

**GRANDPARENT-HEADED FAMILIES' INFLUENCE ON THE  
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS  
IN PORT ELIZABETH DISTRICT**

**by**

**PAULSHA MARY PLAATJIES**

**Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of**

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

**in the subject**

**SOCIO-EDUCATION**

**at the**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SUPERVISOR PROFESSOR VG GASA**

**MARCH 2013**

## DECLARATION

I, Paulsha Mary Plaatjies, certify that:

**GRANDPARENT-HEADED FAMILIES' INFLUENCE ON THE  
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS  
IN PORT ELIZABETH DISTRICT"**

is my own work and that all sources have been acknowledged by means of referencing.



**20 MARCH 2013**

**P M Plaatjies**

***To God be  
the glory!***

## **DEDICATION**

- *In loving memory of my brother Brendin January.*
- *In remembrance of my friend Elroy Ruiters.*
- *In tribute of Mr & Mrs S.M. Plaatjies.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- To my promoter, PR V.G. Gasa, for her advice, patience and encouragement.
- The Department of Education in The Port Elizabeth District for allowing me to conduct this study at these various schools.
- The participants for their valuable contributions towards this study.
- Marcello, my husband, for your support, encouragement and bottomless cups of tea.
- Matthew, my son, for understanding when I was busy doing my “homework”.
- Mr & Mrs F.B. January, my parents, for their prayers and financial assistance.
- Ms J. Abrahams, Mrs C. Booyesen, Mr M. Draai, Ms C. Du Pisani, Mrs C. Flores, Mr F. Hoosein, Mrs F. Meyer, Ms U. Pillay, Mrs R. Rautenbach, Ms A. Tommy, Mrs Y. van Wyk, Mrs L. Zondie and Ms S. Zacharius for ALWAYS believing in me.
- To my village for your support and prayers during my journey.

## **ABSTRACT**

This exploratory study investigated the influence of grandparent-headed families on the academic performance of secondary school learners in Port Elizabeth education district. It draws on Family systems theory and Role Theory to allow one to understand the organizational complexity of families, as well as the interactive patterns that guide family interactions. These theories capture the essence of this study which argues that grandparent-headed family is a very important family unit that needs to be supported in order to function well and thereby giving a better parental support and guidance to those learners who are in need.

The study was conducted in five secondary schools and also in fifteen grandparent-headed homes. The participants included sixteen learners, 5 Life Orientation educators and sixteen grandparents who are caregivers to these learners. The learners were interviewed at their schools, after obtaining consent from them, the school personnel, their grandparents and the Department of Education in Port Elizabeth. The educators were interviewed at their respective schools after they signed written consent. The grandparents were interviewed in a naturalistic setting, namely at their homes after they have given their written consent. Data was gathered using semi-structured open-ended interviews. Interpretive analysis was used to analyse the audio-taped data. The interviews were voluntarily and anonymity was guaranteed.

## **KEYWORDS**

Grandparent-headed family, Academic performance, Secondary school learner, Port Elizabeth Education District

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# CHAPTER 1

## AN INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

There is an African saying, "*it takes a village to raise a child*" which provides a synopsis of this study. A child's "village" consists of the nuclear family, the extended family and society. The nuclear family may be defined as a family that comprises of a wife, husband, and their children living together in their own residence (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: xvii). Whereas extended family is defined as a kinship group consisting of a family nucleus and various relatives, as grandparents and grandchildren living in the same household (Tamasane and Head 2010: 77). The child's village, is furthermore, extended to teachers, pastoral workers, social workers and the society. If the circumstances arise or develop where these key role players, such as the parents, are unable to fulfil their responsibility, it becomes the extended family's responsibility to take care of the child. The grandparents become the obvious choice because most of them are not working.

The intervention on the part of the grandparents to take the role as supplementary and a second- time parent is not usually planned. Many grandparents may feel isolated and unprepared (Horner, Downie, Hay and Wichmann 2007: 2). Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: 17 state that there is a reluctance of grandparents to take custodial rights of their grandchildren, although there is financial assistance from the State.

The reason for this reluctance is that grandparents hope that the parent will take their rightful place within the child's life. It is easy for the grandparents who are thrown into the new and unexpected role of parents to feel overwhelmed and incompetent (Cox 2007: 562). The grandparents are required to, willingly or unwillingly, to fulfil the role of the parents, to their grandchildren, which results in the grandparent becoming the first and most important teachers and mentors in their grandchildren lives. It is of paramount importance for these grandparents to become actively involved in the scholastic education and by virtue of their home environment to the social schooling of their grandchildren. These grandparents need to understand that their involvement in every level of their grandchildren schooling, education and development will, in future, be reflected in these grandchildren's physical and mental-well being as well as their academic performance.

The educator as part of the "village" of the child/ learner plays an increasingly vital role in supporting the second time parents, which in this case are the grandparents, by assisting them to show an interest in the learners' academic performance. The educator's role is to guide the learner from the known to the unknown, thus broadening the learners' knowledge and environment. The grandparent's role as "parent" is to guide the child from childhood towards adulthood. Both the educator and grandparent have a similar objective for the learner/child to be a productive member of society. Grandparents in grandparent-headed families may not always realise how vital their involvement in the academic performance of their grandchildren are. Grandparent-headed families' lack of involvement in the educational needs and requirements of those learners entrusted to them, might be due to a number of influencing factors, such as ignorance, lack of education, age

and/ or health related issues (Moyi, Pong and Frick 2004: 9). When grandparents in grandparent-headed households understand their role as second-time parents, it may assist the educator to assess the above situation and consequently become a better facilitator who is attune to the needs of the learners and sensitive to the environment in which they are nurtured, cared for and educated.

