman (2006) reported that receipt of remittances significantly increases the chances that children attend school in three ways: through increased household educational spending, diminished incidence of child labour, and easing of the negative effect of parental absence due to out-migration. They also show that remittances help reduce within-household gender inequalities and between-household socio-economic status (SES) inequalities as they lead to an increase in the chances of enrolment for females, rural children, children from poor households, and children whose parents are absent.

In contrast, a joint UNICEF/UNDP (2007) background paper stated that school performance of girls of migrant Mexican parents is compromised by their obligations to carry out household duties and having to care for younger siblings. Empirical research on the links of children's schooling to remittances from migrant parents in Latin America and Asia has shown similar results (McKenzie, 2006; Yang, 2004). Kandel and Kao (2001) examined how temporary U.S. labour migration by family members affects the educational performance of children growing up in Mexican migrant communities. Their findings show that parental absence due to migration has a two-fold effect on children. Firstly, it brings earnings into the household, which allows parents to provide more education for their children, and reduces the incidence of children's labour. These higher incomes are also associated with many factors that improve the general well-being of children, as reflected in various indicators, including higher school grades. Secondly, it was noted that labour migration also impacts negatively on children by increasing family stress and behavioural problems in adolescents.

2.3.3 Psychological/psychosocial effects of parental absence

Studies on the effect of parental absence have explored a number of areas of concern in addition to the economic ones, for instance, educational achievement, psychological and behavioural anomalies, socio-cultural and linguistic challenges and difficulties experienced by children reuniting with the parents after separation. The affective consequences on the family unit and its culture have also been considered. Many studies have recognised that migration affects more than just the individual but has a significant effect also on the families who suffer strain, have to reorganise and are disrupted by the experience (eg. studies by Willis & Yeoh, 2000; Yeoh, Huang & Lam, 2005). However, these studies have contributed little to providing details of how the lives of those who have been left behind have been reshaped and affected by the absence of key family members.

Much has been written on the negative effects of Diaspora on families. The plight of the Diaspora orphans left behind in the care of others has also been extensively highlighted, particularly in the case of those who, due to unsuitable

caring arrangements and unable to join their parents, fall prey to child abuse of every description (Shaw, 2008). James Elder of UNICEF (2007), speaking on the Zimbabwean situation in an article published on Alertnet, said that when parents leave their children behind, particularly in difficult times where there is a need to cushion families against poverty, it increases the offspring's vulnerability.

Migratory separation, when parents migrate and leave their children behind, was investigated by Pottinger (2005) in a case-control sample of 9 to 10 year-olds living in inner-city communities in Kingston and St Andrew, Jamaica. Data analyses using descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations show that parents' absence is directly related to poor school performance and psychological difficulties in their children. In Zimbabwe, Betty Makoni (2007) of the Girl Child Network, pointed out that the absence of parents has negative psychological effects on children, discernible in a loss of concentration at school, especially evident in older children who have the additional responsibility of heading the family.

In the United States, Engel, Gallagher and Lyle (2006), investigated the effects of parental absence due to military deployment on children's academic achievement, building on work by Pisano (1992), Angrist and Johnson (2000), and Lyle (2006), all of which looked at how deployments affect military households. Impelled by the demands of the Global War on Terror, in conjunction with ongoing security commitments around the world, the United States military has deployed large numbers of troops overseas in the past five years. More than 25 percent of military households have school-age children, and between 2002 and 2006, some 132,154 children of American soldiers have experienced parental absence due to a deployment. These absences are becoming increasingly frequent and longer in duration. The authors found that parental absences, especially those due to military deployments to hostile theatres can induce feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and helplessness in children. Furthermore, their study, conducted using standardized test scores and personal characteristics of a sample of approximately 56,000 observations for school-age children enrolled in Department of Defense schools between

2002 and 2005, found that children suffer a small but persistent academic penalty when their parents deploy and that the cumulative long-term effects of repeated deployments could become substantial by the time a child reaches the 11th grade.

Parental absence due to divorce has also been extensively explored and, in spite of the fact that for Diaspora orphans parental absence is not due to divorce, it may still be surmised that they may have to deal with similar outcomes as children affected by divorce. Kunz and Kunz (1995) reported that data from a study of 169 college men and women in the United States showed a significant difference in grade point average between students from divorced and intact homes. He also carried out a review of literature spanning sixty years of 347 experimental studies confirming that divorce has negative consequences for children's academic achievement and can affect scholastic progress and test results. Many other areas of development are affected by divorce. A survey carried out on pooled data from 80 000 adults indicates that those who experienced parental divorce, among other problems, tend to have more behavioural problems, lower psychological well-being, less education, lower job status and standard of living, as well as poorer physical health (Amato, 1994).

2.4 Attachment

John Bowlby (1969, 1973) believed that an infant's early experiences with the mother (or primary caregiver) and the resultant bonding, which he termed "attachment", contribute to later social competence and how a person interacts with others in later life. Through these early interactions children form "internal working models" of the self and relationships which are carried forward into new experiences and relationships that affect children's subsequent behavior and their expectations regarding the sensitivity and responsiveness of others (Waters & Deane, 1985). These models become more sophisticated and stable with age – they cannot be modified easily (Bowlby, 1969; DeWolff & Ijzendoorn, 1997). Understanding these processes, and any subsequent changes thereto, is important as they provide continuity between early attachment and later functioning. Bonding experiences of Diaspora orphans

may be shaped by the loss of a primary attachment figure due to migration and it is therefore important to consider their experiences in view of Bowlby's and other attachment theories.

Attachment is an emotional relationship that entails an exchange of comfort, care and gratification (Bowlby, 1969). It began with Freud's theories about love but it is British psychoanalyst John Bowlby (1907 - 1990), who is generally recognised as the father of attachment theory as he devoted extensive research to this concept describing it as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (1969, p.194).

According to Feeney and Collins (2010), attachment bonds have four defining features:

1. *proximity maintenance* — the attached individual wishes to be in close proximity to the attachment figure;
2. *separation distress* — the attached individual experiences an increase in anxiety during unwanted or prolonged separation from the attachment figure;
3. *safe haven* — the attachment figure serves as a source of comfort and security such that the attached individual experiences diminished anxiety when in the company of the attachment figure; and
4. *secure base* — the attachment figure serves as a base of security from which the attached individual engages in explorations of the social and physical world.

Bowlby agreed with the psychoanalytic stance that early experiences influence development and behaviour in later life and felt that attachment styles established in childhood affect those in later life. Together with his colleague, Mary Ainsworth, he formulated a theory of attachment which draws on concepts from ethology, cybernetics, information processing and developmental psychology which emphasises the importance of child-mother attachment and the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore and the consequences of disruptions to such relationships caused by separation, deprivation and bereavement (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). In

conjunction with Robertson (Robertson & Bowlby, 1952) three phases of separation response were identified: protest, despair and denial or detachment (related to the defence mechanism of repression). During the first protest stage, the infant cries and will not be consoled by others. In the second despair stage, the infant is passive and appears sad. Finally, during the third detachment/denial stage, the infant actively avoids and ignores the parent if the parent returns (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

In a laboratory procedure known as the “Strange Situation”, Ainsworth separated attachment into three types: *secure*, *avoidant* and *resistant*. A baby with secure attachment turns to the mother for comfort or protection and receives care without fail from a loving mother. Babies with avoidant attachment withdraw from or ignore the mother who generally rejects them. Resistant (or ambivalent) attachment is characterised by clingy behaviour on the part of the child and inconsistent care from the mother (Fraley & Spieker, 2003). The “Strange Situation” classification has proven consistent over time and is now widely used in psychology as it postulates that attachment behaviours formed in infancy influence the way people deal with relationships in later life. In Figure 2.1 the difference between secure attachment and other more negative kinds of attachments is illustrated.

Although this theory focuses on infancy and early childhood attachment, in his trilogy, *Attachment and loss* (1969; 1973; 1980), Bowlby points out that in mammals and birds, behavioural systems tend to become organised during specific sensitive developmental periods and later he presents an epigenetic model of personality development which could be seen to imply that attachment affects personality development and behaviour beyond infancy and early childhood. In addition, in subsequent work, he states that individuals who grow up to become fairly stable and self-reliant generally have supportive parents who also know when to allow and encourage autonomy. Bowlby also feels that “the inheritance of mental health and of ill health through family micro-culture is no less important, and may well be far more important, than is genetic inheritance” (1973, p.323). According to Pickover (2002), insecure attachment styles have been linked with psychiatric disorders, especially after

the loss of an attachment figure, and these children may additionally develop the inability to form secure attachments and become hostile and rejecting of their environment.

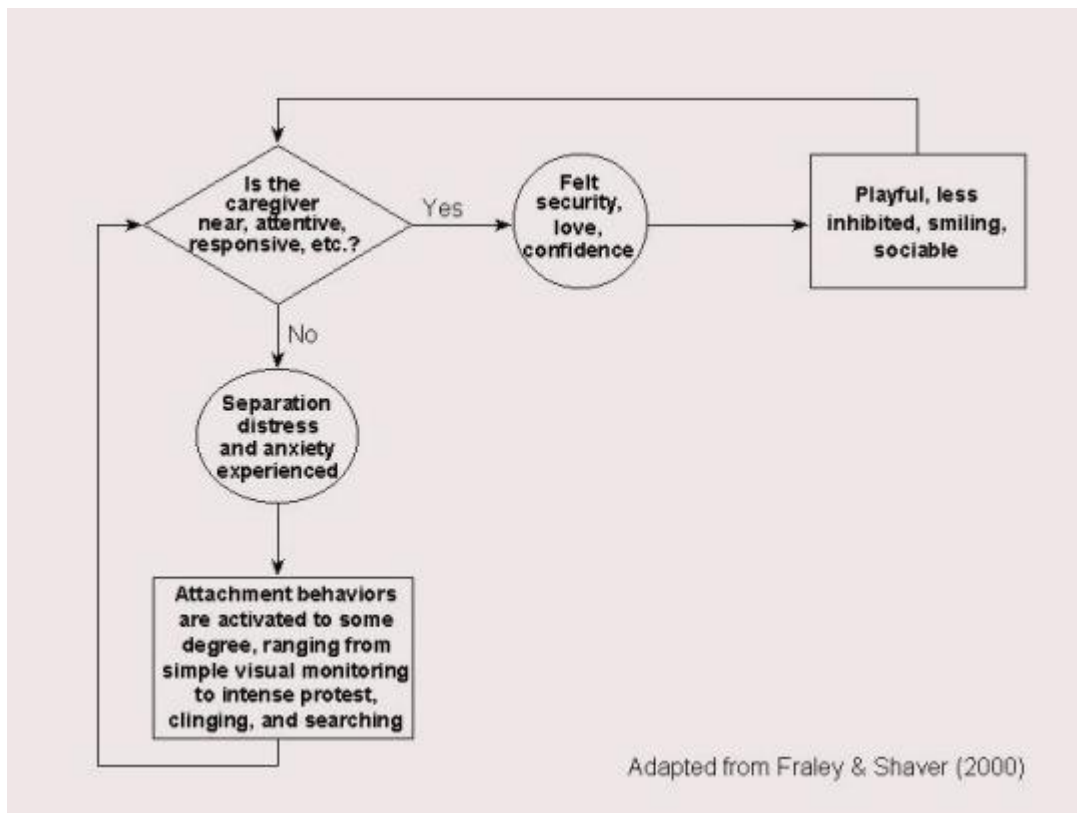


Figure 2.1. Attachment patterns between infant and adult (adapted from Fraley & Shaver, 2000)

2.4.1 Attachment in adolescence

In adolescence, attachment relationships with parental figures change, and these bonds can even be perceived by adolescents “more like ties that restrain than like ties that anchor and secure” (Allen & Land, 1999, p. 319). As a key task of adolescence is to develop autonomy and to learn to rely less on parental support, a new way of dealing with attachment is formed. This does not mean that the relationship becomes less important because, as youngsters strive for autonomy, they will become less dependent on their parents but will still need to turn to them for support and security if they feel overwhelmed, behaviour consistent with infants’ exploratory systems. In fact, adolescents who display autonomy-seeking behaviours generally have a positive and secure relationship with their parents and know that they can rely on them at all times (Weiss, 1982; 1991).

An important process in adolescence is the transfer of reliance from parents to peers, who become the main attachment figures at this developmental stage, in an attempt to attain independence and autonomy. Generally, adolescents find their contemporaries easy to rely on as they have much in common with each other. Although this process of transference can be difficult at first, it serves the purpose of encouraging the formation of adult attachment styles and long-term relationships with peers, some even of a romantic nature (Weiss, 1982). Adolescents who have insecure attachment styles and their families may encounter difficulties transitioning attachment relationships and balancing autonomy and attachment needs. As these adolescents feel uncertain that their attachment relationships may last in the face of problems or disagreements, they generally tend to avoid dealing with these issues, unlike securely attached adolescents who try to resolve problems and disagreements immediately. This avoidance may become a pattern that could cause difficulties later in life and even lead to depression and other disorders. In her paper, Lee (2010) points out that adolescent depression has also been linked to maternal attachment insecurity and that in the face of a changing relationship and emotional instability, parents should be aware of the fact that they are needed by their offspring more now than ever before.

2.4.2 Attachment in adulthood

Attachment theory does more than help us to understand emotional reactions in infants as it also provides a framework for understanding love, grief and loneliness in adults as attachment styles in adults are believed to evolve directly from the internal working models of the self (as worthy or unworthy of love) and of others (as responsive or unresponsive) that were developed during infancy and childhood. It is thought that these internal working models develop mainly from interactions with important attachment figures and, once established, are believed to shape emotion regulation and social interaction patterns in childhood and adulthood (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1973).

The study of attachment processes in adult relationships only began in the late eighties with the work of Cindy Hazan and Philip Shaver (1987) who identified

four prototypic adult styles of attachment analogous to those found by Ainsworth and Bowlby in infants, derived from two underlying dimensions, referred to as *anxiety* and *avoidance*. These underlying dimensions and attachment styles are depicted in Figure 2.2. The anxiety dimension refers to how much a person worries about being unloved or rejected, whilst the avoidance dimension refers to the extent to which a person avoids interdependence and intimacy. The first style is known as *secure* and applies to adults who are low in both avoidance and intimacy and are, therefore, comfortable in intimate relationships, capable of turning to others for support and confident knowing that they are loved and valued. The second style is known as *preoccupied* (anxious-ambivalent) and applies to those high in anxiety and low in avoidance, who have an excessive desire for closeness and high dependence needs and who are also fearful of rejection. The third style is known as *dismissing avoidant* and characterises those who are low in attachment and high in avoidance, who perceive close relationships as unimportant whilst valuing independence and self-reliance. Finally, the fourth style, known as *fearful avoidant* typifies those who are high in both anxiety and avoidance and thus desire intimate relationships and approval of others yet avoid close relationships as they fear rejection. Researchers in the field of adult attachment have argued that these four styles of attachment in adulthood can be understood in terms of rules that direct responses to emotionally distressing situations (Fraley & Shaver, 2000) evolved partly in the context of parental responsiveness to distress signals (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). A number of empirical measures using self-reports and interviews based on these styles of attachment have been developed, such as Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) "Attachment Styles Among Young Adults: A Test of a Four-Category Model", used to study adult intimate relationships.

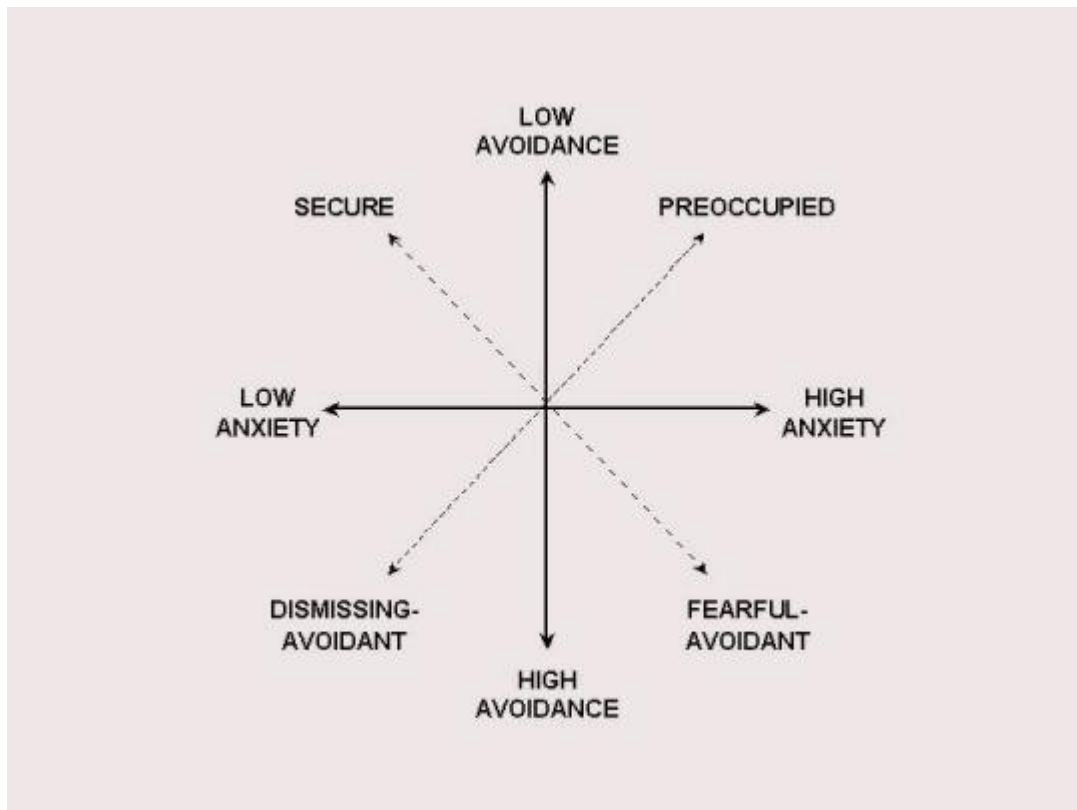


Figure 2.2 Dimensions underlying adult attachment styles (adapted from Hazan & Shaver, 1987)

Although studies have shown evidence of stability of attachment styles across adulthood, a number of studies have reflected instability attributed to change in working models over time, shaped by changing inter-personal circumstances (Davila, Karney & Bradbury, 1999; Fuller and Fincham, 1995). This could have serious repercussions in the attachment styles of Diaspora orphans because, for example, a previously securely attached infant who has shown secure attachment during childhood, could develop an insecure attachment style in adolescence triggered by the departure or absence of a parent.

Research has also investigated how secure and insecure adults differ in inter-personal behaviour in a variety of contexts. These studies have found that secure adults are generally more effective support-providers and support-seekers than insecure ones (Carnelley, Pietromonaco & Jaffe, 1996; Collins & Feeney, 2000); secure adults use more constructive ways of dealing with conflicts than insecure ones (Pistole, 1989); secure adults tend to utilise more effective communication styles (Feeney, Noller & Callan, 1994); and secure

individuals respond more adaptively to separation than insecure ones (Fraley & Shaver, 1998). Attachment style differences in adult sexual behaviours have also been studied. For example, Brennan and Shaver (1995) found that avoidant adults are more likely than secure ones to engage in “one-night stands” and Feeney, Noller and Patty (1993) reported that they have more accepting attitudes towards casual sex. In comparison to secure and avoidant individuals, anxious/ambivalent ones (especially women) tend to have intercourse at a younger age and to have a greater number of life-time sexual partners (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002) as well as being more likely to experience unwanted pregnancy (Cooper, Shaver & Collins, 1998). Although the Diaspora orphans of this study are still adolescents, one may expect that the attachment style they develop during the period of separation may result in the positive or negative behaviours highlighted above.

2.4.3 Attachment in extended families

The structure of families varies significantly according to cultures and societies and has become progressively more diverse and complex, thus, caution should be exercised when applying attachment theories to extended families that do not adhere to Euro-centric Western models as these models place great emphasis on the mother-child attachment. However, as Sua’rez-Orozco, Todorva and Louie (2002) noted, in many cultures, relationships with extended family members are also significant and, therefore, the loss of the primary attachment figure may be experienced as less traumatic. Because of this, the importance of attachment figures should be seen to extend beyond the mother to other primary caregivers.

In Zimbabwe, the predominant family structure is patriarchal with great emphasis placed on the role of the extended family. Thus, migrant parents generally entrust the care of their children to grandparents or other relatives. Although this can be positive in some cases, in other instances a number of problems can be expected to arise in these caring arrangements, especially when the adolescent becomes part of an existing family group and feels marginalized, or when inter-generational problems arise with grandparents who live by, what the children consider, old-fashioned and obsolete values.

2.4.4 Conclusions on attachment

In conclusion, although Weiss (1982; 1991) believes that bonds of attachment are not found in all relationships, only in those of emotional significance which are crucial to a person's sense of security and emotional stability, he does not negate the importance of attachment figures for optimal development. As presented in the discussion on attachment, research in this field appears to point to the fact that, although not essential, the constant and stable presence of parent/primary caregiver figures enhances the chances of a child attaining desirable qualities such as ego strength, good interpersonal skills and self-definition. For example, Blatt and colleagues, proposed that the processes of interpersonal relatedness and self-definition, which operate synergistically, are enhanced by the presence of attachment figures able to provide closeness, nurturing, stability and protection and disruptions to these relationships can prejudice the development of these qualities and may even result in psychopathologies (Blatt, 1974, 1995, 1998; Blatt & Blass, 1996; Blatt & Shichman, 1983; Blatt & Zuroff, 1992).