## **1.2 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY**

The researcher becomes interested in understanding the parenting systems that operates in a society and the impact thereof in terms of education. The patterns of parent attendance during consultation with educators suggest that many learners rely on alternative (support) systems of caregivers such as grandparents. There appears to be a gradual increase or paradigm shift from the nuclear family as primary caregivers to the extended family. This may be due to many factors, such as, high divorce rate, HIV/AIDS related deaths, high mortality rate, financial constraints, incarceration and any other limitations and restraints which hinder the parents from raising their children. Due to these factors, the nuclear family requires an intervention, which usually results in a grandparent(s) increased supportive role. “The bulk of care for orphans, or affected children, within the extended family rest with grandparents” (Tamasana & Head 2010: 83 ).

It also came to the researcher’s attention that a number of these grandparents are not familiar with the changes in the education system. Outcomes- based education (OBE) and its continuous assessment are foreign to many of these grandparents. Some of these grandparents seem unable or unwilling to assist their grandchildren.

The researcher assumes that this might be to a lack of understanding on the grandparent's behalf.

Many of these grandparents appear as if they do not see the necessity of parental involvement in their grandchildren's schooling. These grandparents might also be under the impression that it is the teacher's responsibility to teach and make sure their grandchildren are at school. Therefore the researcher sees the necessity of encouraging grandparents to be more actively involved with their grandchildren's schooling. Grandparents need to know what is happening in the academic sphere of their grandchildren. This will empower these grandparents to guide their grandchildren more holistically.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Families provide the social, cultural and emotional support that children need to function well in school (Deplanty, Conlter-Ken and Duchane 2007: 361). Although some of the grandparents do not have legal custody over their grandchildren, it is still expected that the grandchild/ren in their care, receive holistic parenting and that the grandparents should be held responsible for their holistic well-being. Parenting behaviours, parental approaches and parental skills often directly influence children's educational achievement and cognitive development (Bakker, Denessen and Brus-Leaven 2007: 175). If grandparents can understand the importance of education and the fundamental role they play in their grandchildren's schooling and education, it may have a positive impact on the academic performance of the learner raised in their household.

Against this background, the research questions may be formulated.

### **1.3.1 Main research problem**

What is the influence that the grandparent-headed families have on the academic performance of the learners under their care?

### **1.3.2 Sub-questions**

- What are the barriers that limit the grandparents from providing educational support to their grandchildren?
- How could educators assist grandparents and learners from grandparent-headed households?
- What strategies and programmes must be identified to assist grandparents to provide effective educational support to their grandchildren?

## **1.4 THE AIMS OF THE STUDY**

- To establish if the grandparent-headed family has an influence on the academic performance of the learner.
- To establish barriers that limits the grandparents from providing educational support to their grandchildren?
- To establish the ways in which educators can assist grandparents and the learners from grandparent-headed households.

- To identify strategies and programmes, in order to assist grandparents, to provide effective educational support to their grandchildren.

## **1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.5.1 Research design**

The researcher decided on Qualitative research. Qualitative research focuses on the subjective views of research participants. Researchers can exploit the rich, illuminating, data generated in qualitative research in the form of verbatim quotations to be presented in their writing. The researcher will take special care during this research to link these quotations to appropriate themes and to make sure it is followed by an analysis. Qualitative data are gathered from smaller numbers, but are likely to be detailed and in-depth (Basit 2010: 182, 185).

### **1.5.2 Population and sampling**

This research will be conducted at five secondary schools within the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth. The researcher chose the secondary schools which are in the Schauderville and Gelvandale areas because they are in the same cluster and also consist of learners who are living in grandparent-headed families. The researcher will make use of purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling is a random sampling that is providing a sample of information-rich participants (Struwig and Stead 2001: 122). In this method of sampling, we use our discretion, knowledge or experience to choose the sample which we think suits the purposes of our study. This method is useful for

small-scale studies in which the researcher knows exactly what kind of sample is required and how it can be accessed (Basit 2010: 52).

### **1.5.3 Sample**

The participants will consist of learners, their grandparents and the educators. The learners chosen for this research are grade ten learners who are doing Life Orientation. The researcher will ask a name list of all learners in grade ten who are living in a grandparent-headed household from the selected schools. The learners will be randomly selected from these class lists. This will result in three learners per school. The researcher will also select the educators at these particular schools who teach Life Orientation to these learners who are part of the purposeful sampling. The grandparents of these learners will also become participants of the purposeful sampling.

### **1.5.4 Data collection method**

The researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with the respective participants. The researcher will record these semi-structured interviews with the participants using audio-tape and also take notes.

The learners will be interviewed at school, after obtaining consent from the learners, the school, their grandparents and the Department of Education in Port Elizabeth. The educators will be interviewed at their respective schools after they signed written consent. The grandparents will be interviewed in a naturalistic setting, namely at

their homes after they have given their written consent. The data will be collected through semi-structured interviews as well as through document analysis, for example, schedules from the schools.

#### **1.5.5. Data Analysis**

The researcher will implement the following methods to analyse the data by conducting “data tabulation, data coding, and constant comparative method of coding, interpreting qualitative data and writing a report” (Struwig and Stead 2001: 169). Data analysis will enable the researcher to organise the raw data which has been collected from the semi-structured interviews. The raw data will be tabulated into hard –copies and then organised according to themes or categories. The raw data will be grouped into themes by using codes. Constant comparative method of coding is when data is inductively analysed. Data interpretation focuses on the holistic interpretation of raw data. Interpretation is not merely the reporting of data but provides the reader with insights that were not obvious at first (Struwig and Stead 2001: 144). The results from the interviews will allow the researcher to group the similarities and differences.

### **1.6 METHODS TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS**

The researcher needs to be emphatic towards the needs of the participants in the study. During the research the well-being of the participants will be of top priority (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namely: 2005: 8). The element of trust between the researcher and the participants is of paramount importance. There

might be a risk to the research if the trust factor between the researcher and participants are weak. To ensure trust the researcher should make the participants aware of the purpose of the research and what is expected from them.

## **1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Research ethics provide researchers with a code of moral guidelines on how to conduct research in a morally acceptable way (Struwig and Stead 2001: 66). The research will be conducted at five secondary schools in The Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth. Before the research commences, written consent will be signed by all participants. The Department of Education in Port Elizabeth will be requested to give a written consent before research commences at these five secondary schools. Consent from the learners' grandparents and principals will be obtained before the interviews take place. The researcher will be using pseudonyms to safeguard the identity of the participants as well as ensuring confidentiality while conducting this research. The participants that are participating in this study will be given pseudonyms; their real names will not be used. They will be respected and treated with dignity throughout this study.

## **1.8 DELIMITATION AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The researcher narrowed the scope to five secondary schools in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth. Inception takes place because it is a small sample which limits generalisation. These findings could be used for future research and practice.

## **1.9 DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS**

### **1.9.1 Grandparent-headed family**

We frequently use the term 'grandparent-headed family' to characterise families in which grandparents have been placed in the parenting role because of the absence, death, or incarceration of the parent or the inability of the parent to raise the child (Cox 2007 :562). The number of grandparents who are rearing their grandchildren because of their adult children's inability to parent is increasing (Bethany & Bailey 2007: 334). It is similarly found that the bulk of care for orphans within the extended family rested with grandparents (Tasmane and Head 2010: 84 ). A careful analysis of South African history will attest to the central role played by grandparents in looking after their grandchildren, orphaned or not (Tasmane and Head 2010: 77).

Horner, Downie, Hay and Wichmann (2007:77) explain it as a family where grandparents provide full-time parental care in the absence of the biological parent(s). The increasing fragility of family arrangements is also reflected in increased rates of divorce, participation of parents in the workforce and abandonment. These circumstances have resulted in grandparents assuming parental roles more frequently (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: xv).

It can be surmised that grandparent-headed family is when the grandparent take the role as surrogate parent to their grandchildren because of the absence of their biological children due to divorce, death, incarceration, participation in the work force and abandonment.

### **1.9.2 Academic performance**

Academic performance refers to how students deal with their studies and how they cope with or accomplish different tasks given to them by their teachers. It can be measured by collecting data on student performances on actual classroom projects and tasks (Madison 2009: 11).

### **1.9.3 Secondary school learner**

According to Gasa (2006: 10) a learner is defined as any person, ranging from early childhood development to the adult education phases, who is involved in any kind of formal or non-formal education and training activity, any person who receives or, is obliged to receive education. The term 'learner' refers to persons studying in ordinary, public school. A learner who has successfully completed a primary education proceed to secondary school and thereby called a secondary school learner. According to the stages of development the secondary school learner is in the adolescent stage. Barnhart and Barnhart (1976:29) define adolescent as a person growing up from childhood to manhood or womanhood. Freud (Rice 1996:58) perceives adolescence as a period of internal conflict, psychic disequilibria and erotic behaviour. During this stage the emotional development of adolescents are perturbed pertaining to the relationship with their parents, peers, teachers, and the whole society. This stage makes it difficult for anyone involved to give necessary support to these learners, especially the grandparents.

#### **1.9.4 Port Elizabeth Education District**

Port Elizabeth is one of the three towns (Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage and Despatch) that form part of Nelson Mandela Metro pole. Port Elizabeth Education District consists of all the schools in Port Elizabeth. This district has eighty secondary schools. The Northern areas form a part of the Port Elizabeth Education District. There are sixteen secondary schools in the Northern Areas; the research for this study will be conducted at five of these Northern Areas Secondary Schools.

#### **1.10 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

This dissertation consists of five chapters.

##### **Chapter 1**

This chapter consists of the introduction, problem statement, the aims of the study, purpose of the study, research design and methodology, methods to ensure trustworthiness, ethical consideration, delimitation and scope of the study, definition of concepts and lastly chapter outline.

##### **Chapter 2**

This chapter gives a comprehensive review of the related literature on why grandparents become second-time parents. The responsibilities these second-time parents have towards their grandchildren. The documented experiences of these learners who are living in grandparent-headed families are compared to relevant

literature. The impact these second-time parents have on the scholastic performance of the learners is reviewed as well as the theoretical background of this study.

### **Chapter 3**

This chapter presents the methodology of the study, the research design, instrumentation strategies for data collection as well as procedures for data analysis.

### **Chapter 4**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study as well as discussions of the results. The outcomes of the study is compared to related theories and literature. The discussion focuses on qualitative data collected by means of interviews.