2.5 The Developmental Theory of Erik Erikson

Erik Erikson postulated a life-long developmental theory characterised by crises, which he considered equivalent to turning points in life, to be resolved at key stages. He also proposed this development to be epigenetic, that is, although certain potentials and needs may emerge at genetically determined times, and may predominate that stage of life, the person is constantly developing as a whole and less obvious changes are occurring simultaneously in other areas (Erikson, 1959; Roazen, 1976). Each stage of growth is related to other stages, giving a sense of continuity in development. Erikson also stresses the importance of social influences in development and sees behaviour as the outcome of inherent tendencies and patterns which are changed into specific personality traits by means of interaction with the social environment (Roazen, 1976). Therefore, a supportive environment will facilitate the successful negotiation of each developmental crisis and promote the acquisition of positive ego strengths and *vice versa*.

The first developmental crisis identified by Erikson is that of basic trust versus mistrust, which relies heavily on the mother-child relationship, as do attachment theories, as it is the mother who, with her behaviour towards her child, teaches him/her the extent to which the environment can be trusted (Erikson, 1963). Sensitive care of the baby's needs and a sense of trustworthiness projected by the mother form the basis for the successful resolution of this crisis and the acquisition of a healthy trust in the world and in themselves, which leads to the ego strength of hope which, according to Erikson, "will later combine a sense of being 'all right', of being oneself and of becoming what other people trust one will become" (Erikson, 1963, p. 249). Erikson also maintains that parents must be able to guide by setting boundaries as well as "represent to the child a deep and almost somatic conviction that there is a meaning to what they are doing" (Erikson, 1963, p. 249). In accordance with the epigenetic principle, each crisis has to be worked through again at other stages. The absence of parents during adolescence may compromise the re-working of this stage and result in a diminished sense of hope as well as distrust, reflected in interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, if the parents are not willing or able to provide the child with a convincing explanation for their absence, further damage could take place. Zimbabwe Diaspora orphans therefore may present with a sense of hopelessness (or diminished hope) and may also find it hard to establish trust in other relationships as a result of their inability, due to parental absence, to resolve this developmental crisis.

The developmental crisis of adolescence is that of identity versus role confusion. Identity is "a complex concept which can be defined as people's images of themselves, including the feeling that a thread of continuity runs through their lives and their self-images and the views others have of them are essentially in agreement" (Erikson, 1963, p. 261; Roazen, 1976, p. 25). The physical, psychological and social changes that adolescents face force them to re-examine all their previous beliefs as they begin to search for a self-image, which Erikson calls *continuity in life*. This self-image needs to be congruent with society's expectations in order to form a sense of identity. It is this search that often causes adolescents to clash with society and their parents and may

cause a sense of confusion (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2003). Erikson (1963) sees typical adolescent behaviour patterns, such as taking part in group activities, as part of their search for identity. An environment conducive to the needs of the adolescent during this search for identity will facilitate the resolution of this crisis and result in the ego strength of reliability or fidelity which is characterised by confidence in one's identity and at the same time an acceptance of others' identities as well as loyalty towards one's social role(s), whilst failure to do so may result in what Erikson terms as "role confusion" (Erikson, 1963; Erikson, 1968). Absence of parents to Diaspora during this developmental phase may mean that such a supportive environment may be critically compromised and may hinder the successful resolution of developmental crises.

2.6 Factors impacting on the effect of parental absence

A number of factors have been found to mediate the negative effects of parental absence. For example, Pottinger (2005) found that having someone to talk to about the migration and living in a supportive family can greatly affect the way in which a child perceives his/her parents' absence.

The composition of a family unit and the quality of relationships within the family can be heterogeneous in nature, where some of the relationships may, at times, be far from ideal, meaning that sometimes the loss of a parent to Diaspora has beneficial, rather than negative effects on adolescents. For example, a study by Aguilera-Guzman, Garcia and Garcia (2004) examined cases in which paternal migration led to an improvement in the emotional well-being of the remaining family members due to the removal of a hostile environment which disappeared with the removal of the father. It can be deduced, therefore, that when migration brings about a reduction or elimination of domestic violence and abuse, the experience of separation may be positive and even reduce stress within the family, thus beneficial to all concerned.

Silver (2006) found that data gathered in the course of a study suggests that absence is traumatic only when the absent family member played a role that is hard to fill by other family members or friends or provided significant social

support. The study also found that although a mother figure is not easily substitutable, the presence of what is termed “other mothers” (someone who assumes the role of primary caregiver) can help to offset the negative effects of such a loss to migration.

The role of global communication technology has also been recognized in alleviating some of the distress of separation. Products such as telephones, telephone cards at competitive rates, text messages on cell phones (sms’s), e-mail and other computer facilities (such as Skype) that allow for easy communication between family members and overcome international borders make the experience less painful, especially for adolescents who tend to rely heavily on these means of keeping in touch. The protective value of contact cannot be underestimated. One of the respondents in the study by Smith, Lalonde and Johnson (2004) epitomizes this by stating that his experience was not as traumatic as some of those of his friends who had a trying time being separated from their parents, because his mother remained in close contact with him and his siblings, which he felt really helped while they were apart.

The length of the separation from parents also determines how the time is experienced, with longer separations being associated with more negative and long-lasting effects. Estrangement of children from their parents and difficulties in conforming to parental expectations are common, and lengthier separations make the emotional connection between parent and child increasingly fragile. Gopaul-McNicol (1993) noted that during long separation periods, the children may come to view their caregivers as legitimate parental figures, more so than their biological parents, which leads to considerable difficulties when they are reunited and during times when the migrant parent returns home.

2.7 Emerging themes — effects of parental absence on adolescents

Silver (2006) concurs that very few studies address the effects of migration on non-migrants, thus this study examines such effects on the psychological well-being of Zimbabwean adolescents left at home. Studies cited by Silver (2006) done on Latin American families affected by out-migration, were based

primarily on the Mexican Family Life Survey. These studies highlight a number of themes that appear to emerge in the context of parental migration that affect adolescents left behind, some of which are likely to appear in this study on Zimbabwean adolescents. The following are themes identified by Silver (2006) in various studies cited and reviewed by her, which also provide guidelines for the present study:

2.7.1 Depression

A significant link has been found between stressful life events and depression (Aguilera-Guzman et al., 2004; Maza, 1997; Paykel, 1973; Rodriguez, Hagan & Glenn, 2000; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Separation from a significant person due to migration is a stressful occurrence with life-long repercussions compounded by major family restructuring and adjustments. It can therefore be surmised that Zimbabwean adolescents may report feelings and symptoms generally found in depression or dysthymic disorder. The studies cited above also report a positive correlation between length of separation and higher depression levels in adolescents as compared to those not separated or separated for short periods.

2.7.2 Abandonment and rejection

A Honduran trans-national family study by Schmalzbauer (2004), reports that in interviews carried out with adolescents left behind by migrant parents, feelings of abandonment and rejection, at times caused by not understanding the reasons for being left behind and sadness at the loss of family ties, are mentioned.

2.7.3 Conflicting feelings

Some Diaspora orphans interviewed discuss the economic benefits that in their minds outweigh the psychological and emotional distress caused by separation. These children display concurrently feelings of gratitude and resentment, in varying degrees (Schmalzbauer, 2004).

2.7.4 Role changes and role additions

Studies (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1992; Schmalzbauer 2004; Aguilera-Guzman et al., 2004; Collins, 1991) have found that adolescents find it stressful having to assume roles previously provided by migrant parents. These new obligations are normally in addition to previous ones, and include “other-mother” roles for girls who have to become nurturing figures to younger siblings, household duties (cooking, cleaning, etc) and paternal roles for boys, such as household chores (repairs, maintenance, etc.) and providing support and advice to younger members, particularly in the case of the oldest male.

2.7.5 Lack of social support

Although adolescents rely more on peers than on parents for social support, they also rely heavily on parents to provide them with a secure base to explore their new identities and independence. A study by Aguilera-Guzman, Garcia and Garcia (2004), cited in Silver (2006) confirms this by noting that adolescents rely on parents for daily needs and a loss of this social support exaggerates daily stressors and causes undue strain on individuals. In particular, paternal advice and support is mentioned by some children as being greatly missed.

2.7.6 Importance of communication

The vital role that communication plays in mediating the negative effects of migration cannot be stressed enough and emerges as a constant theme during interviews with adolescents, who place great emphasis on this aspect of their experience. Silver found this reiterated in a study by Schmalzbauer (2004) who points out the importance of communication in maintaining ties in trans-national families.

2.8 Psychological mechanisms used to deal with parental absence

Defence and coping are closely related terms that refer to psychological mechanisms that individuals use to deal with adversity. Although similar, there are several differences between the two coping mechanisms, though.

It is generally agreed that coping is flexible, reality oriented and purposeful (Parker & Endler, 1996), whilst defences tend to be rigid and distort reality (Haan, 1965). Furthermore, according to Cramer (1998), defence mechanisms involve primarily unconscious automatic processes, whereas coping mechanisms typically involve conscious, effortful strategies that emphasize cognition.

Defence and coping mechanisms also differ in the fact that the former tend to be relatively stable, enduring individual characteristics whilst the latter are more situation specific and are not generally associated with personality (Cramer, 1998). According to Lazarus (1993), the distinction of various defence mechanisms was developed to understand psychopathological reactions, in contrast to coping, which is mostly regarded as non-pathological and a normative reaction to life's stressors.

2.8.1 Coping mechanisms

Interest in how individuals cope with stress has grown since research in the field of coping behaviours and activities begun in the 1960's but, in spite of progress in the field, there is still a lack of consensus regarding the boundaries of coping. The issues that appear most contentious are those of measurement and conceptualization (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen & Wadsworth, 2001) which lead to a number of problems, such as confusion when attempting to measure the construct "coping", make comparisons difficult and have given rise to a number of different approaches to the categorization of coping mechanisms.

For the purpose of the current study, Grasha's (1983, p. 162) conceptualization of coping mechanisms as "conscious ways of trying to adapt to stress and anxiety in a positive and constructive way by using thoughts and behaviours oriented towards searching for information, problem-solving, seeking help from others, recognising our true feelings and establishing goals and objectives" will be deemed to apply. It will be an aim of this study to identify and record those mechanisms used by Zimbabwean adolescents in an

effort to cope with parental absence, as a means to gain greater insight on how these youngsters manage their situation.

An overview of the literature shows a variety of categories of coping, such as “problem solving, information seeking, cognitive restructuring, seeking understanding, catastrophising, emotional release or ventilation, physical activities, acceptance, distraction, distancing, avoidance, self criticism, blaming others, seeking support and the use of religion” (Compas, et al., 2001, p.92) but for the purpose of data analysis in the current study, coping mechanisms will be categorized according to the eight mechanisms described by Grasha (1983, p.163) with the addition of “seeking support” and “physical activities” as cited in Compas et al. (2001, p.92), as these are considered by the researcher especially relevant in view of the developmental stage of adolescence. The coping mechanisms considered in this study are therefore as follows:

1. Objectivity – Separating one thought from another, or our feelings from our thoughts, which allows us to obtain a better understanding of how we think and feel and an objective evaluation of our actions.
2. Logical analysis – Carefully and systematically analysing our problems in order to find explanations and to make plans to solve them, based on the realities of the situation.
3. Concentration - The ability to set aside disturbing thoughts and feelings in order to concentrate on the task in hand.
4. Empathy - The ability to sense how others are feeling in emotionally-arousing situations so that our interactions take account of their feelings.
5. Playfulness - The ability to use past feelings, ideas and behaviour appropriately so as to enrich the solution of problems and to otherwise add some enjoyment to life.
6. Tolerance of ambiguity - The ability to function in situations where we or others cannot make clear choices - because the situation is so complicated.

7. Suppression - The ability consciously to forget about or hold back thoughts and feelings until an appropriate time and place to express them arises.
8. Substitution of thoughts and emotions - The ability consciously to substitute other thoughts or feelings for how we really think or feel in order to meet the demands of the situation.
9. Seeking support – The ability to identify and make use of an appropriate support system in order to deal with those aspects of a situation that present a challenge.
10. Physical activity – The ability to channel negative emotions and energy into physical activities instead of allowing them to turn inwards or outwards against the self and others.

Compass and Epping (1993) say that individuals learn problem-solving skills during pre and primary school years and then progress to learn emotion-focussed coping in late childhood and early adolescence as they become more aware of emotional states and the ability to regulate such states. It is therefore envisaged, that although ten coping mechanisms have been selected, not all may emerge during the course of the interviews with Zimbabwe Diaspora orphans as they may be affected by developmental and personal factors and, conversely, others not mentioned above may emerge from the interviews with the adolescents in the study.

2.8.2 Defence mechanisms

The concept of the defence mechanism was originally introduced by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and was later elaborated by other psychodynamically oriented theorists, like his daughter, Anna Freud (1895-1982), according to the Encyclopedia of Children and Adolescence (1998). The Dictionary of Psychology (Reber & Reber, 2001, p. 179) defines a defence mechanism as “an enduring pattern of protective behaviour that functions to provide a defence against the awareness of that which is anxiety-producing”. It further points out that everyone seems to agree that these processes are unconsciously motivated and acquired and are developed to protect the self from unpleasantness of many kinds. These mechanisms prevent us from being overwhelmed by traumas or perceived threats and can be useful, normal

and even positive ways to come to terms with such situations and give us time to find ways of coping. However, as they generally involve some degree of distortion of reality and self-deception, in the long term, they are generally regarded as unhealthy and undesirable because the reduction of stress that they bring about can be so appealing that the defences are maintained and become habitual (Gross, 1993).

As with coping mechanisms, the use of a particular defence mechanism is also affected by the cognitive level of development of a child (Cramer, 1998). Vaillant (1993) and Porcerelli, Thomas, Hibbard, and Cogan (1998) cite several authors (eg. Battista; Bond, Gardner, Christian & Sigal; Cramer, Blatt & Ford; Hibbard & Porcerelli) who provide empirical support for the notion of a developmental hierarchy of defence mechanisms ranging from immature to mature. As normal mental and emotional development proceed through childhood, adolescence, and late adolescence, more mature, complex, and adaptive defences emerge. Thus, it may be postulated that an adolescent's level of development will affect the use of defences, with the more cognitively complex ones, such as suppression, being adopted by the more mature youngsters, whilst denial or repression may be employed by the less mature ones.

An overview of literature reveals that there are a variety of defence mechanisms and different categories, depending on the source used. For example, Vaillant (1993) lists them in different categories whilst Gross (1993) simply describes the major ones. It will be an aim of this study to identify and record the defence mechanisms used by Zimbabwean adolescents and for the purpose of data analysis, these mechanisms will be categorized according to those described in Gross (1993), as follows:

1. Repression – forcing a dangerous/threatening memory/idea/feeling/wish, etcetera, out of consciousness and making it unconscious.
2. Displacement – choosing a substitute object for the expression of your feelings because you cannot express them openly towards their real target. You transfer your feelings onto

something quite innocent, or harmless, because it is convenient in some way.

3. Denial – refusing to acknowledge certain aspects of reality, refusing to perceive something because it is so painful or distressing.

4. Rationalization – Finding an acceptable excuse for something which is really quite unacceptable, a “cover story” which preserves your self-image or that of someone close to you. Justifying your own and others’ actions to yourself – and believing it!

5. Reaction-formation – Consciously feeling or thinking the very opposite of what you (truly) unconsciously feel or think. The conscious thoughts or feelings are experienced as quite real.

6. Sublimation – a form of displacement where a substitute activity is found to express an unacceptable impulse. The activity is usually socially acceptable – if not desirable. One of the most positive/constructive of all defences.

7. Identification – The incorporation or introjection of an external object (usually another person) into one’s own personality, making them a part of oneself. Coming to think, act and feel as if one were that person. Involves imitation and modelling.

8. Projection – attributing your own unwanted feelings and characteristics onto someone else. The reverse of identification.

9. Regression – engaging in behaviour characteristic of an earlier stage of development. We normally regress to the point of fixation.

10. Isolation – separating contradictory thoughts or feelings into “logic-right” compartments so that no conflict is experienced. Separating thoughts and emotions which usually go together. A form of dissociation.

As with coping mechanisms, not all the above defence mechanisms may emerge from the interviews carried out with the Zimbabwean adolescents

included in this study, as developmental and personal factors will affect their use. Identifying such defence mechanisms in the research participants may assist them to consciously replace them with more positive coping mechanisms before they become entrenched.

2.9 Conclusion

In spite of the fact that many studies report negative effects of parental absence on children due to migration, findings appear to be somewhat contradictory, and no conclusive evidence stands out as to whether the benefits of such absence outweigh the negative impact of separation. Little qualitative research appears to be available on the effects of Diaspora on the well-being of adolescents, especially in Zimbabwe, and how these children perceive their situation. Furthermore, not much is known on the successful and unsuccessful coping mechanisms that children employ under these circumstances and themes that pervade their experience, making it imperative to identify these children and obtain as much information as possible on their life as Diaspora orphans in order to facilitate a friendly environment that caters for, and recognises, their unique needs.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Producing knowledge through research in the social sciences can be likened to different reporters writing an account of the same event. Each will make factual statements, knowledge claims and moral judgements to refer to an empirical reality and with their writing they will be creating conditions through which reality will be known by their readers. The realities depicted in each individual account may be diametrically opposite to one another or may highlight separate aspects of the social world being described thus creating diverse pictures (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Just like accounts of the same event can differ according to the way in which a writer approaches the topic, so can social science research produce multiple accounts depending on the way a researcher approaches a field of study.

There are two widely recognised approaches to research, namely the qualitative approach and the quantitative approach (Fouché & Delpont, 2005). The qualitative approach is holistic and its principal aim is to understand social life and the meanings that people attach to it. It is focused on people as creators of their own reality and researchers who subscribe to this paradigm try to see reality from the eyes of those who are living it, as they generally believe that there is no single reality (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Conversely, the quantitative approach focuses on specific questions or hypotheses and aims to describe reality objectively by measuring specific variables which are quantified through empirical methods (Fouché & Delpont, 2005). The social world is seen as relatively stable and researchers who adhere to this approach endeavour to predict and control human behaviour (Creswell, 1994).

To gain insight and understanding into the lives and experiences of Diaspora orphans requires an approach that allows the researcher to study the issue in depth in an attempt to generate as much rich information as possible. It also requires an approach that is naturalistic, holistic and inductive in order to increase knowledge of the unique and individual realities of the research

participants. Loxton (2004) feels that listening to children's own views has long been neglected or ignored and that children are relegated to a silent minority being spoken for by others, often well-meaning, adults, such as parents or teachers. In order to access their world, it is therefore vital to really hear what these children say in their own words and thus, the most suitable paradigm for this study is a qualitative approach.

3.2. Research question, aims and objectives

The purpose of a study can be largely determined by two factors, namely the research question and its aims and objectives.

3.2.1. The research question

The starting point of the study was the researcher's involvement with a number of adolescent Diaspora orphans which prompted her to begin investigating the matter in an effort to be more sensitive to these children's needs, followed by the realisation that little information was available regarding their situation. The researcher felt strongly that it was essential to acquire a better understanding of these children's world and their perception of it as, according to Loxton (2004), it is of fundamental importance to incorporate the child's point of view into caring systems, social policies and professional practice before any contribution of significance can be made targeted at developing and optimising human potential. In view of the above, the direction of the research is guided by the question: **How do Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans view and cope with parental absence?** Even though the qualitative methodology chosen for the study requires a flexible research design, the researcher felt that it was important to enter the field with a question in mind to guide the study. The research question was, however, formulated in a deliberately broad manner so as to allow for as large a scope as possible and an inductive approach.

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), a research question refers to the question that the study wants answered, related to the phenomenon being investigated. Furthermore, they point out that a good question is one that can be answered and one that must be measurable. With regard to measurability,

they further point out that it is misleading to think of this concept as only putting a number on something as it should not necessarily refer to experiments, clinical trials, surveys and statistics. In addition, the authors point out that the question should be important enough to investigate. Attempting to answer the above question is fundamentally important as insight into these children's lives is sadly lacking in Zimbabwe and by employing in-depth interviews guided by a flexible approach based on qualitative principles the researcher felt it would be possible to, at least in part, answer the question and provide relevant measurements in the form of themes and emerging coping and defence mechanisms employed by Diaspora orphans to deal with their situation.

3.2.2. Aims and objectives

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the aim of this study is to explore the way in which Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans view parental absence by identifying themes, structures of meaning and any coping or defence mechanisms that may be employed by them to deal with their unique living circumstances. With this aim in mind, the researcher chose the following objectives:

- To obtain first hand information from adolescents who are left behind by their migrant parent or parents by means of in-depth interviews.
- To extrapolate from these interviews emerging themes and structures of meaning.
- To identify any coping or defence mechanisms used by said adolescents, which may emerge from their interviews.
- To increase available knowledge of the ways in which being left in the home country is viewed by adolescent Diaspora orphans.
- To come to conclusions and make recommendations for further research in this field.
- To make recommendations which may be used by any interested parties to better understand and assist these adolescents, particularly in the context of secondary education.

3.3. Research paradigm and design

In this section, the study's paradigm and design are discussed and their selection justified in terms of the research question.