### **Chapter 5**

This chapter provides a summary of the study. The recommendations for further research are also discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This study draws on Family systems theory (Kruk 1994:38) and Role Theory (Landry-Meyer and Newman 2004). These two theories allow one to understand the organizational complexity of families, as well as the interactive patterns that guide family interactions. According to Weigel (2008: 2026); Levin and Trost (1992: 348) and Mbiti (1969: 106) the concept of family is one with which almost every individual can identify. It has different interpretations from different people, for some, it means their family of origin, a clan, a blood relative; the family that someone has biologically created; and for others, it means the individuals with which someone has developed lasting bonds of intimacy through adoption, foster care, or other relationships. What is important about the family is that it is a basic social unit of all cultures. It has represented the most significant institution for nurturing, caring for, and socializing children. While some people still cling to the traditional definition of a family meaning two or more persons living together related by blood, marriage, or adoption; other people in different societies recognize that a sizable number of families do not fit this definition.

The above family definition encouraged the Governor's Task Force on Children, Youth and Families in New Mexico to adopt the family policy. It was adopted in 1990 and states the following: "We all come from families. Families are big, small, extended, nuclear, multi-generational, with one parent, two parents, and grandparents. We live under one roof or many or none. A family can be as temporary as a few weeks, as permanent as forever. We become part of a family by birth,

adoption, marriage, or from a desire for mutual support. As family members, we nurture, protect, and influence each other. Families are dynamic and are cultures unto themselves, with different values and unique ways of realizing dreams. Together our families become the source of our rich cultural heritage and spiritual diversity. Each family has strengths and qualities that flow from individual members and from the family as a unit. Our families create neighborhoods, communities, states and nations” (The Report on the House memorial 5 Task Force on Young Children and Families 1990: 4). This policy excerpts captures the essence of this study which argues that grandparent-headed family is a very important family unit that needs to be supported in order to function well and thereby give better parental support and guidance to those learners who are in need.

## **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.2.1 Family Systems Theory**

Family systems theory's heritage emerged from the work of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy's work on *general systems theory* which offered the world of the mid-twentieth century a different way of viewing science. Instead of the mechanistic models of the time, von Bertalanffy's general systems theory argued that organisms are complex, organized, and interactive. Such an approach shifted from a linear causal model to models that required a broader, *holistic* orientation in order to understand fully the dynamics involved. By the close of the twentieth century family systems theory had become one of the major theoretical foundations guiding empirical investigations into

the study of families and from which clinical interventions and programmatic work with families were being developed (Kruk 1994:38).

Family systems theory stipulates that a system must be understood as a whole. A system cannot be understood if the individual parts are scrutinized in isolation. The whole is bigger/greater than the parts. Within the family there are properties and behaviours which should not be viewed in isolation if one wants to gain the understanding of the family. Understanding the whole of the family unit is important in order to understand the “hierarchy” of the family (Letiecq, Bailey and Kurtz 2007: 14-16). Each family or a clan has their own values and principles that encourage the grandparents to take care of their grandchildren in times of crisis. This clan determines how the family members as a system are grouped, their roles and duties. The change that could happen to a single family member could influence and bring about changes to the whole family. When the nuclear family is unable to take care of the child for whatever reasons the system is not dismantled but extended to other members of the family, in this case grandparents.

This theory emphasizes the importance of the family. What makes a family? A possible answer could be a sense of belonging. The family consists of multiple components that are inter -dependant (Kruk 1994: 38). The grandparent-headed unit is also a family unit where the grandparents became second-time parents to their grandchildren because their adult children are unable to fulfill their role as parents. It brings a sense of belonging to those in need, in this case the grandchildren. Any family unit influences the individual in how to interact with people and how to be a productive member in society. How well the family unit functions as individuals or as

a group influences the other family members as well (Conway 2004: 16). How these individuals interact with society, their beliefs, their life style and life world could directly or indirectly be influenced by the family unit they grew up in (Glaser, Montserrate, Waginger, Stuchburg and Tinker 2010: 37).

### **2.2.2 Role Theory**

Role theory provides the framework for the exploration of the different roles that grandparents are exposed to when enacting a parent role. Due to the shift in the nuclear family the grandparent has to adopt the role as second-time parent to their grandchildren. They are compelled by the circumstances to have a dual role as grandparent and second-time parent to their grandchildren. They assume a role that has no clear guidelines (Coall and Hertwig 2010:25). Grandparents may suffer from a lack of insight because they are unfamiliar with the milieu of which their grandchildren are raised in. They might have emotional and physical stresses because now they need to acclimatize with roles of being a parent in this changing epoch. They may have a low self-concept because they are overwhelmed by the responsibility to raise their grandchildren to become productive members of society (Thomas, Spring and Yarrow 2000:4). They find themselves in different stages, such as consensus, conformity, role conflict and role taking (Landry-Meyer and Newman 2004:1008).

Consensus, conformity, role conflict and role taking are concepts that are going to be discussed under role theory and how they influence the grandparent-headed households.

- Consensus

It is an agreement among the persons and the expectations that is held by the people in society to take responsibility for a situation (Landry-Meyer and Newman 2004: 1008). It is expected that these grandparents should do what is anticipated from them and to uphold the principles, values and norms of these roles that is dictated by society, when they consent to take the responsibility.

When consensus is established integration and interaction runs efficiently. The question still arises to what extent do grandparents agree to these norms and values as they unexpectedly took over the parenthood roles in times of crisis? Secondly does this integration really embody the consensus between the grandparent and society expectation of this “new role”? This consensus is not always relevant when grandparents are expected by society to be second-time parents and to fulfill this role when they are not mentally, physically, socially and financially ready.

- Conformity

Conformity seems as social imitation (Landry-Meyer and Newman 2004: 1008). Some grandparents conform to the role of second-time parenting because their peers might also be raising their grandchildren. Sometimes they become engaged to this parenting because they think it is expected of them to

conform to this behavior and as a result they internalized these norms. It is likely to happen that some of the grandparents are externally influenced to conform to these unexpected roles. They may be influenced by society and their peers that are second-time parents to embrace this unexpected and demanding role. Even if these grandparents might feel that they are not as equipped to be second-time parent, peer and societal pressure as well as family crises may enforce conformity. However, this pressure that is placed on these new second-time parents may be taken without giving it much thought.

- Role conflict

This is when a person is faced with conflicting expectations that is in clash with the person's norms and values. It might be difficult for these grandparents to totally remove themselves from the problem of being a second-time parent but the reality of being a parent and not enacting a traditional grandparent role contributes to a sense of conflict. The transition from grandparent to parent poses internal conflict for them. When they assume a parental role they must accept that they are the disciplinarian, provider, and authority figure in a parent-child relationship. The conflict role may be displayed through guilt feelings. The grandparents may agree or forced by the circumstances to take over parenthood of their grandchildren. When the emotional state that they were in when they took over parenthood subsides, they begin to wonder if they are capable of fulfilling the needs of their grandchildren. Age, health, poor sight

and/or hearing, backache, high blood pressure, and chest and side pains also become a big factor to their conflict (Landry-Meyer and Newman 2004: 1019).

- Role taking

The grandparent must take the “role of the other”. In this study the grandparents must take the role as surrogate parents to their grandchildren. This might be due to factors such as illness, imprisonment, substance abuse, parental death, teenage pregnancy, abandonment, military deployment, deportation, parental neglect or abuse, divorce and single parenting, poverty, homelessness or some other situations requiring kinship care. Now the responsibility lies with these grandparents to raise their grandchildren. Many grandparents might not have the resources to raise their grandchildren but feel the need to take up the role as second-time parent (Landry- Meyer and Newman (2004: 1018).

### **2.3 CAUSES FOR THE GROWTH OF GRANDPARENT-HEADED FAMILIES**

One of the fundamental functions of parents is to care and protect their children. Unfortunately many parents are unable to fulfil this paramount purpose in their children’s lives. This leads to intervention from extended family, mostly the grandparents. This shift means grandparents have to be the surrogate parents to their grandchildren, because their parents are unable to fulfil their classically defined role as parents (Letiecq, Bailey and Kurtz 2007: 1). In many of these families, grandparents are raising grandchildren not by choice or tradition but by default. It

may be where a family crisis necessitated that a grandparent is required to take the responsibility as parent (Szolnoki and Cahn 2002: 2).

Historically, grandparents have often served voluntarily as an alternative and no obligation was attached to their role. Mudavanhu (2008: 14) mentions four types of these voluntarily grand parenting styles:

- The formal type  
This type is where the grandparent spoils their grandchildren with special gifts and baby sit on an ad hoc basis
- The fun seeker  
This type is when the grandparent plays an advisory role
- The distant figure  
This type is when the grandparent is not as actively involved in the grandchild/ren's live because of physical constraints and distance
- The reservoir of family wisdom  
This style is when the grandparent is responsible for imparting special skills, wisdom, knowledge and resources to the younger members of the family

In addition, Mudavanhu (2008:14) mentioned another grandparent type which is different from those mentioned above. The surrogate grandparent differs because there is an obligation attached to it. This one is very important in this study as it brings out its main focus. Many grandparents have not planned or indeed expected to be solely responsible for raising their grandchildren. These grandparents may not even have had the time to think about what lies ahead. It may be possible that the main reason for their rushed decision to take their grandchildren could be out of

trepidation that their grandchildren will be placed in foster care or adopted by strangers and they will never have contact with them (Szolnoki and Cahn 2002: 3).

These grandparents could have taken their grandchildren because of drug or alcohol abuse. In some cases when parents abuse drugs or alcohol, they neglect or physically abuse their own children. Abuse of children by their parent or parents may lead to the removal of these children from their parental home (Smith and Dannison 2003: 38). Any form of abuse is traumatic to a child. It could be more traumatic when the children suffer abuse from the hands of their own parents as they are expected to play a significant role and have positions of trust. This would possible be a double blow for the extended family more so for the grandparents. Although, these grandparents might have ambivalent feelings towards their children, they may still need to take care of their abused grandchildren (Tshenkeng 2009: 24). Divorce or separation can be very damaging to parents and also leads to children desertion. The divorce and unemployment sometimes lead to economic hardships and contribute to financially inability of the parents to take care of their children. The incarceration of parents may also contribute to the unavailability of the biological parents. Due to economic hardships, greedy and unemployment, some parents fall prey of evil acts and end up in jail. During their term in jail, grandparents are compelled by circumstances to avail themselves and take care of their grandchildren (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: xvii).