3.3.1. Research paradigm

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006, p.6), paradigms are “all-encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology”. Ontology refers to the nature of the reality that is to be studied, what researchers believe exists and is real. Generally scientists have ideas about the nature and reality of what they intend to study, but these ideas are so obvious that they are seldom consciously questioned (Dooley, 1990; Wilson, 1983). Therefore, ontological questions address the primary issues researchers have to deal with and are especially valuable because they influence all subsequent decisions made regarding the study to be carried out (Chafetz, 1978; Mason, 1996). Epistemology relates to the relationship between the researcher and what is to be studied – how we know and explain something. Epistemological questions make us decide what types of statements are permissible about social reality and what qualifies as being social scientific knowledge (Mason, 1996; Wilson, 1983). Methodology denotes the practical aspects of obtaining the required information. This includes the guidelines that researchers agree on and that can be relied on to give acceptable research practices and that provide us with the necessary techniques and tools (Babbie, 1995; Denzin, 1989; Mason, 1996). Goldenberg (1992, p.18) posits that methodological principles in the social sciences ensure that we can defend our findings. These interrelated paradigms function as perspectives that provide a rationale for the research and compel the researcher to specific methods of data collection, observation and interpretation in order to ensure the coherence of the study. Their importance rests on the fact that they impact on both what is to be studied and the manner in which this is done. What paradigms do not do, however, is to exactly define the purpose of a specific study, such as who or what the conclusions are to be about or even what type of conclusions are to be drawn about the field of the study (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Three dimensions of paradigms are generally quoted, namely the positivist, the interpretive and the constructionist paradigms. Each of these paradigms subscribes to a way of approaching reality along specific ontological, epistemological and methodological tenets. The positivist approach is most suitable if the researcher believes that what is to be studied is a stable and unchanging reality and wants an approach that is objective and detached that relies on the control and manipulation of reality in order to provide accurate and measurable descriptions of the laws and systems that organise social life. The interpretive approach should be chosen by researchers who believe that the reality to be studied is made up of people's subjective experiences to be obtained by utilising interactional or intersubjective methodologies, such as interviews, which will fulfil the need to explain subjective reasons and meaning that lie behind the social world. A researcher who believes that reality is fluid and changeable and made up of social constructions and discourses and who wishes to deconstruct these socio-politically constructed realities would feel that the most appropriate approach would be a constructionist one. From the above, it is evident that research that adheres to a positivist paradigm will employ a deductive stance, preferring to begin research with a theory about the nature of the world which will be tested and then generalized to whole populations, whilst those adhering to interpretive and constructionist paradigms will emphasise an inductive approach to reality, which begins with a set of vague speculations and tries to make sense of a phenomenon by observing specific instances (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Crabtree and Miller (1992) posit that a researcher must decide what assumptions are appropriate and suitable for the topic to be studied and then choose methods that are consistent with the selected paradigm in order to ensure coherence throughout the study. The most suitable paradigm for the present study is an interpretive one because, according to this paradigm, the ontology is the internal reality of subjective experience, the epistemology is empathetic and the methodology is qualitative, interactional and interpretive (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p.6). In other words, the researcher wishes to learn more about the way in which adolescent Diaspora orphans experience their reality from their subjective point of view and she will do so by employing

in-depth interviews and case studies with an emphasis on interaction with the subject and an empathetic approach, suitable for the developmental stage of the research participants, that is adolescence.

3.3.2. Research design

The research design is a “strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 34). In other words the research design is a plan that guides the collection and analysis of data that “aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure” (Sellitz, Jahoda, Deutsch & Cook, 1965, p.50). The research study needs to be designed in a way that will supply answers to the research questions and therefore what needs to be decided is the type of research suitable for a study, the persons or situations from which data needs to be gathered, as well as the type of data needed, and how it is going to be collected and analysed (Van Eeden & Terre Blanche, 2000). Research designs vary on a continuum from fixed and inflexible, like an architectural blueprint, to flexible and fluid, depending on the orientation of the researcher and the purpose of the study. For instance, qualitative researchers choose designs that are open, fluid and changeable and not technically bound as they see research as an iterative process that requires a flexible and non-sequential approach (Terre Blanche & al., 2006). In fact, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.225) state that some qualitative designs cannot be formulated in advance but must “emerge, develop, unfold” as the research question(s) and focus may change according to what emerges from observation and analysis. On the other hand, quantitative researchers prefer “pragmatic guides for action” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p.36) that specify exactly how the research is to be carried out. Regardless of the approach chosen, research designs should still be seen as strategic frameworks for action and should specify certain activities to be carried out that will ensure that valid conclusions are reached by a study. Mouton and Marais (1989) also state that the aim of a research design is to plan and structure a given project in such a way that the validity of its findings is maximised.

A vital aspect of a research design is that it should be coherent, that is all aspects of the research should fit together logically within the framework provided by a particular paradigm (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Because a paradigm includes specific theoretical assumptions, the focus of the research question(s) and the methods to be used to answer such questions, all aspects of the research should reflect the chosen paradigm (Van Eeden & Terre Blanche, 2000). For instance, a researcher working within a positivist paradigm will be interested in exposing and confirming laws of causality and should therefore ask questions regarding relationships between measurable variables and strive for accuracy and maximum control of other variables. Conversely, researchers working within an interpretive or social constructionist paradigm may want to ask questions regarding the meaning of a subjective experience and for their design to be coherent they will need to concentrate on observing people in their natural setting, not on the accurate measurement of variables.

3.3.2.1. Approaches of social scientific research

According to Grobbelaar (2000), two main approaches are recognised within social scientific research, each having evolved from a different school of thought. The first, being the quantitative approach, evolved from the positivist school of thought which stemmed from the natural sciences. This approach is concerned with cause and effect of phenomena. However, this approach was found lacking as it did not cover certain aspects of the social world, for example, man's ability to experience events in a spiritual manner. As a consequence of this, a new school of thought, humanism, appeared which recognised the uniqueness and meaningfulness of human situations and behaviour. From this, the qualitative approach evolved which is concerned with the human spirit, human behaviour and society.

The most significant differences between these two approaches concern the kind of information (data) collected and the analysis techniques employed. According to Mouton and Marais (1989), the quantitative approach is the approach used by researchers in the social sciences that is more formalised in nature as well as explicitly controlled, with a more carefully defined scope, and

that is relatively close to the approach used by researchers in the natural sciences. Grobbelaar (2000, p.88) concurs with this, calling it “more structured and controlled in nature” and points out that its scope is much bigger and more universal. Validity and reliability are vital elements of the quantitative approach and specific scientific methods and techniques are used to ensure that these requirements are fulfilled. According to Naser, Joubert and Sonnekus (1995), the points of departure of this approach are the following:

- Natural and social realities are observed and studied the same way.
- Scientific knowledge should be factually based on things that can be observed and measured by means of the senses.
- The research process should yield value-free knowledge.

They further point out that preference is given to the following methods and techniques:

- Conceptualisation of concepts that can be operationalised through measuring instruments.
- Data-collection techniques, such as structured questionnaires and schedules.
- Data-analysis techniques, varying from simple cross-tabulation of the data to complex statistical analysis techniques.

Thus, according to Neuman (2006), the aim of the quantitative method of inquiry is to discover and confirm causal laws to predict activity by making use of empirical methods that allow an independent and objective observation of the world in order to arrive at a stable and predictable truth. This approach implies that what is to be studied is made up of a stable and unchanging social reality which can be measured by dividing it into its smallest elements which should be studied separately, referred to as reductionism, by adopting an objective and detached stance. Crabtree and Miller (1992, p. 10) assert that the positivist paradigm, which is consistent with the quantitative method of inquiry, “values progress, stresses the primacy method, seeks an ultimate truth of reality and is grounded in a western tradition”. Quantitative methods tend to treat individuals as sets of numbers that can be analysed statistically, and although these methods are considered more reliable and easy to replicate and are believed to yield truthful explanations of phenomena by those who

adhere to a positivist stance (Greenberg, 1991), they do not provide the opportunity of experiencing reality as others do, nor do they try to understand or empathise with the people they are studying.

According to Wax (1971), qualitative research methods are as old as recorded history and can be traced to great historians and writers, such as Herodotus and Marco Polo. However, qualitative methods only started being employed in social research in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with works such as that of Frédéric Le Play who travelled around Europe for almost a quarter of a century collecting vast quantities of material for his study on the social and economic conditions of the working classes for his study which he published in 1855 as a series of thirty-six monographs, entitled *Les Ouvriers Européens* which earned him the Montyon prize conferred by the Académie des Sciences (Brooke, 1970; Bruyn, 1966), being one of the earliest examples. Mouton and Marais (1989, p.157) define the qualitative approach as one in which the procedures are less formalised and explicated in a less strict manner than in the quantitative approach, the scope is less defined in nature and the researcher investigates in a more philosophical manner. Thus, qualitative methodology can be broadly taken to refer to research that produces descriptive data, consisting of people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) and it is a way of approaching the empirical world. This type of methodology requires an inductive type of research that allows concepts and understandings to stem from patterns in the data, as opposed to quantitative methods that require the testing of preconceived hypotheses or theories. Furthermore, this approach is holistic as it sees people as being part of a context and does not reduce individuals to sets of variables. Qualitative researchers are interested in all perspectives and often their studies provide a forum for those who are ignored by society, like the poor and the "deviant" (Becker, 1967).

The aim of the qualitative research approach is to study the subject in its unique and meaningful situation or interactions. This approach stresses observation rather than measurement. Although less pragmatic, this approach still adheres to a set of strategies which help to guide the research and set

parameters for the collection and interpretation of data. Its points of departure are consequently as follows (Neser et al., 1995):

- Concepts that capture the meaning of the experience (situation), action or interaction of the research object (man).
- Unstructured questionnaires and interviews.
- Participant observation, ethnographic studies and case studies.
- Recordings of life histories, use of autobiographies and diaries.
- Analysis of collected data by means of non-quantitative frameworks and category systems.

As previously stated, the methods used for collecting data constitute a fundamental difference between the quantitative and the qualitative approaches. Mouton and Marais (1989, p.165) highlight these differences as follows:

- “Quantitative researchers use a system as the point of departure of research which is then applied to the phenomenon under investigation. In other words, they apply a specific structure to a phenomenon. On the other hand, qualitative researchers begin with the belief that the phenomenon should be self-evident and needs to manifest itself as it is. The task of the researcher is only to register it.
- Quantitative research looks at a phenomenon from a distance as they prize objectivity highly. A disadvantage of this is that if any behavioural manifestations emerge that were not anticipated in the research, problems may arise. Conversely, qualitative research is more involved with the phenomenon. Researchers are even willing to become part of what is being studied in order to fully experience a phenomenon. This may facilitate open observation and accurate pinpointing of behaviour”.

Borg and Gall (1989, pp. 385-387) point out that qualitative research has the following general characteristics:

- “It involves a holistic investigation carried out in a natural context. The researcher tries to study all the elements present within a particular context which is studied as a whole in order to understand the diverse

realities involved. Because of this, the researcher tries to understand a phenomenon within its social, cultural and historical contexts.

- Man is the primary data-collecting instrument. The qualitative researcher relies on man as the observer rather than on measuring instruments. As a complex situation develops, the researcher can adapt accordingly. Individual value differences and prejudices can be taken into account. Additional data are still obtained by means of more objective instruments, such as documents or questionnaires.
- The emphasis is on the use of qualitative methods.
- Subjects are selected in a purposeful, rather than a random, manner. This allows for the selection of a wide variety of subjects which can then be observed.
- Inductive data analysis is used so that unexpected results will also be highlighted. That is, the researcher collects the data before trying to understand the situation and making deductions.
- A grounded theory can be developed, that is one that has emerged from the data and not from a pre-determined theory, as in the case of quantitative research.
- The design of the research is not fixed in advance, but develops alongside the research. The researcher begins with a tentative design than can be adapted to include variables previously excluded from the phenomenon being studied.
- The subject plays a role in the interpretation of results, in order to reconstruct reality from the subject's own frame of reference.
- Intuitive insights are used and emphasis is placed in intuition-based knowledge, for example, the subject's experience of a situation.
- The emphasis is on social processes as this type of research focuses on the social processes and the meanings attached to such social situations by the participants".

Grobbelaar (2000) points out that it is important to emphasise the strong points of qualitative research and its uses in the field of exploratory and descriptive research as this approach stresses the importance of the context as well as the subject's frame of reference which is consistent with the above principles.

In accordance with the above tenets, Marshall and Rossman (1989, p. 46) state that the following types of research can be used within the qualitative approach:

- “Research that, because of practical and ethical considerations, cannot be done by means of experiments.
- Research that makes in-depth inquiries into complexities and processes.
- Research into variables which still need to be identified.
- Research that tries to find out and explore why the current policy and practice do not work.
- Research about unknown phenomena”.

It is evident from the above discussion that the phenomenological perspective is central to qualitative research, as it views human behaviour and what people say and do as a product of how they define their world. In other words, the aim of this type of research is to try to see things from other people’s point of view (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). For the above reasons, the type of research approach most suitable to provide rich, detailed information about the lives of adolescents who have been left behind by parents who work in the Zimbabwean Diaspora is a qualitative one.

3.4. Research methodology

As indicated above, a qualitative paradigm was chosen to undertake the present research because its tenets and inherently holistic nature are best suited to provide the kind of information that the researcher set out to obtain. According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), qualitative methods allow the researcher to study chosen issues in depth, honesty, and detail as they pinpoint and try to understand the categories of information that emerge from the data. In addition, as qualitative research is inductive, it enables researchers to develop concepts, insights and understanding from patterns in the data free from predetermined hypotheses or theories. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) also point out that qualitative researchers try to understand people from their own frame of reference, in accordance with the phenomenological

perspective, which is in line with the aims of this study of trying to increase knowledge about Diaspora orphans' subjective perspective of their situation.

Summarised below are some of the goals of qualitative enquiry (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Kopala & Suzuki, 1999; Terre Blanche et al., 2006) which confirm its choice as the most suited to capture the subjective experiences of these adolescents:

- A holistic understanding of a phenomenon obtained by building a complex, detailed and in-depth description of the life of the subjects and the meanings they attribute to it.
- To understand the meaning of events, actions and interactions in their context.
- To conduct research in a natural setting; not one that is alien to the participants.
- To understand an event from the subjective perspective of the research participants in order to capture the meaning they attribute to their experience.
- To understand human or social problems from multiple points of views.
- To adhere to inductive principles, letting the information speak for itself in order to expose categories, themes and patterns.
- To recognise the individuality and variability of meaning and to keep the aim of the research away from the principles of generalisability.

3.4.1. Selection of participants and selection criteria / sampling

Terre Blanche et al. (2006, p.133) define sampling as the “process of selecting cases to observe”. It is a vital step in the research process as it entails making decisions regarding which people, settings, events, processes and behaviours are to be observed. Thus, the methods employed to choose a sample will impact on both the results and their interpretation (Van Rensburg, 2000).

In quantitative research, sampling strategies are used to ensure that the cases selected to make up a sample are representative of a larger population so that findings can be generalised (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This is because, as a rule, the population to be studied is too large and unmanageable. Scaling

down the number of subjects to be studied obviously makes it more manageable and, as a result, records should be more accurate. Populations from which samples are to be drawn are consequently carefully defined and described and selection criteria are stipulated in the research design (Van Rensburg, 2000).

In qualitative research, on the other hand, the sampling process is guided by very different sampling concerns and procedures dictated by the research topic rather than by the extent to which a sample is representative of a population. According to Neuman (2006), this is because qualitative researchers are primarily concerned about how a sample illuminates social life, therefore, the purpose of sampling is to select participants who can deepen the understanding of a particular phenomenon.

The quantity of material required for a qualitative study varies, but it is generally based on the idea of theoretical saturation. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis often occur concurrently and thus, theoretical saturation is the point when a researcher stops collecting new material because it no longer adds anything to the research in the way of new information that confirms or refutes the emerging analysis. In other words, theoretical saturation is reached when the information becomes too repetitive (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

As the aim of this study is to explore how Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans experience parental absence, and in view of the fact that a qualitative approach was chosen as the most suitable for this enquiry, non-probability sampling was used to select participants for the study. According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006, p.139) this type of sampling refers to “any kind of sampling where the selection of elements is not determined by the statistical principle of randomness”, as the researcher wished to select those who met the criteria for the study, which included:

- being of an age generally accepted as falling within the adolescent phase of development, that is between the ages of 11 and 21 years; and

- having one or both parents working outside Zimbabwe, in its Diaspora (called “Diaspora orphans”).

Inclusion in the sample was, of course, also dependant upon the receipt of a completed and signed consent form on the part of the parent/guardian and of a verbal re-iteration of the adolescent’s willingness to participate in the study.

Van Rensburg (2000) states that purposive or judgmental sampling takes place when a sample is selected by a researcher on the basis of available information or his/her knowledge about the population and judged to be representative of the total population. As such, this type of sampling is influenced more by the subjective considerations of the researcher than by scientific criteria. Convenience or accidental sampling takes place when elements are selected because they can be easily accessed until the desired sample size is reached. Finally, snowball sampling is a technique that involves the participants of a study identifying other potential subjects, a system especially useful when studying sensitive or hidden populations.

In the current study, all the above-mentioned sampling techniques were employed. Purposive samples were obtained by approaching a number of secondary schools in Harare, Zimbabwe, which were selected using convenience sampling on the basis of being accessible to the researcher and willing to participate in the study. Permission to carry out research in selected schools was requested and obtained from the Provincial Education Director of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture. The researcher then approached the Headmaster/mistress of each school and gave him/her a letter explaining the purpose of the study and requesting assistance in identifying adolescents who attend the school and whose parent(s) is/are part of the Zimbabwean Diaspora (see Appendix A). Once the adolescents were identified, the researcher approached them face-to-face and explained a little about the study and began to establish a rapport with them by giving them the opportunity of asking questions regarding the research. Those who expressed an interest in participating were given a letter of invitation to join the study and a consent form to be given to their parent/guardian to peruse, sign and return to the researcher via the school office (see Appendix B). Once the consent

form was returned to the researcher, an interview time was arranged with each adolescent. Snowball sampling was utilised by asking the research participants if they knew of other adolescents within the school in the same position. At times the adolescents themselves came forward with information regarding others without the need to solicit such information, in which case the researcher made contact with them via the school authorities.

From the above process, the researcher identified approximately twenty adolescents, seventeen of which fitted the requirements of the study and were selected to make up the sample.

3.4.2. Research context

Dilthey proposed a method of understanding which he termed *verstehen* (understanding) whereby the meaning of a text can be established by piecing together the context of the text's conception in order to re-create the author's words (in Bleicher, 1980). To do this, knowledge of the socio-historical and linguistic context in which the author worked must be included in the analysis process. In the social sciences this resulted in the idea that the meaning of human words, actions, experiences or creations can only be understood in terms of the personal and societal context in which they occur (Bleicher, 1980). The principle of understanding human behaviour in context is fundamental to qualitative and interpretive research which aims to obtain terms and categories derived from subjective, lived experiences that allow an empathic insight into human phenomena.

The context of the present research is set against a back-ground of social, political and economic instability which has plagued Zimbabwe in the last decade as a result of which an estimated four million Zimbabwean have left the country to join the world-wide Diaspora (Shaw, 2008). Many of these emigrants have chosen to, or been forced to, leave their off-spring behind and remit funds back to Zimbabwe for their maintenance. Many of these children are in main-stream schooling and caring arrangements vary from being taken care of by relatives or friends to boarding at the school they attend.

Although the schools visited by the researcher seemed to be able to identify some of the adolescents who have parents working outside the country, none have accurate records of their exact number (as it seems that many parents choose not to notify the school) and no systems appear to be in place to offer them any form of support. Most schools have counsellors but no specific approach is made towards the Diaspora orphans who are not in the counselling system already unless they make a personal approach and request this service themselves.

The schools visited are all situated in the greater Harare area and not all proved willing to participate, one of them even asserting that there were no Diaspora orphans attending their school. Although approaches were made to both private and government schools, the final sample was mostly made up of girls from private schools. These schools cater for fairly affluent families and their fees are beyond the realm of affordability of the majority of the Zimbabwean population. The one government school who participated in the study is heavily funded by alumni and offers first class facilities to their students.

3.4.3. Data collection and instruments

In qualitative research the primary instrument for both collecting and analysing the data is the researcher whereas, in quantitative research, tried and tested assessment instruments are used which rely on proven statistical techniques of analysis (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In order to become the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, researchers need to develop certain skills, such as listening and interpreting in order to accurately record the phenomena they study. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) caution that a researcher employing qualitative methods should not disturb the context in which the phenomenon occurs unduly and, in order to do this, the setting should be entered with care and by interacting with the participants in an open and empathic way.

Moon, Dillon and Sprenkle (1990) assert that, in qualitative research, information is generally gathered in either a verbal or visual form through

interviewing, document analysis and participant observation. Du Plooy (2000, p.176) defines an interview as “a data-collection method [which] uses personal contact and interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee”. Interviews vary, for example, they can be structured, when a specific list of questions is asked, or unstructured, when specific questions are not present and can take place either face-to-face or over the phone (or other electronic means) (Du Plooy, 2000). Different types of interviews serve different purposes, for instance, an in-depth interview’s main aim is to obtain detailed information and is thus most suited for qualitative research. According to Pitout (1995, p.112), in-depth interviews have also been called “intensive interviews”, “unstructured, conversational interviews”, “ethnographic interviews” and “focused interviews” and they are used to delve into the reasons behind the answers, opinions or emotions expressed by a respondent (Du Plooy, 2000). Semi-structured interviews, according to Greeff (2005), are interviews that are focused around areas of particular interest yet still allow flexibility. In addition, these interviews are generally used to gain a detailed picture of beliefs and/or perceptions of a subject on a particular topic and are particularly well suited to gain insight into personal issues, one of the aims of this research study.