HIV/AIDS is one of the most dreaded diseases in South Africa and worldwide (Karim and Karim 2010: 37). People are getting sick and die in great numbers. The Aids epidemic has left many children orphaned. Grandparents become second-time

parents out of love for their sick or deceased children and orphaned grandchildren (Hlabiyago and Ogunbanjo 2009: 506). Their role as second time parent might now be a necessity because of the stigma still attached to the life choices their children have made. These grandparents might have a strong sense of family and might perceive it as vital to make sure that these children see themselves as part of a family unit.

There are some other illnesses including mental illness that may hinder the parents from taking care of their own. When parents are diagnosed with a mental illness and have to be placed in specialised care the responsibility of their children usually are transferred to the extended family. Usually the grandparents take care of their grandchildren. These grandparents might feel a deep sense of obligation towards their own children and grandchildren. They may also be under the impression that it is only a temporary arrangement and that the biological parents will be able to resume their responsibility as parents. In some situations the temporary arrangement becomes permanent (Szolnoki and Cahn 2002: 4).

Teenage pregnancy is on the rise in South Africa. These teenagers are not financially, mentally and emotionally ready to take care of their own children. Some of them are unemployed, lack education and expected to go back to school after giving birth (Coall and Hertwig 2010: 35). Teenage pregnancy becomes one of the most intense changes in the grandparent-headed household. Grandparents possibly feel a sense of responsibility to their grandchildren and take responsibility for them. They are unable to deal with the stigma when their teenage daughter becomes pregnant and try to make the situation as normal as possible. Many grandparents

may have feelings of unconditional love and will take care of their grandchildren rather than leave them at the mercy of strangers. (Smith and Dannison 2003: 37).

Raising a child is expensive more so for parents that are unemployed. Most grandparents come to the aid of their children and try to lighten the burden. They take the financial responsibility of raising these grandchildren (Coall and Hertwig 2010: 19). Another reason may be the behavioural instability of the grandchildren. When parents are unable to care for their children these children could possible show more signs of behavioural and emotional problems (Smith and Dannison 2003: 38). Parents may find they are unable to cope with their off spring and the help of the grandparents are enlisted. These grandparents might view this opportunity to be of assistance to their grandchildren as an opportunity raise their grandchildren differently to that of their own children (Conway 2004: 21). Tshenkeng (2009: 24) expands that all these sacrifices may be caused by the grandparents' guilt over the disintegration of their family.

Grandparents are significant role-players in the lives of their grandchildren in our culture as well as other cultures (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: xv). Grandparents are considered to have gained experience and responsible for advice, support or the occasional sleepover, when and if parents required such support. They often assist with the care, education, minding and general childhood education, nurture and support of their grandchildren on ad hoc basis (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: xviii). Grandparents may conceivably want to keep the family unit safe but without assistance from professionals and extended family. These grandparents possibly will feel that they are unable to be second time parents but because their own children

and grandchildren are depended on them, they might have to avail themselves. Grandparents may possibly also feel if they do not care for their grandchildren their grandchildren could be placed into foster care or adopted. Many grandparents might be second time parents to their grandchildren because they fear they may lose them and the family unit will change forever (Szolnoki and Cahn 2002: 7).

## **2.4 UNDERSTANDING HARDSHIP FACING GRANDPARENT-HEADED FAMILIES**

New groups of parents are emerging because of the shift in the family structures. One of the many groups of parents that are up-and-coming is the grandparent-headed family. This family unit is very vulnerable because mostly it arose out of crisis (Ruitz 2000: 2).

### **2.4.1 The responsibilities of grandparents in grandparent-headed families**

The grandparents' roles in a grandparent-headed family have been found to have negative and positive aspects (Cross and Day 2008: 85). In an objective view these grandparents are able to raise their grandchildren in their homes. These grandchildren raised by their grandparents will not be placed in traditional foster care or adopted by strangers. When grandparents raise their grandchildren themselves, it is assumed that the traditions and values of that family and that of their culture will be passed on to a younger generation. The heartache that these grandparents experience by the actions of their children might be lessened by raising their grandchildren themselves. Grandparents' might valour this opportunity to redeem

themselves as parents whereas they perceive that they may have failed with their own children. Although a shift in the family dynamics has occurred the well being of the children are still of paramount importance. The drawbacks of raising their grandchildren cannot be ignored (Cox 2007: 561).

A grandparent, as parent, of the grandchild becomes the primary educator of that child. The grandchild learns valuable life lessons from their grandparents. Parental involvement has shown to be of paramount importance for the school career of the learner (Bakker, Dennesen and Brus-Leaven 2007: 180). Grandparents might not be aware that their involvement in their grandchildren' schooling is vital. Despite the grandparents' school involvement, they are also responsible to be a breadwinner, provide clothing, shelter and medical care. It is still expected of them to educate and transfer cultural norms and traditions to the younger generations, to instil a sense of cultural pride in their grandchildren. It is also expected from them to understand their grandchildren's emotional needs, and physical changes and to help them cope with traumatic life experiences. It should be understood that moving in with grandparents might not have been a smooth transition to some of these grandchildren. Some of these grandchildren might have been abused and neglected; it now becomes the responsibility of the grandparents/s to seek professional help for them and during this process to guide and support their grandchildren (Mkhonta 2008: 88).