Du Plooy (2000) cites a number of advantages to using interviews, for example:

- they are flexible and can provide detailed and new information that may not have been anticipated;
- unclear questions and answers can be clarified, as interviews involve a dialogue between two (or more) people;
- follow-up questions can be asked to obtain additional information or clarification; and
- rapport can be established between interviewer and interviewee which enables the researcher to assist with the interpretation and analysis of the data.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used in this study, which were recorded using a cellular telephone device. The reason why the researcher

chose to use a cell phone as a recording device is because teenagers are especially comfortable using these instruments and find them non-intrusive. The cell phone was activated at the beginning of the interview and, at times, to break the ice, the researcher even asked the students to assist with this task which proved to be very successful.

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the students and thanked them for participating. They were reassured regarding anonymity and asked if they wished to ask any questions before beginning the interview. The researcher endeavoured at all times to create a comfortable and relaxed interview environment where the participants could feel safe and able to express themselves freely. The interview was started by asking questions aimed at obtaining some background information on the adolescent, such as “how old are you?” and “do you have any brothers or sisters?” as well as questions aimed at obtaining information regarding what the parents do and where. These questions were based on the interview guidelines which are attached hereto as Annexure D. These questions served as “ice-breakers” and allowed the participants time to adjust to the interview context. Once the initial part of the interview was completed, the participants were asked to speak about their situation. The interviewer had to make use of listening and interpreting skills in order to formulate gently probing and clarifying questions with the aim of eliciting more information.

At the end of the interview, participants were assured of the availability of the researcher should they feel the need for support or counselling. They were also invited to write down any additional thoughts they may like to share. The interviewer, where necessary, made field notes immediately after the interview in order to capture any non-verbal cues or additional information obtained before or after the formal interview and then transcribed the material onto a word-processing programme on the computer as soon as possible after the interview.

3.4.4. Data analysis

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006) there are numerous qualitative traditions that fall under the umbrella of interpretive analysis that vary along a continuum from quasi-statistical to immersion/crystallisation styles. Whereas quasi-statistical styles use predetermined categories and codes and a mechanical approach to analysis, immersion/crystallisation styles require becoming thoroughly familiar with the phenomenon being studied, reflecting and producing an account based on intuition and emerging themes. They further highlight that, in order to produce a good interpretive analysis, it is crucial to stay close to the data and to interpret it from a point of empathic understanding.

The purpose of interpretive analysis is to provide a rich description of phenomena, in other words a comprehensive description of the processes, transactions and contexts taking place (Geertz, 1973). Terre Blanche et al. (2006) cite an aphorism linked with the purpose of qualitative research, that is “to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (p. 321). Thus, interpretive analysis can be looked upon as being a back-and-forth motion between different dimensions and points of view, such as between description and interpretation, part and whole or foreground and background. They point out that at the end of such process people should recognise a phenomenon they know as true but should also be able to see it from a different perspective.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the analytic steps proposed by Terre Blanche et al. (2006), not necessarily in the order stated below, as follows:

1. Familiarisation and immersion

This step involved obtaining a preliminary understanding of the meaning of the data by spending time reading through the transcripts of the interviews several times and making notes where appropriate. Because the qualitative approach was used, this step had already begun during the data collection phase, which meant that the researcher, by this stage, had a basic understanding of the material gathered. Furthermore, by the end of this step, the researcher felt

that she knew her material well and had a general idea of what could be supported by the data.

2. Inducing themes

A bottom-up approach was used to try to work out what the organising principles are that underlie the material and to begin to get a general idea of the contents and possible categories and themes. In other words, the researcher looked carefully at the material in order to get a feeling of emerging themes and categories. She also tried to keep the range of categories as wide as possible to allow for diverse and divergent interpretations but, at the same time, she also tried to keep the focus on experiences related to the Diaspora phenomenon and not to include other aspects of the adolescents' experience.

3. Coding

Coding means marking various sections of the text which relate to a particular theme in the same way for example, highlighting a particular word or section in a certain colour if it relates to the theme "peer support". If a section or word applies to more than one theme or category, more than one colour is used to mark it.

Coding the data was done manually using highlighters and coloured pens and by making notes on the text. The cut and paste function of the Word programme on the computer was also used to move bits of text around. Broad categories that were found to emerge from previous studies of the subject were used to guide the process, but room was left for additional categories as they emerged. On the computer, sections were copied from the original interview transcripts and pasted under one (or more) category in order to create clusters of material for further analysis and elaboration.

4. Elaboration

This step is targeted at bringing together steps 2 and 3 above to give a new view of the material. Comparisons were made and text that appeared to belong together was noted. Each of the themes that emerged from coding was further elaborated and additional corroborating evidence was looked for in

the transcripts. Clusters of data entered under each category were re-analysed to see if more themes emerged and the entire coding system was also revised at this point. This step was conducted with the principal aim of producing a comprehensive and insightful interpretation of the phenomenon.

5. Interpretation and checking

The final step of the analytic procedure involved putting together the material into a meaningful format using thematic categories. The interpretation was then scrutinised for weak points, for example contradicting data. This step also covered the production of the written account of the experiences of Diaspora orphans as they emerged from the seventeen interviews carried out with the participants. The researcher also tried to ascertain, at this point, if and how her personal involvement affected the interpretation of the data.

3.4.5. Trustworthiness of the study

Empirical studies rely heavily on the concepts of reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the extent that the measurable features of a theory can be replicated. There are several types of validity, including internal validity, which refers to the degree that an independent variable is responsible for changes in a dependent one, and external validity, which relates to the extent to which the result of a study can be generalised to other studies (Duffy & Wong, 1996).

Although these concepts are essentially quantitative and reflect a positivist epistemology and in spite of the fact that some researchers feel that these concepts relate to measurement and that they are not relevant in qualitative research (Stenbacka, 2001), qualitative researchers are still bound to demonstrate that their interpretations are credible. In view of the above, Golafshani (2003) suggests that these concepts should be re-defined to be used in qualitative research, merged and replaced with more encompassing terms such as credibility, transferability and trustworthiness. Hence, reliability and validity are not viewed as separate concepts in qualitative research, however, Stiles (1993) proposes that reliability refers to the trustworthiness of observations of the data whilst validity refers to the trustworthiness of the interpretations of the data and the conclusions drawn from it.

With regard to the trustworthiness of observation of the data or reliability, Stiles (1993) offers a set of guidelines to ensure the trustworthiness of a research study which will be discussed below and related to the present study:

1. Disclosure of orientation

This requires the researcher to disclose any preconception, expectation, theoretical orientation or value that may impact on the study. Such disclosure assists the reader to place the interpretations offered by the researcher into a certain perspective and establishes a specific context. In this study, the researcher used a phenomenological approach and qualitative methodology as she wished to describe Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans' experiences as they emerged from the interviews conducted with them. The approach was empathic and supportive as the researcher's work brings her into daily contact with a number of these adolescents and she is therefore fairly familiar with their plight.

2. Explication of social and cultural context

This refers to making explicit to the readers the social and cultural context of the research study and that of the participants in order to frame the perspective from which a phenomenon is viewed. Furthermore, the researcher should also inform the reader of the reasons for the study. This was done by obtaining as much available background information on Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans and the socio-economic and political factors that have impacted on the phenomenon in Zimbabwe. The literature review also covered aspects of the Diaspora phenomenon in other countries in order to provide a broader perspective and a global background for the researcher to compare findings from a wide range of socio-cultural contexts.

3. Description of internal processes of investigation

This relates to the internal processes of the researcher while conducting the study and providing interpretations. As in qualitative research the main instrument is the researcher him/herself, it is important to share these processes with the reader as they will impact on the study and become part of the research itself. In the present study, the researcher did not try to remain

detached, but immersed herself in the life of these adolescents and tried to reflect carefully on how each interview and contact with each participant impacted on the way in which she viewed the material gathered.

4. Engagement with the material

This relates to the researcher's relationship with the participants and with the information gathered. Engagement also refers to a compassionate view of human experience in order to deepen understanding. The researcher established a close and trusting relationship with the participants by offering support and making explicit her availability on an on-going basis. She also researched the phenomenon extensively and then spent time making several readings of the transcripts of the interviews and making personal notes in order to truly immerse herself in the material obtained.

5. Iteration: cycling between interpretation and observation

This refers to moving between theories, interpretations and the text as "interpretations change and evolve as they become infused with observations" (Stiles, 1993, p. 605). This was done by reflecting the participants' words during interviews in a way that offered them the opportunity of confirming or disconfirming the researcher's understanding of their experience and by spending time with the transcripts of the interviews in order to allow the categories to grow and change naturally as they emerged from the text.

6. Grounding interpretations

This involves linking interpretations, observations and the interviews carried out. This was done by providing the reader with extracts from the transcribed interviews to highlight connections between themes and categories and the actual interviews.

Validity is an integral concept in both qualitative and quantitative research. With regard to ensuring the trustworthiness of the interpretations of the data and the conclusions drawn from it or the validity thereof, it is generally agreed that the use of triangulation is a sound way of controlling bias and establishing valid propositions (Mathison, 1988). Triangulation means collecting material in

as many different ways and from as many sources as possible, which helps researchers to understand a phenomenon better by approaching it from various angles (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Denzin (1970) identifies four types of triangulation:

1. Data triangulation

This refers to the use of various data sources in a study. In the present study, the researcher interviewed participants from diverse environments and backgrounds in order to obtain different viewpoints of the phenomenon. In addition, the literature review provided information on similar studies conducted by other researchers on the phenomenon.

2. Investigator triangulation

This refers to using different researchers to draw attention to previously unnoticed researcher effects, such as the effects of a researcher on the context of the study. In this study, the researcher discussed her findings with her supervisor, co-supervisor and colleagues to obtain their feedback on her interpretations.

3. Theory triangulation

This refers to the use of multiple perspectives to interpret the data. In this study, a number of different theories were used as a basis for the research.

4. Methodological triangulation

This refers to the use of several methods for studying a phenomenon and looking for converging evidence from different sources such as interviews, participant observation and reviewing documentary sources. The researcher tried to study the phenomenon in as many ways as possible by using follow-up interviews, case notes and by making use of available literature.

Stiles (1993) proposes several types of validity in qualitative research that should make the study more credible, which are discussed below and related to this study:

1. Testimonial Validity

This refers to checking the accuracy of the interpretations by asking those whose experience is studied for their views. In the present study, this was done by approaching some of the research participants and obtaining from them feedback with regard to the interpretations reached by the researcher after the analysis stage.

2. Catalytic Validity

This refers to the degree to which the research process affects the research participants by re-orienting, focusing or energising them, that is, an “interpretation which produces change or growth in the people whose experiences are being described” (Stiles, 1993, p. 611).

3. Reflexive Validity

Refers to how the theory is changed by the material obtained. In terms of the hermeneutic circle, interpretation and observation should change by re-visiting the data over and over again. In this study, this was done by immersion into the material before, during and after the analysis phase.

In quantitative research designs, Lincoln and Guba (cited in De Vos, 2005) propose four constructs that reflect the premises of qualitative analysis to replace the empirical concepts of reliability and validity. These were used to assess the trustworthiness of the present research study and are explained below:

1. Credibility: As the alternative to internal validity.

In the current study, the subjects, categories and themes were accurately identified and described.

2. Transferability: As the alternative to external validity (generalisability).

The findings of the study were compared with similar studies carried out in other countries, as a form of triangulation.

3. Dependability: As the alternative to reliability.

The empirical concept of an unchanging social world is diametrically opposed to the qualitative/interpretive approach and, therefore, replication is a problem. However, the researcher endeavoured to create similar conditions for each of the interviews by following the same interview format and using similar settings.

4. Confirmability: As the alternative to objectivity.

In order to remain objective, the researcher kept in mind the findings of other studies in the field and let the data speak rather than trying to make it fit into preconceived categories. This was done by keeping an open mind regarding other themes that might emerge from the interviews and not being restricted by the categories identified in the literature review.

In this study the researcher endeavoured to apply all the above criteria to ensure that the research was trustworthy and credible and that similar findings would be found if a similar study were to be carried out. However, all research is not immune from bias and the above criteria are vulnerable to distortion. Stiles (1993, p. 614) states that “the strategy of revealing rather than avoiding involvement is consistent with the broader shift in goals from the truth of the statements to the understanding by participants and readers”. He further asserts that this style needs to be based on “a degree of trust that the investigator and the research consumer will work responsibly toward understanding, even while pursuing personal commitments” (p. 614).

3.5. Ethical considerations

Terre Blanche et al. (2006) cite four widely accepted philosophical principles that should be applied to research to ensure that it is ethical, an approach that has become known as “principlism”, namely autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons; nonmaleficence; beneficence; and justice. The ethical aspects of the current study need to be discussed because they are particularly important due to the fact that the research involved minors. At all times the researcher ensured that no harm whatsoever was done to the

participants of the study by following the four principles of ethical research, as follows:

1. Autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons

This principle was applied by stressing that participation in the research was voluntary and that the parents/guardians of the minors signed an informed consent prior to the interviews. Protection of the participants was also ensured through confidentiality as the identities of the adolescents were kept safely locked away and no names were mentioned in the research findings. The researcher also reiterated the voluntary and informed aspects of participation by explaining the study to the adolescents before the interview and asking them if they were still happy to take part.

2. Nonmaleficence

This requires that no harm be done to research participants either as a direct or indirect consequence of the research. The adolescents were not placed under any physical risk and, on a psychological level, optional follow up counselling was offered in case the interview might be experienced as disturbing, in as much as it might bring to the fore suppressed emotions and conflicts. In addition, the researcher has experience working with adolescents and closely monitored the participants during the interviews for any signs of distress or discomfort. However, no follow up therapy was requested.

3. Beneficence

This principle requires that the researcher attempts to maximise the benefits of the research to participants. The researcher believes that, apart from the obvious benefits of acquiring more information on the plight of Diaspora orphans and making recommendations aimed at improving the care and support these adolescents receive, being able to voice their feelings in the safe context of an interview, can be psychologically beneficial to these adolescents who may have felt isolated and marginalised by society.

4. Justice

The principle of justice requires that researchers have some responsibility to provide care and support of participants and that they be treated with fairness

and equity at all times. The participants of this study were all treated in the same manner and were all offered follow-up counselling facilities. The researcher provided the participants with her contact details and ensured them of continued support in the future. Furthermore, each of the schools that took part in the study will be provided with copies of the research findings and recommendations for their information and to be made available to the parents/caregivers of the participants.

In conclusion, the researcher kept the above mentioned four guiding principles in mind at all times to ensure that the study complied with acceptable ethical principles.

3.6. Conclusion

This study is guided by the desire to obtain more information on the lives of Zimbabwean adolescents who are left behind by migrant parent(s). As such a qualitative, phenomenological, interpretive approach was chosen by the researcher in order to obtain rich and detailed data. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with secondary school pupils in Harare, Zimbabwe which were then analysed in order to extrapolate themes and categories. The researcher used several guidelines to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and adhered to the philosophical principles of ethical research to protect the participants of the study and their families.

Chapter 4

Findings based on thematic analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the themes that emerged from the seventeen interviews carried out with the participants, as well as the coping and defence mechanisms that these adolescents use to cope with parental absence, will be discussed and related to those found in the Literature Review in chapter 2.

Although the interviews varied in length, some being shorter than others, I chose to use all of them for the purpose of extracting themes with regard to how participants experience parental absence and the psychological mechanisms they use (coping and defence mechanisms), in order to achieve a broader picture than one that would have been obtained from using only the lengthier interviews.

The participants of the study, seventeen Zimbabwean adolescents whose parent(s) work in the Zimbabwean Diaspora, attending secondary school in Harare, will also be presented in more detail so as to give a feel of who they are.

4.2 The adolescents

The seventeen adolescents that took part in this study ranged in ages from 12 to 21 years. Four of the participants were males, and thirteen were females. They are all pupils of three secondary schools in Harare, Zimbabwe, two private girls' schools and a government boys' school. These three schools cater for reasonably high socio-economic status (SES) children, and offer first class education to their pupils.

When the interviews were carried out, either one or both parents of these adolescents were employed in other countries. A number of these parents are professionals, for example, university lecturers or doctors. Four of the participants have mothers who work in the Diaspora, five have fathers away and eight have both parents working outside Zimbabwe. The parents of all

these adolescents are in contact with their children and seem to remit adequate funding for the families left in Zimbabwe. This is an important aspect of their experience which will be discussed in further detail. It seems that all the participants of this study are well provided for in terms of basic needs as well as being able to attend expensive educational establishments. This has serious implications for this study as it means that the sample used is restrictive and only representative of a very small part of the Diaspora orphan population of Zimbabwe. It is the researcher's opinion that the adolescents whose circumstances are truly dire are probably not in formal education and certainly do not attend the schools from which this sample was drawn.

The children were individually approached and expressed no concerns regarding being interviewed, but some found it easier to speak about their situation than others. In particular, the researcher noted that the four boys from one school and the girls from another school were less expansive and more matter-of-fact about their situation and appeared to find it more difficult to talk about their experiences. The girls from one specific school were more open and willing to share their experience. This may have been partly due to the fact that the researcher teaches and counsels at this school. Only one of the adolescents interviewed took up the offer of follow-up counselling.

4.3 Themes

In a study done on Latin American families affected by out-migration, Silver (2006) found six predominant themes that emerged, namely depression, abandonment and rejection, conflicting feelings, role changes and role additions, lack of social support and the importance of communication. In the present study on Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans the researcher found that all these themes appeared in the course of the interviews carried out, but also noted additional ones not mentioned by Silver (2006), namely materialism, difficult relationships with caregivers and sexual abuse and molestation. Each theme will now be discussed in more detail.

4.3.1 Depression

A number of studies cited in Silver (2006) (specified in Chapter 2), report a significant link between stressful life events and depression. The separation from parents experienced by Diaspora orphans, coupled with the need for major family restructuring and adjustments is a stressful life event. The researcher found that a number of the participants of the study exhibited some of the symptoms required for a diagnosis of depression, according to the criteria of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

One of the criteria for diagnosing depression is a depressed mood. This can manifest through appearing tearful. Some of the adolescents were tearful during the interviews and talked openly about crying. For example one girl, speaking about her mother's absence, said: "If she is not there, I like, I just cry!" whilst another said that "sometimes there will be a little bit of tears". One of the participants pointed out that it is not always easy for them to cry openly: "Well, at school you just have to be carefree, because that is what most people do, be carefree, because you don't want to cry because that would draw attention to yourself" which may indicate that perhaps more of these children would be overly tearful if they felt more comfortable crying in public. Another respondent was passionate when she said: "What else is there to do? I just cry, I cry it out, then after that I go to sleep" which may indicate that perhaps this is one feeling that is especially predominant in their experience.

A depressed mood can also be diagnosed through subjective reports of feeling sad or empty. Sadness due to feeling lonely is an experience that appears quite common and emerged strongly from these interviews. Many of the respondents talked about loneliness. "I am always lonely", "you feel kind of lonely" and "it gets quite lonely". It seems that although many of these adolescents report having friends and even family members that they can turn to, the fact that one or both of their parents work in the Diaspora still generates a sense of sadness due to feeling rather lonely. This seems to point to the fact that, although according to Attachment Theory, during adolescence peers

become more important as attachment figures it is not enough to compensate for parental absence and a safe base to explore from.

The DSM-IV-TR draws attention to the fact that a depressed mood in children and adolescents can manifest as an irritable mood. Some of the respondents confirm this. One said that “sometimes you get angry and frustrated”. Others showed signs of irritability when they spoke about their caregivers and reported that often they find it difficult to get on with them. Their words show that an irritable mood could be affecting their interactions with these people. For example, one girl reported that “sometimes we have big fights, like the past two weekends, we’ve had these fights and it’s not nice” whilst another said: “I just feel something but then she is not feeling the same thing so then we have trouble getting along” when speaking about her relationship with her grandmother with whom she now lives.

Although a few of the respondents reported finding it difficult to concentrate in class (another criteria for diagnosing depression), this was not prevalent and, in fact, most of the respondents did not appear to have problems with regard to their school work.

In conclusion, although studies reviewed by Silver (2006) found a strong link between stressful life events and depression, the Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed only exhibited some of the criteria for diagnosing depression according to the DSM-IV-TR, in particular a depressed mood discernible in crying, feelings of loneliness and irritability (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). This study did not set out to diagnose depression in these adolescents but further studies could look into administering a measure for depression to adolescent Diaspora orphans to see if any would be positively diagnosed as suffering from a depressive disorder.

4.3.2 Abandonment and rejection

Schmalzbauer (2004) reports that in interviews conducted with Honduran adolescents left behind in their home country by their migrant parents, feelings of abandonment and rejection emerged. Some of the reasons given by this

study for these emotions are lack of understanding of the reasons for being left behind and/or sadness at the loss of family ties.