#### **2.4.2 Challenges facing grandparents in grandparent-headed families**

Many grandparents take over the parental role during family crisis. They are often unprepared for their new role and thus face considerable challenges (Cox 2007: 2). These challenges could be the age of the grandparent, financial and socio-economic standards, health, and the level of education. These challenges appear to have a profound impact on the grandparents' lives and might influence the philosophy of their grandchildren's life. The life view of the grandparents might influence the life view of their grandchild. Grandparents might feel stressed because their lives had to be altered to meet the needs of their grandchildren. They might also be stressed because their children are unable to be productive parents (Thomas, Sperry and Yarrow 2000: 4).

These grandparents may have to stop working, reduce their work hours, or make other employment related sacrifices to allow for the time needed to care for their grandchildren (Cross and Day 2008: 86). In many instances, grandparents might be the sole breadwinners in the family and as a direct result of the reduction or loss of income it might lead to financial constraints. These financial constraints will directly influence the grandchildren in their care. Grandparents' might feel their grandchildren could be taken away from them so they may choose not to ask for financial intervention from the government or non-governmental organisations (Cross and Day 2008: 561).

Many of these grandchildren are raised in poverty because in some of these households the only income they receive is a monthly old age pension grant. (Cross

and Day 2008: 561). Another drawback which is of some concern is the health of the grandparents. They may have old age ailments such as high blood pressure, diabetics, depression, arthritis, malnutrition and heart disease. Their ailments may never be treated because sometimes they are hesitant to seek medical attention because they may be hiding to be seen as not able-bodied enough to raise their grandchildren (Cox 2007: 562).

Grandparents that raise their grandchildren have more stress than their less stressed peers (Letiecq, et al 2007: 351). These grandparents as second time parents could experience difficulty in understanding the life world of their grandchildren. These grandparents may face barriers when communicating with their grandchildren. These stressful factors possibly may cause grandparents to be highly strung second-time parents. These stressors that the grandparents experience might lead to depression. These grandchildren have emotional needs when they come to live with their grandparents. It may happen that some of them were raised in a dysfunctional family where their parents were quarrelsome, abusing alcohol, taking drugs, abusing and neglecting them. Their innocence and trust could be shattered by the people they trust the most, their parents. These events might have directly influenced their emotional development (Gasa 2012: 206). Grandchildren raised in these circumstances are likely to have severe emotional needs that require intervention from the experts. It becomes stressful for these grandparents to sought help from the experts in order to assist these grandchildren to become well adjusted individuals in society. Depression is most likely among grandparents who have recently assumed the role as care giver. Traditional roles in the past may have sheltered grandparents from emotions such as sadness and hopelessness (Letiecq, et al 2007: 349, 352).

Taking the responsibility of looking after younger children might make the caregiver feel very isolated. Having no support from the extended family and society might lead to a feeling of seclusion. These grandparents might have been actively involved in society but now they are unable to pursue this endeavour. They might still have actively been involved in the workplace but now they have the responsibility of raising their grandchildren. They might feel obligated to leave the workforce or work less hours so that they could tend to the needs of their grandchildren (Letiecq, et al 2007: 351). Their loneliness could lead to ill health and depression, especially when their peer group may be involved in leisurely activities whereas they are performing the role as second-time parent (Cox 2007: 564).

Mention has been made that the grandparents sometimes become the caregivers after a crisis in the family. Grandparents might be given a double blow, raising their traumatised grandchildren and assisting their own children. As part of the child's extended family grandparents may not have been as actively involved in the raising and caring of their grandchildren. Their involvement become so instant due to a crisis and brings about a shift not only within the home of the grandparents but in the homes of all the members of the family (Cox 2007: 77). This instant involvement makes them to accept the role as a parent to their own children and the role as second-time parent to their grandchildren. This directly influences the family dynamics. These grandparents have a dual role to fulfil. When they were raising their own children they were younger and mostly were of good health. Now these second-time parents might have ailments and are older (Conway 2004: 11). Their poor health may be worsened by the lack of time, money and ability to address their

physical health issues. In some cases these grandparents are afraid that their medical condition may hinder them from raising their grandchildren. They sometimes hide their health status in fear of losing their grandchildren (Szolnoki and Cahn 2002: 4).

Care givers especially those whom are older tend to have more financial restraints. These grandparents possibly live on a fixed income in a form of state pension grant. They may be willing to raise their grandchildren but financially they are unable to provide the basic needs to their grandchildren. As a result, these households experience a lot of poverty (Szolnoki and Cahn 2002: 2). In addition, raising their grandchildren could possibly be a factor in an increase in emotional stress of grandparents. The stress level is also heightened by grandparents' unpreparedness to deal with the school, society, family and health care facilitators (Szolnoki and Cahn 2002: 4). It is also stressful to them when their legality of caregiving is questioned as some of them do not have legal custody over their grandchildren. Sometimes they are not recognized as legitimate caregivers (Cox 2007: 564).

#### **2.4.3 Challenges facing grandchildren in grandparent-headed families**

There is always the possibility that the grandchildren are uncomfortable with the contact their grandparents have with their parents. Sometimes these grandchildren could be under the impression that their grandparents are more supportive of their parents. They may possibly feel they are constraining the lives of their grandparents. They might not feel comfortable expressing their feelings to their grandparents. In some cases their biological parents still have contact with their children. There is

always the possibility that these parents have abused their children. Some grandchildren might have trust issues, because their parent was not reliable and trustworthy (Thomas, Sperry and Yarrow 2000: 4).