In the interviews carried out with Zimbabwean adolescents, abandonment and rejection are prominently evidenced in their words. "Last time I saw her I was in grade 6 and now I am in lower 6 form" said one girl, meaning that she has not seen her mother for approximately seven years. Her words were tinted with sadness and a sense of loss of the times they could have been together. "She's so far away, like there are so many things she is missing out in my life and so many things I am also missing out in her life!" she said. This girl was particularly upset by the fact that her mother knew so little about her and the person she has become. She exclaimed: "She doesn't even know how good I am, like I tell her on the phone, mom, I can sing, but she doesn't know how good I am so she has never heard me sing, ever!" This girl appeared to feel abandoned and gave the impression that her mother did not pay her the attention she felt she deserved.

One of the boys interviewed said that not having his father at home was "very negative" and passionately stated that he did not want him to go away to work in South Africa. This particular boy seemed to see his father's departure as constituting abandonment especially, as he pointed out, when his father would not be there to say "well done my son I am proud of you!" whenever he achieves something. This boy expressed himself in an angry manner, almost becoming heated. Another boy expressed concerns about his safety in the absence of his father and stated: "We don't feel safe when there is no dad at home". He looked very small and dejected when he said this and it was evident that he felt abandoned and vulnerable.

Some of the participants showed signs of feeling abandoned and rejected as a result of not understanding the reason behind parental migration, or perhaps the reason why they were unable to migrate with their parents. "I just feel it's not fair" exclaimed one girl, speaking of her parents' absence, while another said: "Sometimes I just don't understand why", supporting Schmalzbauer's (2004) findings.

Some of the participants spoke of being left behind when they were younger. “I was left when I was a child” and “I’ve never known what it’s like to be with him [my father]”. Although these words appear rather cold or detached, there was a definite incongruence between words and body language which seemed to portray vulnerability, sadness and loneliness. These adolescents appear to have experienced being left behind as a form of abandonment.

Feelings of abandonment and rejection emerging as a result of sadness caused by the loss of family ties also appear prominently in the interviews with Zimbabwean adolescents. “Well, you feel that they love you but not in the way your mother would, so then you have that longing” said one participant talking about her caregivers. One of the girls stated: “I feel it’s just not the same, [be]cause they [my caregivers] are not my parents”, echoing this sentiment. It appears that the sadness and longing for their parent(s) are not quelled by the love and attention these adolescents receive from others. Another girl said, with longing, that she often thinks that if her mother was there things would be different. One of the girls interviewed appeared to feel even more abandoned by her mother after her visits. She said: “When she goes back, it goes back to the way it was and it’s kind of harder just being by yourself”.

Abandonment and rejection also appear to result in a sense of loneliness, which emerged prominently from the interviews conducted with the Zimbabwean adolescents. Many of the adolescents interviewed came across as lonely, even those who live with one parent or who experience their caring arrangements as satisfactory. Allen and Land (1999) assert that, in adolescence, attachment relationships with parental figures undergo significant change and that ties with parents can even be seen more as restraints by adolescents than as a secure base to explore from. Weiss (1982) proposes that an important task of adolescence is the transfer of reliance from parents to peers, whereby peers become the main attachment figures, in order for individuals to attain independence and autonomy. The Diaspora orphans interviewed for this study seemed to experience loneliness which could indicate that, possibly due to the absence of one or both parents, they have encountered a set back in their quest for independence or have been unable to

shift their reliance from parents to peers, indicating a possibly delayed or skewed development in this regard. If the transition of reliance from parents to peers had taken place successfully, it could be surmised that their relationships with friends would, at least in part, compensate for parental absence and these adolescents would not seem so lonely.

Most of the Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed spoke of feelings of loneliness. "I am always lonely [when my father is away]" reported one boy. "I am lonely ... and there is no one" said one girl who lives with her aunt, uncle and five cousins and reports being otherwise well-cared for by her caregivers. "At home it's lonely, there is no one to talk to [be]cause usually I am by myself" said one girl who is a boarder at school during the week and stays with her grandparents during weekends and school holidays. She continued by explaining: "I don't even feel like it's home, it's just a house, four walls, not a home!". This girl reported being lonely but still admitted: "I actually feel that my friends are closer to me, they are more family than the people at home, [be]cause you stand up for each other, they sort of help me cope", showing that the support she receives from her friends, although comforting, is not sufficient to counteract the absence of her parents. Another girl's words confirm this: "You've got friends who support you through and through. But you still miss [your parents] a lot, it's a difficult situation". It appears that although friends are a strong source of support, these adolescents do not regard that as sufficient.

As reflected by the interviews carried out with the Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans, abandonment, rejection and the resultant feelings of loneliness are a prominent experience confirming the findings of Schmalzbauer (2004).

4.3.3 Conflicting feelings

Schmalzbauer (2004) found that some children involved in his study display concomitantly feelings of gratitude and resentment and, when interviewed, they discussed the economic benefits that, according to them, outweigh the psychological and emotional distress caused by the separation from their

parents. The interviews conducted with Zimbabwean adolescents for this study confirm this.

Eight of the seventeen adolescents interviewed during the course of this study discussed the economic benefits obtained from having parents working in the Diaspora which appear to make up for their absence from home. Two of the boys expressed their views as follows: “It is something he wanted to do, something to help the family and it’s a positive thing” said the first boy, whilst the second boy argued: “If he [my father] works outside the country then the funding in the family will be more stable, we can get a better living out of it”. Of course, the Zimbabwean economic situation has been foremost in the lives of many Zimbabweans since the economic crisis that started in the early 2000’s, and this may have compounded these adolescents’ awareness of the need for financial stability for the family. Furthermore, little or no social security is available in Zimbabwe and alternative sources of financial assistance are scarce, making it imperative for a family to provide for its members through their own labour.

The girls interviewed for this study mirrored the feelings of the boys and appeared to feel that their parents were working in the Diaspora in order to give them a better life. “My mother is away so that I can get a better life” said one girl, whilst another commented that her parents “will be doing something to benefit my future”. One of the reasons given by the participants was the financing of their education: “She is working so hard to get my school fees and put me through school so that I can have a life that she probably never had – a better life” said one girl about her mother. Her words portray a sense that this girl primarily experiences the absence of her mother as a sacrifice on the part of the parent, as a result of which the adolescent feels impelled to do her best in order not to let her mother down. This may cause a number of problems, such as feelings of guilt at being the reason of the parental “sacrifice” and feeling that one’s best is never quite good enough compared to the high price that is being paid to afford the adolescent such an opportunity. This girl confirms this as she pointed out that “it’s like pressure. I feel so pressured to do more than I can, so I work hard at everything I do”.

According to Lachaud (1999), Zimbabwean families where one (or more) members work outside the country tend to have higher levels of educational attainment as compared to households without migrants, due to the fact that foreign currency earnings from Diaspora populations remitted back to the country of origin make a significant difference to a family's income, resulting in the ability of households to pay for food, schooling and other necessities. This appears to be the case for the Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed, as they all attend excellent educational establishments which are unaffordable to most of the population. In spite of being aware of the benefits that result from the absence of their parents, some of the adolescents are still angry at their circumstances. One girl, who is very unhappy about her caring arrangements, exclaimed: "I am stuck there and I don't want to worry my mom about it because she is away so that I can get a better life, but it's not fair that I have to stay with him [my grandfather]. I wish she was here or that I could be with her again!". This girl feels disempowered by her circumstances which could have serious repercussions later on.

Conversely, another respondent felt that being without her parents is worth it in order to have an improved standard of living. "I guess it's for a good cause because life is better there than when we were in Zimbabwe", she pointed out. However, the fact that she began this statement with the words "I guess" shows that the girl is not entirely convinced and may harbour conflicting feelings regarding her situation. Another girl justified her situation by thinking beyond the immediate family to the benefits that accrue to the extended family: "It's just the economic situation and my dad can support more people, like his family" she said with a sense of pride. The family structure in Zimbabwe is such that the primary income earner generally has to support more than just his immediate family. This can be a cause for conflicting feelings as this adolescent misses her father and probably wishes he was closer to her, yet at the same time, desiring his presence would mean the lack of sufficient funds to benefit not just herself but a number of other relatives.

Some Zimbabweans utilise the funds remitted back to their home country to purchase means to generate income locally and to assist with supporting the family, especially if, like in the case of one participant, the spouse left behind is

unable to obtain employment. This girl's mother, for example, remitted funds to set up a small commuter transport business. She recounted: "He [my father] quit his job a long time ago, that's why my mom had to go to Australia. [When she visited us] my mom bought a Kombi, a minibus, she bought two of them, so now when he [my father] is short of money he doesn't have to ask my mom!" This girl misses her mother a great deal and became very emotional during the course of the interview, saying: "I like, I just cry! ... I have to talk to myself that I must be grown up, that things will be okay" because she knows that if her mother was not working in Australia the financial well-being of the family would be severely compromised. This girl is emotionally very conflicted as she wishes she could be with her mother but realises the necessity of her absence.

The same respondent also appeared to experience conflicting feelings regarding her mother's absence because she worries about her parents' marital relationship and would like them to be together in spite of the need for her mother to earn an income and support the family. She said: "You don't know how your mom and dad are, if he is being faithful. He told us that he has not being faithful and now he has HIV... I don't know if my mom knows. I was scared that there would be problems between them when my mom came home". To compound the girl's concerns is the fact that she could now be worried about her own future in view of her father's condition. Graham Pembrey (2009) reports that, largely due to the economic situation in Zimbabwe, Anti Retroviral Drugs (ARVs) are not easily available or are unaffordable for most and cites World Health Organisation's figures that estimate that less than one sixth of those requiring ARVs have access to them. In addition, Pembrey (2009) points out that the life expectancy of a woman in Zimbabwe is estimated at 34 years. This means that if the girl's father has infected the mother, the family could lose both parents, including the principal income earner, fairly quickly. This girl took up the offer of follow-up counselling and has attended counselling sessions regularly since her interview.

An aspect that emerged prominently from the interviews carried out with the Zimbabwean adolescents, that could partially be due to their experience of the

economic crisis, is that many of them appear to feel that any sacrifice is worth making in order to have financial well-being and luxury goods, which for a number of years were extremely difficult to obtain locally. In fact, material goods appear to have become important status symbols within peer groups. This theme will be discussed in more detail, under the heading of “materialism”.

Conflicting feelings, primarily stemming from comparing the benefits accrued by what a migrant parent is able to provide for his/her family left behind against the absence of the parental figure, emerged notably in the interviews with adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans.

4.3.4 Role changes and role additions

Some of the studies reviewed in chapter 2 (2.7.4), for example those of Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1992), Schmalzbauer (2004), Aguilera-Guzman et al. (2004) and Collins (1991) found that some adolescents have to fill in for their migrant parents and carry out duties within the house and family which were previously taken care of by their parents. For example, some girls have to become substitute mothers for younger siblings and have to take on household chores, such as cooking and cleaning. Boys generally have to assume head of the family roles such as providing guidance and support for younger members and repairs and maintenance tasks. These role changes and additions may be experienced as stressful by some of the adolescents.

The Zimbabwean boys interviewed for this study confirmed that assuming roles previously carried out by their migrant father is a common experience for Diaspora orphans. For example, one participant recounted that he does “the technical side of things like fixing and the repairs” but pointed out that even though he and his brothers try to fill in the gap left by their father, things are not quite the same. He highlighted that “even if my brother takes up the role and I take up the role, us boys will never replace my father”. Another young man stated that not only does he have to provide guidance for his brothers but he has also assumed a spousal role towards his mother, providing her with support and advice. He said: “I talk to my younger brothers, I talk to them

about life and issues of life. To my mom, I give her support wherever she needs support in terms of guidance about finance and transport". These are onerous responsibilities which compound the stress of the situation by placing heavy additional burdens onto these adolescents who are already trying to cope with altered family circumstances.

Another young man said that he has to manage his time carefully in order to fit in studying into his schedule which must include other tasks within the home that he has to fulfil in the absence of his father. "Sometimes, when you come from school, you do your books but still you know that there are things that need to be attended to, so time is a thing that needs to be managed". He appeared to be concerned about this aspect, as success in education is paramount for these adolescents yet, at the same time, other responsibilities cannot be ignored. A few of the girls interviewed echoed his sentiments. For example, one revealed that "as soon as you get home you have to help with this, this, that, before you can just sit down and do your homework. If you go and do your homework before you help out, she [my aunt] comes screaming. So then, you know, I don't really get enough time, sometimes I won't even sleep or I'll [go to] sleep really late [be]cause I am trying to finish [my homework] so I don't get into trouble at school". This girl is obviously under a lot of pressure and experiences the additional roles she has to carry out round the home as stressful. Furthermore, if she is not sleeping sufficiently, this situation could progress into physiological or psychological problems brought about by sustained high levels of stress.

One participant reported having had to act as her own guardian and receiving no support from the rest of the family when she had to make an important decision, that of choosing her Advanced Level subjects for her last two years of school. She was emotional when she recounted this incident, which she evidently experienced as stressful. "The day we had to choose my subjects there was no one to come with me because I live with my grandmother but at the moment she has gone to England to take care of my cousins, so [she] wasn't there. My cousin couldn't go to school [with me] because she is in varsity so there was no one to come with me. I had to go by myself and try to

convince the teachers I can do the subjects – by myself! Which was pretty hard!”. This incident appeared clearly etched in her memory, even though it happened almost two year previously, showing that it was experienced as traumatic. Age-inappropriate responsibilities that must be taken on by Diaspora orphans in actual fact rob them of their adolescence by making them grow up very quickly. This can be both positive and negative. Negative, because they should be allowed to develop in terms of ‘normal’ developmental stages which, if not properly worked through, could result in an incomplete resolution of developmental crises. Positive, because these adolescents learn quickly how to take care of themselves and others, which may give them a sense of independence and achievement and make them better able to cope with subsequent developmental stages.

Some of the Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans interviewed reported having to deal with certain role changes and role additions. All those who spoke on this aspect of their experience appeared stressed and even overwhelmed, as in the case of the girl who is missing out on sleep in order to fulfil her role requirements.

4.3.5 Lack of social support

Silver (2006) points out that adolescents rely on their parents for social support and for the fulfilment of every day needs. When this support is absent, daily stressors become exaggerated and cause unnecessary strain on these adolescents. Paternal advice and support is especially mentioned. In addition, although at this developmental stage individuals are more reliant on peers than on parents for social support, a secure base is vital for the exploration of new identities and for independence to mature. In the absence of parents due to Diaspora, this growth may be jeopardised (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Feeney & Collins, 2010).

Lack of social support is a predominant theme that emerged in the course of the interviews carried out with Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans. This could result in skewed development in some due to the lack of a safe base to explore from. Many of the participants spoke openly of the lack of

support. “The support, the encouragement is something that I miss a lot” or “the emotional support ... I have really missed a lot”, are statements common to many of the adolescents who took part in this study. Some miss the physical presence of the absent figure, for example: “That presence of a father in the house, you just miss him”, “it is a little hard because I am lonely there and there is no one” and “at home it’s lonely, there is no one to talk to [be]cause usually I am by myself”. These adolescents’ circumstances are heavily laden with a sense of loneliness, in spite of the presence of other family members and friends in their lives. A number of adolescents appeared especially aware of the lack of social support when their parent(s) are unable to witness their achievements, especially in the scholastic context. “It will never be the same as him [my father] having being there to say well done my son I am proud of you”, said one boy, whilst another stressed that what he missed the most was his father not seeing his achievements in person. One girl reinforced these sentiments by stating that she missed her mother’s presence especially when there are “things like Prize Giving, she [my mother] doesn’t get to come and cheer me on when I am achieving something good”.

Some of the adolescents interviewed seem to miss the guidance and role model figure that the absent parent provided. For instance, one boy, speaking about his life in the absence of his father, said: “Many challenges come up without my father, someone to talk to, someone to guide me, someone to just have a chat with. He is my role model, my mentor in a way. Without him I just don’t have anyone to really turn to”. Another boy stated that his life without his father “has been not so good because you always need a father by your side, especially when you are a male. You need a male figure to tell you what to do especially when you are growing up”. These adolescent boys appear to lack above all the support provided by their father as someone to teach them role identity and act as a model for them. As traditional Zimbabwean society is becoming increasingly westernised, the absence of the father may result in role confusion for these adolescent boys who are not supported in their transition from adolescence to adulthood by a male role-model.

The girls interviewed for this study seem to miss most of all the role of the trusted confidant that many mothers play in the life of their daughters —

someone to talk to. "I want to talk to my mom about problems at school and stuff [be]cause sometimes you can't really talk to anyone else", reported one girl, whilst another explained that she missed her mom the most and finds it difficult when "there is a situation, like there is a fight at school with your friends or something is happening and I would like to talk to her about it because she would tell me what to do, but you can't because she is not there". Some of the girls reported that they find it difficult to talk about personal issues with other family members or caregivers and, as a result, miss their mothers even more. One said: "You can't ask your aunt something [be]cause you feel it's wrong or something", whilst another confirmed this feeling of not being able to talk to others in the same way as she can talk to her mother by saying: "When I have problems I don't have anyone to tell them to, so for me that is the hardest thing". Many of the girls expressed similar sentiments which are best summarised in the words of one of the participants, who stated: "You need your mother there to be able to talk!".

Small tasks also appear to become more stressful in the absence of a mother or father due to their working in the Diaspora. One exasperated girl exclaimed: "I even have to go shopping by myself or with my grandmother" which she appeared not to enjoy very much. One mentioned that in the absence of their father transport has become stressful for the family members left behind: "Transport has been a problem", he said, as his father is the only one who can drive. Another spoke of "management of the house" being a challenge. The boys interviewed for this study also reported that they miss the support of their parent(s) when they need to access an allowance (pocket money). "When my father was around, I could just ask for pocket money and get it, but now its more of a hassle to contact him and tell him you have this and this at school and to send money" reported one. Another confirmed this by saying: "I can't have all of the facilities I need sometimes, like pocket money and so forth".

The adolescent Diaspora orphans interviewed confirm that the lack of social support, manifested in many guises, is a particularly challenging aspect of their lives which makes their day to day living more stressful than it would be if their parents were not working in the Zimbabwean Diaspora.

4.3.6 Importance of communication

Schmalzbauer (2004) stresses the importance of communication in maintaining ties in families who live trans-nationally. Silver (2006) asserts that good communication can mediate the negative effects of migration and found this theme to emerge constantly during interviews with adolescents left in their home country by migrant parents. The Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed for this study concurred with others world-wide and spoke extensively regarding the importance of constant contact, mostly via telephone, with their parent(s) and the anxiety arising as a result of being unable to contact their parents in this way.

“I guess it’s okay because I talk to them on the phone a lot, about three times a week” said one participant, who relies heavily on telephone contact with her parents to make their absence less traumatic for her. Another girl, speaking about her father who works in the Diaspora, said: “He messages and calls me every couple of days, so we keep in touch, like enough”. “I do speak to her nearly every day, or like once in two days” commented one girl, who appeared pleased with this fact. One boy responded with pride and delight when the interviewer asked him if his father contacted him regularly and exclaimed: “Yes, he does! At least once every week!”. Almost every adolescent interviewed brought up this topic of speaking to their parent(s) over the telephone or via telephone messaging (sms) which confirms how important this link is for them.

When unable to communicate with their parent(s) these adolescents appeared very distressed and some became quite emotional during the interviews. For example, one said: “I have my own phone, then I talk to her [my mother] but if she is not there, I like, I just cry”, whilst another expressed frustration when unable to talk to her mother: “Normally I get to speak to her twice a week, but sometimes she is not at home when I really want to talk to her and that is really hard!” she reported. One girl stressed how important it is for her to hear from her parents when she said: “I usually get angry with them [my parents] when they don’t call and they promised to call!” which shows that she feels let down

by her parents when they are unable to contact her and highlights the importance of this life-line. Some of the adolescents express frustration when their access to the telephone is restricted, for example, at school. "We get our phones like three times a week so that is the only time we get to talk to them [our parents], and it's not for a long time, like maybe ten minutes, so it's been really hard", confided one girl. Another expressed frustration at the often unreliable, and far from optimal, telephone system in Zimbabwe which makes communication challenging. She said: "Sms's work only from her [my mother] to me but I can't reply! I do e-mail her, but it's so hard to say all you want to say!".

Another problem encountered when communicating long-distance with their parent(s), according to the Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed, is that they are constricted by circumstances and are not always able to speak freely and to say all that is on their mind during the course of a telephone conversation. For instance, one girl reported that "sometimes when she [my mother] calls on the phone there are other issues that are much more important at the time, like I have to remind her about school fees and stuff, so that would be like important at that time, so by the time we finish that conversation, sometimes I just decide, I just think it's better not to talk about the other things". It appears that when this happens the adolescent is left with an unsatisfied feeling and an increased longing for the presence of her absent parent. Another girl was very distressed when she recounted that, although she desperately wants to tell her mother some things, she is unable to do so over the telephone as she feels that her caregivers do not allow her the privacy to do so. She said that she cannot speak to her mother freely "because he [my grandfather] is there and listening to my conversation, somehow. I also feel they [my grandparents] don't want me to tell my mom some things, so sometimes I can't really say anything". This girl appeared more angry and frustrated than some of those interviewed who are able to converse freely with their parent(s).

Some adolescents expressed the opinion that telephone contact, although a vital link, is not an entirely satisfactory way of keeping in touch with their parent(s) as it does not provide a good enough platform for them to truly share

their experiences and is not sufficient to compensate for their parents' absence. One obviously frustrated girl told the interviewer that her mother does not realise what a talented singer she has become, because just saying "mom, I can sing!" over the phone does not accurately convey what she is trying to tell her mother who has "never heard me sing, ever!".

Facebook has become a useful form of communication, for those who have access to it, as it affords the opportunity to the user to share photographs with others and to chat online. One of the older girls interviewed remarked: "Before I went onto *Facebook*, she [my mother] never used to know how grown up I've become. I think I went onto *Facebook* last year that's when I put my pictures up and she looked at them and she was like, oh, my God! I had no idea you had grown this big". It cannot be denied that *Facebook* has become an important form of communication for adolescents whose parents work outside Zimbabwe, however, it appears that, although a trusted method of communication, it also does not make up for parental absence.

As almost every Zimbabwean adolescent interviewed for this study spoke about communication with their absent parent(s), its importance cannot be denied. The fact that some reported frustration when their access to their preferred form of communication is limited or unavailable, and others reported satisfaction with the amount of contact they receive in this way, confirms that communication can indeed mediate, at least to some extent, the negative effects of parental absence due to Diaspora for some adolescents. Further studies in this field may be beneficial as findings could be used to devise interventions to optimise the lives of those left behind.

4.3.7 Materialism

In a study published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, Chaplin and John (2007) studied children of different age groups and found that generally materialism increases in early adolescence but decreases in late adolescence during the transition into young adulthood.

Most of the Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed show obvious signs of materialism, in as much as they see parental absence as being a fair price to pay in order to accrue material possessions, especially those that are coveted by their peer group. Many spoke about the financial benefits of having a parent (or both parents) working in the Zimbabwean Diaspora as a means of obtaining luxury items and how this cushions the impact of the experience. This desire for material possessions could be attributed to the on-going economic crisis which has plagued the country for more than a decade, as many luxury goods have been unobtainable or beyond the financial reach of most Zimbabweans during this time. Notwithstanding the above, this materialistic aspect appears to have become a trend with these adolescents. The parents themselves seem to help to sustain this trend by providing their children left in the home country with luxury goods, perhaps as a mean of compensating for their absence.

It is noteworthy that the theme of materialism, in the interviews with Zimbabwean adolescents, emerged only in those carried out with the girls. One participant said: "When your mom comes back she tends to spoil you, because she is not there she's, like, trying to make up". It seems that this girl is aware of the fact that her mother is trying to compensate for her absence by spoiling her during their time together and this does not worry her, in fact, it seems to work well for her. When telling the interviewer about this, she was very pleased with herself and reported that while her mother was in the country, she could shop for virtually whatever she wanted and that this made her popular with other girls. "The shopping is really good [when my mom is here], I can get whatever I want and I get to choose what I want to wear when she is around! My friends think this is really cool! So, it kind of makes up for her being away".

Another girl spoke of the fact that when she shops with her parents, she is allowed to choose for herself, something that she is not allowed to do when her grandparents take her shopping. She was quite resentful of this fact: "When we [my parents and I] go shopping I am allowed to choose what I want. It is way cool! Then, I think, it's okay them being away, even though I do miss

them". One participant, when asked if she saw anything good arising from her parents' absence, replied: "Yes, in a sense, because you get, like, books that you can't get here and some stuff that you can't find here, like cell phones, ipods and cd's, they can send it to you. And you get to go on holiday. So I think then it's quite good, if they were working in Zim[babwe] I wouldn't get that." Once again, this girl seems to feel that having access to luxury goods and holidays somewhat compensates for not spending much time with her parents. This girl does not see her parents very often, in fact less than most of the other adolescents interviewed, yet she seems to feel that the material gains accrued as a result of their improved financial circumstances may be a sacrifice worth making.

"It's for a good cause", reported one of the girls interviewed, "because life is better there [in Botswana] than when we were in Zimbabwe. I can also have lots of things like new cell phones, mp3s, and even my own laptop. I also get lots of clothes and shoes and stuff that is really cool. Then I say to myself, it's better this way!". This girl has become very materialistic in her views as she sees obtaining material possessions as a positive side of being away from her parents. A thirteen year old girl's words epitomise the way some of the Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans have come to view material possessions as a substitute for parental presence and love. Talking about what she feels are the advantages of her parents working outside the country, she said: "I get lots of stuff from them, like cell phones and clothes and things, then I know they really love me because some of the other girls whose parents are working outside they don't get all these things". This is a worrying aspect of this girl's experience as she may, in the long term, come to see love as purely gift and money related rather than an expression of genuine caring. This could make her an easy prey for negative relationships such as the "sugar daddy" phenomenon, where young girls have sexual relationships with older men who use gift-giving as a means to keep them happy and willing because they believe that receiving gifts means they are loved.

Materialism, understood as willingness to justify and accept the absence of a parental figure in return for material (luxury) goods, is a theme that emerged from the interviews carried out with female Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans and

may be an area that may well merit further research and which may call for intervention measures, if necessary.

4.3.8 Relationships with caregivers

Another theme that emerged from the interviews carried out with Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans is the challenges presented by their relationships with their caregivers. In most cases, it appears that the relationships are either strained or the adolescent feels marginalised by an existing family group. These experiences appear to be perceived as stressful and compound the problems already being faced by these adolescents, as evidenced by other emerging themes.

One of the main causes of conflict within caring arrangements that seems to be fairly prevalent is the “generation gap” between the Diaspora orphans and the older caregivers, for example grandparents. These relationships appear characterised by communication problems and the adolescents interviewed reported being subjected to much more rigid codes of discipline than they were when under parental care. One girl recounted: “I can’t talk to my grandmother about it because my grandmother – she’s nice, I love her – but she is practically from a different generation than me, so things would be so much more different [than when she was my age], so sometimes I can’t tell her some of the things I would want to tell my mother”. This girl feels that her grandmother is not able to relate to her own personal life experience and fails to understand her. Furthermore, she feels that her grandmother would use her own life as a model for bringing up her granddaughter, which the adolescent sees as out-dated. This girl explained further: “If I need to tell her something about boys or my boyfriend she would be, like - what do you need a boyfriend for, you are so young?”. From the girl’s point of view, her grandmother is unable to relate to her. “She doesn’t understand, because when she grew up, at my age, she was not allowed a boyfriend”.

Another area of conflict appears to be going out with friends or boyfriends, especially when it was allowed by parents before their departure or during the time the adolescents spend with them. One girl reported: “Even going out with my friends [is a problem], because I live with my grandmother, most of the time that is a problem because it would be, like - no, why do you need to go out at

night? We never used to do that - so, it's like, she's quite difficult". This girl seems to resent the fact that her grandmother allows her less freedom than her parents did. According to a number of adolescents interviewed, it appears that generational differences cause problems and the restrictions imposed by older relatives are difficult to accept and result in strain in caring arrangements. As one girl interviewed told the researcher, being denied the freedom to go out with friends or boyfriends is especially trying for the girls who live with older relatives, as often all their friends are allowed out but they are not. One of the girls interviewed highlighted how age differences negatively affect her relationship with an elderly caregiver and makes her experience a stressful one. She described her situation as follows: "I have my cousin she's really, really old but the thing is, she has this thing where she's always complaining that we don't help ...If you go and do your homework before you help her out, she comes screaming". Some elderly caregivers may come across as uncaring and abrupt to their wards but may just be feeling stressed themselves from having to care for adolescents at a time in their life when they perhaps need a less pressurised lifestyle.

Inter-generational problems also arise over the type of clothes the girls want to wear, versus what their grandparents consider suitable. For instance, one girl said that her grandmother restricts what she is allowed to wear "no trousers and no short things!" she mimicked, laughing. Another angrily stated: "When I go to church with them [my grandparents] I am not allowed to wear trousers. They feel the way I dress is not good enough for them. My parents never even cared about it! ... With my grandparents, I can't choose what I want. They have to choose, so with them I have to wear dresses, skirts and things like that but with my parents I don't really have to wear dresses". This girl is evidently resentful of the restrictions imposed on the way she is allowed to dress by her grandparents, especially because she did not seem to have this problem when in the care of her parents. In the course of an informal conversation, one of the Arundel School girls interviewed confirmed that clothing is "a major bone of contention" between the Diaspora orphans and their grandparents. She said that many girls are not allowed to wear what they want or to choose their

clothes and find this very embarrassing. As expected, conflict over clothing did not emerge from the interviews carried out with the four boys.

Another aspect that this girl highlighted is that the generosity of some parents who spoil their children with material goods is often negatively perceived by the grandparents who feel it necessary to redress the situation after the departure of the parents. "Many girls have problems after they are visited or receive gifts from their absent parents, such as clothes or cell phones, as the grandparents feel that they were spoiled and compensate for this by confiscating the gifts". When this happens it is understandable that these adolescents feel resentful towards the grandparents. At the same time, these children appear unable to do anything about it, giving them a sense of powerlessness.

At times, the differences that cause strain between the Zimbabwean adolescents and their caregivers are not just inter-generational but also cultural. Certain mores appear to govern the relationship between a Shona adolescent and a caregiver, especially in the case of grandparents and older relatives. "Ah, my grandmother, you can't really talk to her about that because in our culture they don't like us [to] ... we don't talk openly to them. She would start saying I am just a spoiled child and I would get into trouble", related one girl and added that when she speaks to her mother about it she is told by her to "just put up [with it]!" Another girl confirms that culture can stand in the way of smooth relationships. "I wanted to tell him [my grandfather] but I don't know how, [be]cause in a way, right, maybe its written in the Shona culture ... if I merely go and complain, I could get into trouble according to the Shona culture, so I don't think I can actually do anything!". This girl appears to feel very trapped and powerless because of cultural restrictions that make it impossible for her to speak freely to her grandfather about what is bothering her.

Some of the adolescents interviewed for this study expressed feelings of marginalisation by an existing group, even when the group consists of extended family members, such as uncles, aunts and cousins. Feeling marginalised and not quite fitting in emerges as a theme in the interviews

carried out with Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans even when the caring arrangements are not unpleasant for the adolescent. For example, one of the girls said that, at times, it is “difficult [be]cause the people you are with just live with their mom and dad, so then you know, they love you and care for you but then you feel there’s that little, well, you feel that they love you, but not in the way your mother would”. It is evident that this girl does not feel unloved but that something is lacking in her relationship with her caregivers and that she feels that she does not fit in completely in this group. Another girl told the interviewer: “I live with my aunt and uncle and they already have five children of their own, three who live with them, so it’s kind of hard for them to make time [for me]”. Once again, although this girl appears well cared for, she seems to feel that she is not receiving quite as much attention as she should by reporting that her relatives are already thinly stretched by their commitment to their own children.

From the interviews carried out with adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans it appears that the Diaspora phenomenon is affecting the composition of the families left behind and may be causing strain on family structures due to the addition of more members into existing groups. This, in turn, can cause strain in the relationship between the adolescents and their caregivers who are called upon to take on additional children into their family unit and may consciously or sub-consciously blame the adolescents for the stress imposed on them.

In the case of strained relationships, frequently it appears that adolescents feel that they cannot discuss this problem with the absent parent(s) because they feel that the parents are doing their best in order to give them a better life and they do not want to place additional burdens on their absent parents by worrying them. For instance, one girl explained: “I wanted to talk to my mom about it but I can’t talk to her over the phone”, whilst another exclaimed: “I am stuck there and I don’t want to worry my mom about it because she is away so that I can get a better life!”. These girls feel a responsibility towards the absent parent that compels them to hide their unhappiness and discomfort from them. It seems that there exists a code of silence among these girls who experience

parental absence as a sacrifice on the part of the absent parent more than a personal sacrifice. One participant's words embody this feeling: "You don't want to make your mom feel like you are not properly looked after because you feel she is doing this for you!".

The problems experienced with caregivers can result in the adolescents taking a more negative view of their situation. A number of the Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed appeared dissatisfied with their living arrangements, even if their daily needs are adequately catered for. The interviews carried out are fraught with examples of this. "I stay with my grandparents or my aunt, but if I had a choice I wouldn't, I don't quite like it. I feel it's just not the same, [be]cause they are not my parents, I am just not used to being around them and sometimes we have big fights, like the past two weekends, we've had these fights and it's not nice", said one girl, whose experience of parental absence is negatively affected by her relationship with her caregivers. Another two participants reiterate this by stating: "I don't like living with them" and "if I had a choice to go anywhere else besides them, I would take that choice because I feel it's unfair". Both these girls seem to feel unhappy about the caring arrangements made for them but feel they are unable to do anything about this. It almost seems that these girls feel that they were excluded from decisions regarding their placement and points to the fact that this could be an area where educational interventions, perhaps in the form of communication and information for both adolescents and caregivers, could make a positive difference to the day to day lives of Diaspora orphans in Zimbabwe and their caregivers.

From the interviews carried out with Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans it seems that relationships with caregivers are not always easy and that they can negatively impact on the experience of parental absence. This is an area that could be targeted for intervention.

4.3.9 Sexual abuse and molestation

James Elder (2007) of UNICEF points out that when parents leave their children behind it increases the children's vulnerability, whilst Shaw (2008)

states that some, due to unsuitable caring arrangements and unable to join their parents, fall prey to child abuse of every description.

One of the Zimbabwean girls interviewed for this study hinted at the possibility of inappropriate behaviour on the part of her grandfather, but did not elaborate sufficiently during the course of the interview to confirm positively that sexual abuse or molestation are taking place. However, she appeared very distressed and emotional when she talked about this during the course of the interview. She stated: "I feel, especially with my granddad, I just don't feel safe in a way, I actually don't feel safe in a way and I haven't quite told anyone besides my friends that I don't feel safe". When gently encouraged to elaborate, she said: "Well (hesitation) he... he's okay ... you know how you give someone a hug. Yeah, but I think that his hugs are too much... I even try to avoid giving him a hug at all times [be]cause I feel that the hugs just ...". She was unable to continue and she had to be given a little time to regain her composure. She then tried to explain further by adding: "No one has ever hugged me like that. Even my cousins who are the same age as me have never hugged me like that, ever! Even my dad has never hugged me like that. And I feel that I shouldn't get hugs like that because even my cousins, we don't hug each other like that!" This girl was not willing to discuss this any further during the course of the interview but was offered follow up counselling which she has not taken up yet, although, on a number of occasions, she has made an appointment which she has not kept.

Of the seventeen adolescents interviewed for this study, this girl is the one who came across as most negative and unhappy. She was also very angry and frustrated and felt unappreciated by her grandparents in spite of what she sees as efforts on her part to be a model child. Talking about her grandparents, she said: "I feel they treat me like a baby, I feel they don't treat me like I am growing up. Because I try to please them, they just, they just don't see it. If I do a good deed I see that as a really good thing I have achieved it. But to them it's just this thing which I don't understand why they don't even see the way I see, sometimes I just don't understand why!". This family's boundaries appear to be very rigid as it seems that the girl is not

allowed to have too much contact with others. For instance, during the course of the interview, she reported: "I am by myself and I only have one friend in the neighbourhood and I am not even allowed to see her [be]cause they think we are trouble together... so I am just usually at home, I don't go out [be]cause they think that I could be naughty or they can't trust me". This shows that she may be forcibly isolated from friends. She also reported being restricted with regards to contact with other family members, something that she resents: "I feel it's unfair [be]cause even sometimes I am not allowed to see my other relatives because I don't know if they [my grandparents] find them as a threat or something, maybe if I like them too much ... I don't know. I feel trapped", she exclaimed. This girl further reported feeling unable to talk to her mother about what is happening because she feels that her telephone conversations are being listened to by her grandfather and because she is worried about the cultural norms that prescribe her behaviour and force her into abiding by a "code of silence".

Commonly accepted characteristics of incestuous families include the following (Herman, 1992; Lewis, 1994, 1999; Russell, 1997):

- These families tend to be emotionally isolated and place very little emphasis on respecting the individual needs of members;
- They are often closed families, where the members have few supportive relationships outside the family;
- Communication between members is poor;
- They tend to be characteristically patriarchal and authoritarian.

Furthermore, Petty (2005) points out that incest is kept a secret and seldom reported and survivors "remain locked into their pain" (p.95). The child lacks support and may be aware of the devastating consequences of disclosure. In the case of the girl interviewed, a number of indicators point to the possibility that sexual abuse may be taking place, in accordance to the above characteristics.

The danger of sexual abuse or molestation is one aspect of the adolescent's experience that should be investigated further. Although much sexual abuse also happens when parents are not absent, parental absence does increase

the child's vulnerability. This study found that out of a small sample of seventeen Zimbabwean adolescents one hinted at inappropriate behaviour on the part of a caregiver. These adolescents are of a well above average SES and generally appear to be reasonably well looked after in the absence of their parents. It could, therefore, be surmised that those who are not as well cared for are much more likely to be preyed upon and become victims of sexual molestation and abuse. A larger sample, especially one from a lower SES, may reveal a very different picture to the one obtained during the course of this study.

4.3.10 Conclusion on themes emerging

The interviews carried out with the seventeen adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans support finding from studies carried out in other parts of the world, for example, those reviewed by Silver (2006) on Central America, Latin America and the West Indies. The same themes appear to emerge from the words of these young people which show that the experience is not country-specific but is shared by Diaspora orphans world-wide. In analysing the interviews, as well as the themes identified by Silver (2006), additional themes were noted, such as materialism, difficult relations with caregivers and sexual abuse and molestation.

4.4 Defence mechanisms

The Dictionary of Psychology (Reber & Reber, 2001, p. 179) defines a defence mechanism as "an enduring pattern of protective behaviour that functions to provide a defence against the awareness of that which is anxiety-producing". It further points out that everyone seems to agree that these processes are unconsciously motivated and acquired and are developed to protect the self from unpleasantness of many kinds.

Gross (1993) asserts that defence mechanisms can be useful, normal and even positive ways to come to terms with certain situations as they prevent us from being overwhelmed by traumas or perceived threats and give us time to find other ways of coping. In the long term, however, they are generally seen as unhealthy and undesirable because they usually involve some degree of

distortion of reality and self-deception and the resultant reduction of stress may become so appealing that the defences are maintained and become habitual. If the absence of a parent (or parents) due to Diaspora is experienced as stressful by the adolescents left behind in Zimbabwe, it can be surmised that they may try to reduce its resultant anxiety and protect the self by the use of a defence mechanism. It is important to identify these defences so that they will not become unhealthy and enduring traits. Early identification can lead to re-education as these adolescents could be taught more positive ways of dealing with their situation. From the interviews carried out with the seventeen Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans the use of a few defence mechanisms emerged. Each mechanism that was found to be utilised by these adolescents will be individually discussed below and compared with the definitions used by Gross (1993).

4.4.1 Rationalisation

According to Gross (1993) rationalisation implies finding an acceptable excuse for something which is really quite unacceptable, a “cover story” which preserves your self-image or that of someone close to you, thereby justifying your own and others’ actions to yourself.

This defence mechanism was the most evident in the interviews carried out with the seventeen Zimbabwean adolescents who tried to “justify” parental absence by providing the interviewer with reasons which, according to them, justify their situation. “I think it is something he wanted to do, something to help the family”, said one boy who justifies the absence of his father by being altruistic and thinking of his father’s needs before his own and, at the same time, believing that his father has left him behind in order to help the family. In this context, this mechanism may be positive as it will give the adolescent time to adapt to his circumstances, but used in the long term could mean that this young man might tend to justify unacceptable actions by finding reasons that to him make up for them.

Some of the adolescents used rationalisation by justifying their parents’ absence in terms of the Zimbabwean socio-economic and political situation.

“Looking at the current situation in the country, I think if he works outside the country then the funding in the family will be more stable, we can get a better living out of it”, responded one participant. Another re-iterated this view by stating that the family is able to enjoy a better life-style than if their parents had remained in Zimbabwe. One girl felt that her mother “is in a safe place”, implying that the situation in Zimbabwe could be dangerous for her and, thus, justifying her absence. The current situation of the country makes it easy to use it as a justification for being left behind, making it easy for these adolescents to rationalise parental absence in these terms.

Rationalisation also happens when these adolescents use the “it’s for a good cause” reason to justify their situation. Some feel that their parents are making a great sacrifice in order to afford them a better standard of living, or access to superior education, or in order to earn enough to provide them with essential or luxury goods. Although for the most part this is true, these adolescents appear to be burying their emotions in order to show gratitude to their parents. The words of one girl aptly summarise this: “I am stuck there and I don’t want to worry my mom about it because she is away so that I can get a better life”. Not being able to speak freely to their parents may well lead to a victim-like attitude and, in the long term, even to learned helplessness.

As well as using the more common justifications mentioned above, some of the adolescents interviewed for this study used rationalisation by providing a number of diverse excuses which, in their view, make the absence of their parents more acceptable. Some feel that “absence makes the heart grow fonder”, for instance, speaking of his father, one stated: “Meeting him [only] sometimes, the moment you see him you tend to love him more”, whilst a girl said: “It’s helpful because [if] you are away from her a lot then you miss her and think about her more than you would if you lived with her all the time, which would get frustrating!”. This girl appears to believe that if you miss someone then you will love them more and assumes that life would be frustrating if that person was constantly around. The words of a third girl confirm this: “When I actually see them [my parents], we bond a lot”.

Another respondent felt that being left behind is beneficial to her development as an individual: "It will help me not to depend on them [my parents] most of the time", but at thirteen being totally alone may be premature. Another justified her situation by stating: "I can study better without lots of people around to distract me" which is her way of coping with her experience in a less stressful way. A fourteen year old girl rationalised her parents' absence by telling herself that this gives her increased freedom which, in fact, appears to negate the finding of most of the other interviews, where the general feeling was that the absent parent(s) afforded the adolescent with more freedom than the caregivers. She said: "I'm a little more free, because my mom would be telling me to clean up my room, help and do chores. That's one advantage!". Another supported this by proposing: "What I like about them [my parents] being away is just the freedom, sometimes I need having the space ... a bit of space, I like that!".