These grandchildren' health and economical situation might draw correlation. Their grandparents may not be able to afford medical attention when they require it. Going for regular check-ups at the dentist may not be seen as a necessity. They may also need mental health services, specialised counselling and specialised medical care this might possible not be paid for by their grandparents because they do not have the money (Letiecq, et al 2007: 337). Most grandchildren living in a grandparent-headed household may live in poverty. Absolute poverty reduces the ability to learn and influences children's educational outcomes. It results in poor home circumstances where there is lack of books, lighting or places to do homework. It affects children's physical well being and is associated with low parental education, limited resources and poor nutrition which reduces the chances of investing to education. It makes them more vulnerable to diseases and less able to concentrate at school (UNESCO EFA 2006: 111).

The self-concept, to the grandchildren from grandparent-headed household, is more than a feeling of pride but to be accepted, respected, loved and recognised by others ( Alexander and Winnie 2006: 355). These grandchildren may be in a situation where they were hurt and abused by their parents, this might influence the way they see themselves. It will affect their self-esteem. They may have a low self-esteem if they do not accept themselves. When a child is reminded by others that they look and acts like their parent and if they have a poor relationship with their parent could

manifest a low self-esteem when it comes to his appearance (Horner, Downie, Hay and Wichmann 2000: 80).

Grandchildren living in grandparent headed families might feel that their loyalty is divided between their parents and grandparents. These grandparents could have additional responsibility because their grandchildren in their care could have emotional scars and needs (Letiecq, et al 2007: 352). They may possibly feel that their parents do not care enough for them and wanted to get rid of their responsibilities towards them. They may also feel they are a burden to their grandparents (Gutman, et al 2007: 377).

These grandchildren could also feel alone and unsure because they have been removed from the family home who had its own set of rules. These grandchildren are now living with their grandparents who possibly could instil new rules and customs. These grandchildren may well also feel unsure because they do not know for how long they will be living with their grandparents. These grandchildren could undergo feelings of insecurity about their current living arrangements. These grandchildren may perhaps not want to become as attached to their grandparents because they might feel that this arrangement is not permanent. Directly or indirectly their grandparents might transfer these stresses onto their grandchildren (Letiecq, et al 2007).

The feelings of the child living in a grandparent-headed household may not be as transparent. The grief that the children experience may sometimes be hidden from their grandparents. This grief may be hidden as the children resist expressing their

feelings sometimes out of fear of upsetting the grandparent (Cox 2007: 562). These grandchildren do not only have to deal with their new living arrangements but they may also be dealing with a traumatic experience. Sometimes the grandchild may feel if they speak about what happened to them their grandparents might feel upset and may stop caring for them. Grandchildren possibly could also act out. They may be disrespectful towards their grandparents and in some instances experience resentment. These grandchildren might not be able to handle the traumatic experience due to lack of interest from significant role-players in their life or they are un-cooperating when help is offered. These feelings of grief may perhaps be misplaced and manifest itself as behavioural problems in these grandchildren living in a grandparent-headed household (Cox 2007: 562).

## **2.5 THE SCARCITY OF RESOURCES IN GRANDPARENT-HEADED FAMILIES**

Many grandparents have to provide for their grandchildren on a fixed income (Letiecq, et al 2007:38). Many grandparents in grandparent-headed households sole income is their monthly pension. Caring for themselves and their grandchildren means they live in poverty or below the poverty line. Holistically caring for their grandchildren, grandparents might need more financial assistance. Providing education, school fees, books, uniform, lunches and if required transport to and from school must be provided through this inadequate income. Low income grandparents often have limited financial resources to cover the financial demands of child rearing (Thomas, et al: 2000: 11).

Although it is widely accepted that every child has the right to shelter; food and clothing unfortunately in these households, these basic rights could only be met to a degree. Many grand-parent headed families may possibly not have medical aid. Due to this factor dental care and regular check-ups could be seen as a luxury. Making use of state hospitals or clinics can be time consuming and transport to and from these free medical facilities may perhaps be too costly. If the grandchild experienced a traumatic life experiences this might go untreated because the funds may perhaps not be available to seek professional help (Cox 2007: 563).

As previously mentioned many grandparents in grandparent-headed households may not ask for assistance from other family members, government institutions or non-government institutions because they fear that their grandchildren may be taken away from them (Szolnoki and Cahn 2002: 7). Many of these children may not even have had a single decent meal a day and this might affect their schooling. Many of these grandchildren in grandparent-headed households can be malnourished and this may perhaps lead to numerous ailments. Grandparents, themselves, may also suffer from health problems that may go untreated due to their financial constraints. Lack of finances may hinder the bond that is so desperately needed between these grandparents and their grandchildren in their care (Moji, Pony and Frick 2004: 4).

The counselling and support available for grandparents are limited or non-existent in the case of the majority of grandparents. There are organisations that provide a variety of support services, including information and support classes, family counselling, and assistance with applying for benefits, but grandparent-headed families are sometimes overlooked (Gasa 2012: 206).

## **2.6 EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FACING GRANDPARENTS, LEARNERS AND TEACHERS**

Learners from grandparent-headed families depend on their grandparents and teachers for educational support. The grandparents become second time parents to these learners which compel them to be their primary educators. But some of these grandparents are not able to fulfil every sphere of these learners' lives due to numerous challenges that face grandparent-headed families. The teachers are also expected to provide support to these learners, although they also confront some challenges. At the end all these challenges affect the academic performance of these learners.

### **2.6.1 Grandparents as heads of the house**

When an older caregiver takes on the kinship care, he/she is instantly placed into an unfamiliar new world of agencies, schools, legal