One of the girls used rationalisation to cope with the fact that she is not able to speak to her mother over the phone as much as she would like to. In order to justify this stressful and anxiety-producing situation, she tells herself that, due to time differences and her mother's working hours "she will be really tired and you don't want to wake her up". This belief appears to help her to accept this situation a little more easily, although she did state that when she is unable to speak to her mother she cries and resorts to giving herself a self-talk to remind herself "that I must be grown up, that things will be okay".

Another form of rationalisation that emerged from the interviews is the belief that parental absence means reduced friction within the household. "It's rare that my mom shouts at me because she doesn't see me, because we used to fight a lot when we were together, but now it's better, we are like best friends!". Another stated that her father is "very hard to live with" and recounted that when he visited her during the school holidays "he's very selfish and self-centred". Although this emerged as a coping mechanism, the reduction of stress caused by the absence of a family member previously experienced as negative has been studied by Aguilera-Guzman, Garcia and Garcia (2004) as a factor that mitigates the negative impact of parental absence. They stated

that a hostile environment disappeared with the removal of an abusive father which, in turn, brought about an improvement in the emotional well-being of the remaining family members. In such case, the experience of separation may be positive and even reduce stress within the family, thus beneficial to all concerned. The situation of this Zimbabwean adolescent before parental migration is not known to the researcher, and there is not sufficient information in the interview to positively state that she experienced her environment as hostile prior to the departure of the mother, however, her words do indicate a strong sense of relief. This girl may be better able to cope with her situation as a result of this.

A final example of rationalisation is one girl who stated that her mother could not visit her because she was not in possession of a “green card”. However, even though this mother was reported in the course of the interview to have now legalized her position, she still had not visited her daughter, who stated hopefully: “I am really looking forward to her coming back”. To date, this visit has not yet occurred which may indicate the use of not only rationalisation but also of denial on the part of this girl.

Rationalisation emerged as the most prevalent coping mechanism utilised by the Zimbabwean adolescents Diaspora orphans interviewed for this study. As this mechanism appears to be used by the majority of those interviewed, an intervention targeted at ensuring that this is not used long-term or in a way that becomes harmful to the self may need to be considered.

4.4.2 Denial

According to Gross (1993), denial entails refusing to acknowledge certain aspects of reality, refusing to perceive something because it is so painful or distressing. Four of the Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans appear to be using this defence mechanism as a way of dealing with their situation.

The first girl whose parents live and work in Botswana, who also uses rationalisation to justify her parents’ absence by attributing it to the economic situation in Zimbabwe, appears to use denial by not acknowledging that she

misses her parents. She does so by stating that she is “used to it” and that their absence affords her “a bit of space”. During the course of the interview she further states: “What I like about them being away is the freedom”. However, the rest of the interview contradicts these statements as she uses a number of emotive statements, such as “you feel really sad” and “you really miss them too much”. This girl appears to experience her parents’ absence as stressful and sad and utilises mainly two defence mechanisms to deal with her negative feelings: rationalisation and denial. Rationalisation as a way of justifying their absence by giving a number of what she considers valid reasons for being left behind, such as the economic situation in Zimbabwe, the increased ability on the part of her father to support more family members with his income, increased freedom, personal space and even the fact that she no longer gets “shouted at” during the time she spends with her parents and improved bonding. In fact, this girl spent most of the interview trying to persuade the researcher that there are strong and valid reasons why her parents have chosen to leave her behind and join the Diaspora. She uses denial as a means of not admitting that she still misses her parents a great deal and that this causes her to feel sad and lonely.

Denial is also used by a 16 year old girl in order not to deal with the possibility that her mother may be choosing not to visit her in Zimbabwe and that she has not yet sent for her, in spite of the fact that her mother joined the Diaspora approximately ten years ago. In the interview, this girl explained that her mother had not returned to visit her for the past six years because for a number of years she was an illegal immigrant in the host country but that her position was now legalised and “it’s going to make it easier” for her mother to return home or for her to join her mother. In spite of the girl’s hopes, almost one year had already passed at the time of the interview since the “green card” had been received but there appeared to be no evidence of a change in circumstances. A difference was noted in the way this girl, who uses denial, speaks of seeing her mother as compared to one who does not use denial. The girl who uses denial as a defence mechanism utilises definite statements, as if it is certain that she will either be visited by her mother or that she will join her, for example: “I am really looking forward to her coming back” and “I am

looking forward to going there". There is no doubt in this girl's mind that these things will happen. Another girl who does not use denial, instead employs hypothetical statements qualified by the use of "if" or "maybe" when speaking of being visited by her parents or rejoining them. For example, she states: "If I get a visa this year, I might see her" and "maybe I will go live there" and thus appears more realistic about her situation. The former appears to be certain that what she desires will happen and that if it does not she may, as time goes by, start to feel let down and abandoned, perhaps even unloved. This may cause her to develop feelings of resentment towards her mother and could make an eventual reunion more difficult for both, whilst the latter may be better adjusted to deal with parental absence as she appears more realistic about her prospects.

A third girl employs denial as a coping mechanism to deal with the fact that, at times, her mother does not call her. She states: "She [my mother] goes to work for, like, 24 hours or so then she won't be able to call". It appears that in this way, this girl is refusing to acknowledge that her mother may be unwilling or unable to call her. It is highly unlikely that this parent would work continuously for 24 hours without finding time for a telephone call. As this girl is an adolescent and, therefore, mature enough to understand the concept of the duration of a working day her statement highlights the use of denial. Although not overtly stated in the interview, this girl may be feeling abandoned and rejected by her mother and, as a result, refuses to deal with the possibility of her mother not wanting to speak to her over the telephone as much as she wants to, causing her to resort to denial as a defence mechanism.

Denial is also used by a girl whose father is HIV positive. This girl, who was concerned that problems might arise between her parents as a result of her father's disclosure of his HIV status, stated, during the course of her interview, that her father is now fine as a result of having successfully disclosed his HIV status to his wife. She stated: "He is now okay" and seemed to genuinely believe that this condition was no longer a problem. It appeared to the interviewer that this girl is blocking out the fact that HIV is a terminal illness and that, providing her father has access to medication, his quality of life can be

good but that his life expectancy may not be very long. In addition, when the interviewer pointed out that the situation must be difficult for her, she replied: “It is not as difficult as you think because you must just know that in life things happen”. It seems that this girl is employing denial as a means of dealing with the possibility of losing her primary caregiver and the uncertainty that her future presents.

Four out of the seventeen Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans employ the defence mechanism of denial in order to block out or not to acknowledge certain aspects of parental absence which cause them distress. Using this defence mechanism for a prolonged period of time may cause long-term negative effects, such as an unrealistic view of life or a pattern of denying aspects of reality which cause unpleasant feelings.

4.4.3 Sublimation

Sublimation is a form of displacement where a substitute activity, usually a socially acceptable one, is used to express unacceptable feelings (Gross, 1993). Although none of the adolescents interviewed for this study exhibited overt signs of sublimation, all appear to be academically successful and to work hard at excelling in their school work. As previously discussed, this may be due to the fact that these adolescents are trying to compensate for what they perceive to be a sacrifice on the part of their parents but may also be a form of sublimation, in as much as school work has also become a substitute activity used to express unacceptable feelings.

4.4.4 Conclusion on defence mechanisms

In the course of the interviews carried out with adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans the use of two defence mechanisms is highlighted, namely rationalisation and denial. Early intervention measures aimed at ensuring that these defence mechanisms do not become entrenched would assist these adolescents to develop other more positive ways of dealing with aspects of their experience that they may find unacceptable. It is possible that a third mechanism, namely sublimation, is also employed by most of these adolescents as the participants appeared to be achievers in the academic and

scholastic contexts which may represent the use of sublimation. However, as the use of sublimation as a means to cope is generally considered positive and constructive (Gross, 1993) this should not represent an area of concern.

4.5 Coping mechanisms

Grasha (1983, p. 162) defines coping mechanisms as “conscious ways of trying to adapt to stress and anxiety in a positive and constructive way by using thoughts and behaviours oriented towards searching for information, problem-solving, seeking help from others, recognising our true feelings and establishing goals and objectives”.

Compass and Epping (1993) state that problem-solving skills are learned progressively during development and become more sophisticated with age as one becomes more aware of emotional states and more able to self-regulate these states. In view of this, although ten coping mechanisms were selected to direct the analysis phase of the interviews, not all emerged during the course of the interviews with Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans, possibly due to developmental and personal factors. Two coping mechanisms that were identified from the interviews will be discussed below.

4.5.1 Seeking support

By far the most widely employed coping mechanism that emerged from the interviews carried out with the seventeen adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans was “seeking support”. Compass, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen and Wadsworth (2001, p. 92), define this coping mechanism as “the ability to identify and make use of an appropriate support system in order to deal with those aspects of a situation that present a challenge”. Most of the adolescents interviewed for this study turn to their friends to provide them with the support they need which is in line with this stage of development where peer support becomes crucial.

One girl stated: “My friends are closer to me, they are more family than the people at home ... they sort of help me cope”. This girl expressed explicitly that her friends help her cope with the situation and obviously provide her with

a valuable source of support that she needs in order to deal with the absence of her parents. It is evident that she considers her friends extremely important by telling the interviewer that she feels they are closer to her than the relatives she lives with or is close to. The sentiment this girl expresses of the importance of friends as a source of support is widely echoed in other interviews. For example, another girl said that although being without parents is “harsh ... you end up getting used to it [because] you’ve got friends who support you through and through”. This girl points out that her friends have assisted her significantly during the adjustment phase of having to adapt to life far away from her parents and they obviously play a pivotal role in her new life.

During adolescence peers play a crucial part in socio-emotional development. According to Weiss (1982) peers now become the main attachment figures as reliance is transferred from parents to friends. This is a normal step towards attaining independence and autonomy. He further points out that usually adolescents find it easy to rely on their contemporaries as they have much in common with each other. It can therefore be surmised that adolescent Diaspora orphans who use the coping mechanism of seeking support – especially from their friends – will be better equipped to cope with their situation and may view it as less traumatic. Statements emerging during the course of the interviews with the Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans such as: “I’m okay, I have lots of friends” confirm this and stress the fact that friendships may well be an invaluable source of support for these youngsters.

One girl explained that “friends comfort you”. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (Hornby, 2000, p. 239) defines “to comfort” as “to make somebody who is worried or unhappy feel better by being kind and sympathetic towards them”. It can therefore be deduced that adolescents who seek the support of friends do so in order to feel better. From the above definition, one could further infer that these adolescents may be feeling “worried or unhappy”. This girl obviously feels that finding friends who are able to provide comfort is a valid reason for seeking their support.

Another reason that appears to direct adolescents to seek the support of their friends is the need to talk to someone who they feel will “understand” them – a confidant. “I pretty much tell my friends ... nearly everything”, related one girl. Being able to verbally share experiences with someone who is perceived as suitable seems to be an important facet of life for adolescents, as a number of the Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans interviewed reported that one of the most difficult aspects of their experience of parental absence is not being able to confide in, and discuss things with, their parents. Although friends cannot be expected to replace parents in this regard, it appears nonetheless that those who are able to seek the support of friends in order to fulfil this need may experience their situation in much more positive terms than those who report not having anyone to talk to.

Some of the adolescents interviewed for this study were even more specific and indicated that they seek the support of friends who are in the same situation as themselves. This may be because they feel that their circumstances may not be fully understood by someone who has not experienced parental absence. For instance, one girl stated that “there are also other people who have parents outside the country who help”. This girl has evidently identified others who are in a similar position as she is and has chosen to seek their support which she appears to have found beneficial. In one of the schools included in this study, namely Arundel Senior School, finding others in the same circumstances seems to be especially easy as this school caters for a large number of boarders (girls who reside in the school hostels for the duration of the school term). A number of these girls talked about how they support each other in the hostel and appeared to the interviewer to be better adjusted and generally emotionally stronger than those who attend schools where there are smaller numbers of boarders.

One girl, who found the transition from Junior to Senior school especially trying due to the loss of her support system, explained: “At my old school there was a girl whose mom had died and she was a lot like me, so she was my friend and we talked a lot ... we could talk about everything! It was good to have a friend like that”. According to this girl, it seems that adolescents who have lost one or

both parents are considered by Diaspora orphans as being in a position to understand them. This is an interesting aspect of how these adolescents view their circumstances and makes the term “Diaspora orphans” most appropriate. It also implies that, if these adolescents view themselves as orphans, they may have to work through some aspects of the grieving process just like those adolescents whose parents have died. Further studies in this field may be indicated because, should this be the case, early intervention and support may greatly alleviate any negative aspects of parental absence and may maximise successful adaptation to life post parental migration. The importance of a support system is stressed by this girl who told the interviewer that although she had made some friends at her new school, she felt that “it’s not really the same”.

Seeking support is a coping mechanism that appears to be widely employed by Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans. Implementing systems to assist these adolescents to meet others in the same situation may be a way of helping them to better cope with their situation by providing a setting which would make seeking support easier.

4.5.2 Logical analysis

Grasha (1983, p.163) defines logical analysis as “carefully and systematically analysing our problems in order to find explanations and to make plans to solve them, based on the realities of the situation”.

During the course of the interviews carried out with the Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans, two of the girls appeared to be employing this coping mechanism in order to deal with their situations in a more positive way. The first girl stated that in order to cope with parental absence “you just act like your guardians are your parents and if you need to talk to them you talk to them or when my mom calls I’ll talk to her, or when my dad calls”. This girl appears very realistic about her situation and seems to have thought about her circumstances and found practical ways of dealing with the problems she has to face, in this instance, someone to talk to. She has found, for instance, that interacting with her guardians as if they were her parents affords her the

opportunity of successfully communicating with them and, in this way, not missing the physical presence of her parents for the purpose of talking to them. She is also realistic about talking on the telephone with her parents. Unlike other adolescents interviewed for this study, this girl does not cry or despair when she is unable to speak to her parents because she has established good lines of communication with her caregivers but she is still able to enjoy talking to her parents when she is able to do so.

When unable to speak to her mother over the telephone, the second girl uses logical analysis to deal with the resulting negative emotions and frustrations. This girl appears to have carefully analysed the situation and thought about it, and has come up with a valid solution to deal with it. She told the interviewer: "Sometimes, when I really need to tell [my mother] something but I can't tell her and wish she was here, sometimes I write a letter which I probably never send, but I just write it at that moment, just to feel better in that moment". This girl has not distorted or blocked out the reality of her situation and has come up with a creative solution that helps her to cope in the moment. Writing a letter evidently allows her to feel like she is actually communicating with her mother when, in actual fact, she is unable to do so. Expressing herself in this way, whether the letter is sent or not, alleviates negative emotions and allows for the expression of feelings. She also pointed out that another way in which she copes with the absence of her mother, who has been working in the United States of America for ten years, is to remind herself "why it's all happening" when she feels particularly down about her situation. This is another example of the use of logical analysis as this girl has carefully and realistically analysed her problem and has come up with a successful way of dealing with it.

Being realistic about a situation and using logical analysis to deal with any problem arising from it means that one is less likely to resort to defence mechanisms, such as denial or rationalisation, which may become problematic or pathological in the long run. Learning to use a coping mechanism such as logical analysis thus appears to be a useful tool that could assist Diaspora orphans to experience parental absence in a more positive way. The girls who

use this coping mechanism appeared to be more positive in their outlook and generally better adjusted. One stated that she experiences parental absence as “kind of normal” even though the frequency with which she sees her parents is lower than some of the other adolescents interviewed, as this girl sees her father once a year and her mother once every two years. She is honest about her feelings as she did admit that she does miss her parents but she stated that she considers her caregiver as “part of the family”.

Although only two of the Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed for this study appear to use the coping mechanism of logical analysis, the way they spoke about their situation shows that this is a positive and valid way of adjusting to parental absence and coping more successfully with their situation. Teaching the use of this coping mechanism as a skill to Diaspora orphans may assist these adolescents to perceive their situation as less stressful.

4.5.3 Conclusion on coping mechanisms

During the course of the interviews carried out with the seventeen adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans, two coping mechanisms seem to be employed, namely seeking support and logical analysis. In general, the adolescents who employ these coping mechanisms to deal with certain aspects of their situation which they experience as stressful seem to be better adjusted and more realistic in their perceptions of their problems. Teaching Diaspora orphans the use of these coping mechanisms may assist them to better adapt to their circumstances and to experience their lives in more positive terms.

4.6 Conclusion

The thematic analysis carried out on the seventeen interviews that took place with Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans reveal that the experiences of these adolescents concur with those of adolescent Diaspora orphans world wide as the findings were compared against other studies, such as that of Silver (2006). The themes that emerged in this study match those found in studies carried out in other countries, with the addition of some themes not mentioned in the studies, namely materialism, difficult relations with caregivers and sexual

abuse and molestation. With regard to the use of defence and coping mechanisms employed by these adolescents, it appears that only a few are used by the participants. The identification of these mechanisms can lead the way to possible interventions aimed at assisting adolescent Diaspora orphans to learn to cope more effectively with their situation, minimise negative feelings and to generally improve their experiences of parental absence.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

In chapter 4, the interviews carried out with seventeen adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans were thematically analysed in order to obtain a greater insight on how these young people experience parental absence and to identify the use of any coping and/or defence mechanisms employed by them. The thematic findings were compared against those of similar studies carried out on adolescent Diaspora orphans in Central American, Latin American and West Indian countries to ascertain whether these experiences are global or country-specific. Although theoretical guidelines were used to identify coping and defence mechanisms, this framework was not applied rigidly in order to let the data speak for itself rather than having to adhere to pre-determined categories.

In this chapter, conclusions drawn and recommendations made for further research in the field will be discussed, as well as the strengths and limitations of the study. Possible areas of intervention aimed at optimising the adjustment of adolescent Diaspora orphans in Zimbabwe are also explored.

5.2 Conclusions with regard to identified themes

The direction of the study was guided by the question: **How do Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans view and cope with parental absence?** The choice of this question was guided by the researcher's desire to become more sensitive to these children's needs and to better understand their world in order to assist with the eventual development of interventions designed at optimising their well-being, particularly in the context of secondary educational establishments. The research question was deliberately formulated in a broad manner so as to allow for as large a scope as possible and an inductive approach.

From the thematic analysis of the seventeen interviews carried out with the Zimbabwean adolescents, a number of themes emerged that give us a better

idea of how these adolescents view their situation. These themes are summarised below.

5.2.1 Depression

In terms of the criteria specified by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-TR) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), none of the Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed meet the requirements for a diagnosis of a depressive disorder, however, some exhibit symptoms of depression, especially a depressed mood manifested in crying, feelings of sadness, loneliness and irritability. In view of this, it appears that these adolescents, although not depressed, perceive their situation in a rather negative way which causes them to manifest with some symptoms of depression.

5.2.2 Abandonment and rejection

Abandonment and rejection emerged as prominent themes from the interviews carried out with the participants of the study. Some of these adolescents appear to feel this way as a result of feeling the loss of family ties, others due to not fully understanding the reasons for being left behind in the home country. Overall, feeling abandoned and rejected appears to cause a pervasive feeling of loneliness in these adolescents who, for the most part, struggle to cope with these feelings in spite of mediating factors, such as the presence of friends or supportive family members.

5.2.3 Conflicting feelings

From the interviews carried out in the course of the present study, it appears that parental absence due to joining the Zimbabwean Diaspora causes conflicting feelings in the adolescents left behind. Gratitude and resentment are concomitantly felt and displayed by the participants. Primarily, these feelings stem from comparing the benefits accrued by what a migrant parent is able to provide for his/her family against the absence of the parental figure. As a result of the Zimbabwean economic crisis of the past decade and its resultant hyperinflation, Zimbabwean adolescents are especially sensitive to financial issues. This may be the reason why more than half the participants

discussed the economic benefits that, according to them, outweigh the psychological and emotional distress caused by the separation from their parents.

5.2.4 Role changes and role additions

Many of the participants reported having to take on additional roles and responsibilities previously held by their parent(s). In particular, the boys have to assume the role of head of the family and mentor to younger siblings, while the girls seem to be required mostly to carry out household chores. As a whole, the adolescents interviewed perceive these additional roles as stressful. Although some appear to recognise that there are benefits in this, most seem to feel rather resentful, especially as these responsibilities can encroach on normal academic commitments, such as studying and homework. Some of the participants appeared to experience the situation as overwhelming.

5.2.5 Lack of social support

The Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed for this study appear to view parental absence due to Diaspora as leaving them lacking in social support. This lack of social support is experienced in three main contexts. Firstly, it is felt when the parent is unable to witness in person his/her child's achievements. Secondly, the girls especially found the absence of a trusted confidant as being a stressful experience, in spite of the fact that many appear to have good communication systems with friends or relatives. Finally, the boys interviewed mentioned missing the presence of a male role-model in their life to guide them into manhood especially difficult to cope with. As a result of the perceived lack of social support, these adolescents experience their day to day existence as being more stressful than they possibly would have if their parents were not absent.

5.2.6 Importance of communication

Communication, by means of telephone and messaging, is considered vital in maintaining family ties and can play an important role in mediating the negative effects of migration. The Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed confirmed these findings and spoke at length of the importance of

communication in their lives. It appears that these youngsters look forward and rely heavily on this form of contact with their migrant parent(s) and when this form of access is compromised or hindered great stress is experienced which, in some cases, appears to aggravate feelings of abandonment and rejection and causes distress. Some of the participants seem to experience high levels of anxiety when unable to contact their parents. Furthermore, the participants appeared especially frustrated with the Zimbabwean telecommunication system which presents challenges to them being able to keep in touch with their parent(s) in this way. In spite of this, the adolescents stressed that, although very important, telephonic communication does not fully compensate for parental absence.

5.2.7 Materialism

Some of the Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed during the course of the present study appear to have become materialistic, in as much as they appear willing to accept parental absence in return for material gains, especially luxury goods which afford them prestige within their peer group. As a result of this, some adolescents appear to experience parental absence as more tolerable providing that it results in them having access to certain material goods.

5.2.8 Relationships with caregivers

On the whole, the Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed for this study reported finding relationships with their caregivers not easy to negotiate and generally stressful. This appears to compound other problems being faced by these adolescents. In most cases, the main source of conflict seems to stem from the “generation gap” between adolescent and caregiver. It is fairly common for migrant parents to leave their children with grandparents or other elderly relatives. These adolescents feel that these older caregivers are unable, or unwilling, to understand them from their own viewpoint and expect them to live by codes of conduct which they feel are obsolete. Zimbabwean adolescents also seem to encounter problems dealing with their caregivers due to cultural mores which prescribe their behaviour. Some of the participants reported difficulties in trying to fit into existing family groups and experiencing feelings of marginalisation. On the whole, the participants reported receiving very little

support from their parents in this regard. Strained relationships with caregivers result in some of the adolescents experiencing parental absence as frustrating and stressful.

5.2.9 Sexual abuse and molestation

There is a possibility that Diaspora orphans may fall prey to sexual abuse and molestation. However, this could not be ascertained by this study as in the interviews conducted during this study, only one participant hinted at possibly inappropriate behaviour on the part of a caregiver. The interviewer was unable to positively confirm this. Any child who is a victim of sexual abuse and molestation is likely to experience parental absence in much more negative terms than others who are not subject to such abuse. Unfortunately, the code of silence that surrounds these offences makes it especially difficult to identify and deal with these situations, unless the victim chooses to come forward and disclose.

5.3 Conclusions about defence mechanisms

As a result of the thematic analysis of the seventeen interviews carried out with Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans it appears that the use of defence mechanisms is mostly limited to three mechanisms namely, rationalisation, denial and sublimation.

Defence mechanisms are only considered maladaptive if they become rigid and entrenched ways of dealing with life's challenges otherwise they serve the purpose of providing a useful defence against stress-producing situations. The adolescents interviewed seem to use rationalisation and denial as ways of making parental absence more tolerable and perhaps to afford them some time to become accustomed to it.

The participants who use rationalisation, for the most part, attribute parental migration to socio-economic reasons which helps them to focus on the benefits to themselves and to their families afforded by the income generated by the parent(s) working in the Zimbabwean Diaspora. Some of the adolescents resort to rationalisation to deal with the stress produced by the lack of

telephonic contact with their parent(s) which, being a vital link for these young people, can be experienced as especially stressful and traumatic by some. By justifying parental failure to make contact and one's own inability to reach them by attributing this to a variety of "acceptable" reasons makes the experience more bearable and less traumatic in the short term. Thus, the use of rationalisation to assist these adolescents adapt to their changed circumstances, providing it does not diffuse to other aspects of their lives and does not become entrenched and enduring, may be considered as not entirely negative.

Arguably, the use of the defence mechanism of denial may not be as acceptable as the use of rationalisation because it entails negating or severely distorting aspects of reality. The participants who employ denial in order not to face up to the realities of their situation, for example, failure on the part of the parent to visit or make arrangements for their offspring to visit them, may result in trust issues diffusing into other inter-personal relationships, as well as tainting the relationship with the migrant parent, especially if the need to use denial is prolonged. The adolescents interviewed who use this defence mechanism appeared to be less well-adjusted and more cynical in their outlook to life in general as some of the others who do not resort to the use of denial.

Sublimation is generally considered as the most adaptive of the defence mechanisms as it entails channelling negative feelings into positive and socially acceptable activities. Most of the participants interviewed for this study appeared to be successful academically and some talked about their need to strive to be the best that they can be in order to "compensate" for the sacrifice being made by their migrant parent(s) in order to afford them a chance at superior education. Although, some of these adolescents seem to feel pressured to do well at school, the outcome of this – academic success – will be beneficial to their self-esteem and future prospects. Excelling at school will benefit their self-esteem by attracting a number of rewards, such as awards, status and good examination results at school. As a consequence of such scholastic achievement, it follows that the chances of these adolescents to be able to progress to tertiary education or gaining employment improve, as will

the likelihood of obtaining scholarships and bursaries. Therefore, the adolescent Diaspora orphans who use sublimation to cope with parental absence should benefit in the long term by the use of this defence mechanism.

It appears that the use of defence mechanisms as a means to deal with parental absence due to Diaspora, is not extensive and it is generally limited to the use of three such mechanisms. On the whole, only denial may cause problems in the long term, whilst rationalisation and sublimation can be viewed as being more positive, in fact almost desirable, as in the case of the use of sublimation.

5.4 Conclusions about coping mechanisms

Ten coping mechanisms were selected to direct the analysis phase of the study, however, not all emerged during the course of the interviews carried out with the Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans. In fact, only two coping mechanisms were identified in the seventeen interviews, namely seeking support and logical analysis. Coping mechanisms are considered positive and constructive ways of dealing with stress and anxiety and, as such, their use should be supported and encouraged.

By far the most widely employed coping mechanism appears to be seeking support. In most cases, the adolescents interviewed for this study turn to their peers to provide them with the support they need to cope better with parental absence as they feel their contemporaries understand their situation. Some of the adolescents seem to choose those who are in similar circumstances, for example, others whose parents have joined the Zimbabwean Diaspora or those who have lost a parent (or parents). During adolescence, peers play a crucial part in development and it is, thus, to be expected that Diaspora orphans should turn to their friends for comfort and support. Although this support does not entirely compensate for parental absence, it appears to significantly mediate the negative aspects of such absence, to the extent that some of the adolescents interviewed asserted that their friends are closer to them than other family members. Friends are also viewed as a source of

comfort and as confidants, helping Diaspora orphans to view their situation in more positive terms.

Logical analysis emerged from the interviews with two girls who employ this coping mechanism to deal with some of the aspects of parental absence that they find especially stressful. Instead of turning to less constructive defence mechanisms or trying to justify, or even distort or deny painful aspects of their experience, these girls carefully and objectively look at what is upsetting them and find positive ways of making themselves feel better in the moment. Carefully and realistically analysing a problem and looking at ways of solving it in a manner that is constructive and affords the needed respite from any negative emotions arising from a situation, allows these adolescents to honestly and openly express their emotions and, as a result, to adjust and cope better with parental absence.

It appears that the use of coping mechanisms, although widespread, is limited to the use of seeking support and logical analysis. Both these mechanisms are helpful and valid ways to cope with parental absence and to view one's situation in more positive terms.

5.5. Strengths and limitations of the study

This study adhered to an interpretive paradigm in order to provide an insight into the subjective realities of the participants. In an attempt to afford these adolescents a voice of their own, the researcher endeavoured to allow the words of these young people to speak for themselves. Doing so, however, resulted in both advantages and disadvantages which will be discussed below.

5.5.1 Strengths of the study

Employing qualitative methodology is a strength of the study as it fitted the aims of the research, namely to explore the way in which Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans view parental absence by identifying themes, structures of meaning and any coping or defence mechanisms that may be employed by them to deal with their unique living circumstances. The in-depth, semi-structured interviews carried out allowed the researcher to obtain

first hand information so that the topic could be investigated directly from the perspective of the participants.

The researcher was also able to provide a platform for the voices of these adolescents to be heard. A dearth of qualitative research on this topic means that little knowledge is available to provide an insight into the life of Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans. Affording these young people an opportunity to voice their experiences and feelings has provided the body of literature with a much needed contribution.

As the participants of this study were minors, the study adhered to strict ethical principles. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured by not using names and storing all transcripts in a place accessible only to the researcher and her supervisors. Participation in the study was voluntary and an option to withdraw at any time was given to the adolescents and their parents/guardians. The interviewer, being a school counsellor, offered optional follow up sessions to the participants and was sensitive to the moods and emotions of the adolescents during the course of the interviews. Results will be made available to the schools who took part in the study and to the Zimbabwean Ministry of Education, Sport, Art and Culture.

The study can be considered reliable, as in qualitative research reliability refers to how trustworthy the researcher's observations are. During the analysis phase, the researcher continuously checked and re-checked her interpretations against the data and against existing literature in order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. In reporting the findings, the participants' own words were conveyed verbatim as much as possible in order to record the adolescents' experiences from their own unique viewpoint. The researcher also consulted with colleagues and her supervisors to ensure that her interpretations reconstructed the participants' experiences accurately.

5.5.2 Limitations of the study

The main limitations of the study lie in the composition and the size of the sample. The present study is a qualitative one and, as such, its aim was not to

obtain a sample representative of the population but one that would illuminate the social life of adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans. Although qualitative research prefers small samples, using only seventeen participants also represents a limitation, as it means that the results cannot be generalised. In addition, the adolescents who took part in this study represent only three Harare schools and, in spite of the fact that one is a government school, all three are unaffordable to the majority of Zimbabweans and cater for fairly affluent families. As a result, the themes, coping and defence mechanisms that emerged from this study cannot be taken as being representative of the experience of parental absence of all Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans, as the participants of this study are all of a similar socio-economic status, are reasonably well cared and provided for and do not lack in basic necessities.

During the course of the study, the researcher was informed of a family of Diaspora orphans living in the shell of a house, in a medium-density suburb of the city of Gweru, in central Zimbabwe, whose parents left a number of years ago to join the Diaspora. Initially, these seven children (two groups of siblings who are cousins) received regular and adequate remittances from their parents but these stopped after a few years leaving the children destitute and dependent on charity hand-outs to live on. Apparently, these children live in abject poverty and even struggle to feed themselves. None of these children are in school. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to travel to make contact with these children. It is the researcher's opinion that, if the present study had included such children, the picture that would have emerged would have been dramatically different from that obtained from the seventeen adolescents interviewed for this study and that it would probably be more representative of the experiences of the majority of Diaspora orphans in Zimbabwe. Therefore, although the interviews yielded an insight into the lives of the participants, these should not be taken as representative of the lives of all Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans.

Another limitation of the study is that only one interview was carried out with each participant. Although the researcher endeavoured to build a rapport with these adolescents, it is possible that if a number of interviews were carried out

over a period of time, the participants would have felt more at ease about sharing their experiences and may have revealed additional information.

5.6 Recommendations

As a result of the findings of this study and from the literature reviewed, a number of areas of concern emerged. Detailed below are recommendations for future research and some areas that could be targeted by interventions aimed at assisting adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans to maximise the positive aspects of their situation and minimise the negative ones.

5.6.1 Future research

There appears to be a dearth of research in Zimbabwe on the topic of Diaspora orphans. Statistics are either unavailable or unreliable and the researcher was unable to find any studies specifically relating to those left behind by migrant parents. Carrying out studies in this field would not only provide empirical information relating to the incidence of this phenomenon and related topics, but also allow for a greater understanding of what is happening to the children of those who have left to join the Zimbabwean Diaspora.

In Zimbabwe, as well as in other parts of the world, there appears to be a shortage of qualitative research with regards to the experiences of Diaspora orphans. Using various forms of qualitative methods, such as case studies, in-depth interviews, participant observation and other methods would provide important additions to the existing body of knowledge and facilitate the development of interventions aimed at this population.

This study targeted a very small sector of the population of adolescent Zimbabwean Diaspora orphans, as discussed in the limitations of the study (5.2.2). The researcher is aware that the findings of this study are restricted to a rather privileged sector of the population, those who are in formal education and whose parents can afford to send them to expensive schools. The plight of those who have either been abandoned by migrant parents or who are not being provided for adequately, either due to insufficient funds being remitted for their maintenance or to misuse of remitted funds on the part of those

tasked to administering to their needs, has not been adequately investigated. Research in this field should yield invaluable information currently not available.

Working systems currently in existence in Zimbabwe aimed at the well-being of children in general could be explored, such as the police service, health and social workers, state and para-state agencies and NGO's (Non Governmental Organisations) with a view to investigating whether they are presently reaching Diaspora orphans in need of assistance. From the interviews carried out with the seventeen Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans it is evident that none of these adolescents are aware of any support systems available to them outside their own schooling establishment. Identifying these systems and making this information available to Diaspora orphans could provide some with a much needed life-line.

Studies to establish whether depression affects Diaspora orphans and whether parental absence causes them to undergo a grieving process, similar to that of the death of a parent, could be carried out. The large-scale administration of depression and grief measures to those affected by parental absence would yield useful information, currently not available, that could assist with early intervention measures to prevent long-term psychological and physiological harm befalling these children.

5.6.2 Suggested areas of intervention

This study would not be complete without putting forward some suggestions, on the basis of the findings, of areas that could be targeted by interested parties for the development of interventions aimed at assisting parents, caregivers and educational establishments to deal with adolescent Diaspora orphans' unique needs.

With regard to parents, it would be greatly beneficial if they could receive information on how best to prepare their children for migration and for their lives in the home country without their parents. One of the themes identified in this study is that of abandonment and rejection which can be caused by not

fully understanding the reasons behind parental departure. Making parents aware of the importance of explaining their actions to their children may well result in better adjusted adolescents. The importance of communication in the lives of adolescents should also be stressed to their parents. According to the interviews carried out with the seventeen Zimbabwean adolescent Diaspora orphans, it appears that regular contact, in the form of telephone calls or messaging, mediates the negative impact of parental absence. The adolescents interviewed reported anxiety and other negative feelings when unable to communicate with their parents. Sensitising both the parent(s) and the adolescent in this regard would be beneficial to both parties. Parents could also be encouraged to discuss ground-rules with both the adolescent and the caregiver to minimise the incidence of conflict post departure.

With regard to caregivers, they could be provided with information on some of the challenges that adolescent Diaspora orphans may encounter, especially those that make adaptation and integration into their new family units problematic. Some of the adolescents interviewed pointed out that it can be difficult to communicate and interact with their caregivers. The role of communication in improving relationships between adolescent and caregiver could be stressed in order to improve relationships and living arrangements.

It is the researcher's opinion that educational establishments could play a crucial role in maximising Diaspora orphans' adaptation to their new circumstances and making their experiences more positive. Schools could become a life-line for these adolescents and provide them with support and guidance. For instance, schools are in the unique position of being able to identify and bring together adolescents whose parents have joined the Zimbabwean Diaspora. The coping mechanism of seeking support was identified as the one that is used the most by these adolescents, thus, facilitating encounters between peers who are in similar circumstances would provide them with valuable support systems and, as a result, improve the way they cope with their circumstances.

Schools could form support groups which could be used as a meeting platform and discussion forum for Diaspora orphans, as well as to teach these adolescents positive coping mechanisms and problem solving strategies. In doing so, perhaps the use of maladaptive defence mechanisms will be reduced. Issues such as materialism, which emerged as an area of concern, could also be addressed in the context of these support groups. Life-orientation lessons specifically targeted at Diaspora orphans and their unique needs could be held for them at school in order to equip these adolescents with the tools they need to successfully deal with their situation.

Many schools offer counselling services to their students. School counsellors could be familiarised with the plight of these adolescents and encouraged to give them support and guidance. Alternatively, teachers should be provided with information regarding Diaspora orphans and their unique needs and requested to be sensitive and supportive to these adolescents, particularly in the initial phases of adaptation.

These are only a few interventions which I have chosen to mention as they could be implemented at a micro level within a fairly short period of time and using existing resources, such as the Institute of Migration to disseminate information and educational establishments to implement support systems for adolescent Diaspora orphans. At a macro level, however, much could be done to offer assistance and support to Diaspora orphans and their families, especially those who have been less fortunate and find themselves in dire circumstances, as in the case of the Gweru children. It is my sincere wish that this study will increase awareness into the plight of these young people and encourage others to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this field and develop interventions to assist these children.

5.7 Personal reflections and final words

This study has been a fascinating journey into the lives of seventeen very special young Zimbabwean adolescents who have touched my life with their stories and have honoured me by sharing their experiences. I found them all to be amazingly strong and brave young people who have embraced their

challenges and who are coping with their situation in the best way they know how to. Working with these adolescents has made me realise that as therapists and teachers we often forget to truly listen to the voices of those whom we encounter in the course of our life's journey, especially the young ones.

I wish each and every one of the seventeen participants all the very best for their future.

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APPENDIX A

8 Argyll Drive
Highlands
HARARE
Tel: 788209/0912310361

Date:

The Headmaster/Headmistress
.....Senior School
HARARE

Dear Mr./Mrs.

RE: Master's Dissertation : Zimbabwean children's experience of their parents' absence due to Diaspora

I am currently writing my Master's dissertation through Unisa on the above subject which I feel is highly topical to our country and, especially, to our schools.

As you are no doubt aware, due to the current economic climate in Zimbabwe, a significant number of our pupils have become "Diaspora orphans" due to parents having left to seek work elsewhere in order to support their families. Much has been written, in other countries, on the psychological effects of this situation on the children who are left behind with one parent only, or even in the care of relatives and friends, but little information appears to be available on the Zimbabwean situation.

I feel that obtaining qualitative information on how these pupils experience their situation will enable educators to take preventive action and formulate appropriate interventions, where necessary, to normalise this experience for all those concerned.

I would be most grateful if you could assist me by identifying any pupils that may find themselves in this situation at your school and granting me permission to seek consent from their parents/guardians to interview them. The identity of the children and their parents/guardians will be protected and no names will be used in any part of the study.

I thank you in anticipation of your assistance in this matter and for your support.

Yours sincerely

O. M. Filippa

APPENDIX B

8 Argyll Drive
Highlands, Harare
Tel: 788209

Date:

Dear Parents/Guardians

RE: Master's Dissertation : Zimbabwean children's experience of their parents' absence due to Diaspora

I am currently writing my Master's dissertation through Unisa on the above subject which, as an educator, I feel is highly topical to our country and, especially, to our schools.

Much has been written, in other countries, on how these children view their situation, but little information appears to be available on the Zimbabwean context. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting a study to deepen our understanding of these children and I would like to invite you to take part in this study as I believe it will help us to devise appropriate interventions in order to provide an improved service in the educational context.

The study will consist of one or more interviews with you son/daughter when they will be asked to talk about their experience of having their parent(s) working away from home. No probing or leading questions will be asked and the children will be free to express themselves as they wish. Names will not be used anywhere in the study and no one will be able to link your son/daughter's name with the information obtained.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and that the choice to participate is yours alone. If you choose not to participate you will not be prejudiced in any way. The results of my research will be available through the school office on completion of the study for your perusal together with a report on the findings.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please return the attached consent form to the School office as a matter of urgency. If you have any questions or require clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you in anticipation of your assistance.

Yours faithfully

OLGA FILIPPA

PLEASE RETURN THIS CONSENT FORM TO THE SCHOOL OFFICE AS A
MATTER OF URGENCY

I, the undersigned, give consent that my son/daughter
(child's name) may participate in the study regarding children's experience of the
absence of their parent(s) due to Diaspora. I give my consent freely and without being
forced in any way to do so. The purpose of this study has been explained to me and I
understand what is expected of my child. I have received contact details of who to
contact if I need to speak about any issues regarding the study and I understand that
names will remain confidential.

.....
Name and signature of parent/guardian

.....
Name of pupil

APPENDIX C

DSM-IV-TR (2000) Criteria for Major Depressive Episode

A. Five or more of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2-week period and represent a change from previous functioning; at least one of the symptoms is either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure.

Note: Do not include symptoms that are clearly due to a general medical condition, or mood-incongruent delusions or hallucinations.

1. depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, as indicated by either subjective report (e.g., feels sad or empty) or observation made by others (e.g., appears tearful). Note: in children and adolescents can be irritable mood.
2. markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day (as indicated by either subjective account or observation made by others)
3. significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain (e.g., a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month), or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day. Note: in children, consider failure to make expected weight gains.
4. insomnia or hypersomnia nearly every day
5. psychomotor agitation or retardation nearly every day (observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down)
6. fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day
7. feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day (not merely self-reproach or guilt about being sick)
8. diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day (either by subjective account or as observed by others)
9. recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide.

B. The symptoms do not meet criteria for a Mixed Episode.

C. The symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

D. The symptoms are not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or a general medical condition (e.g., hypothyroidism).

E. The symptoms are not better accounted for by Bereavement, i.e., after the loss of a loved one, and persist for longer than 2 months or are characterized by marked functional impairment, morbid preoccupation with worthlessness, suicidal ideation, psychotic symptoms, or psychomotor retardation.

APPENDIX D**INTERVIEW GUIDELINES**

DATE:

SCHOOL:

NAME:

AGE:

SEX:

POSITION IN FAMILY:

MOTHER'S OCCUPATION:

FATHER'S OCCUPATION:

WHO WORKS OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY? MOTHER/FATHER/BOTH

HOW LONG HAS HE/SHE/THEY WORKED AWAY FOR?

HOW OFTEN DO YOU SEE HIM/HER/THEM?

WHO DO YOU LIVE WITH ?

: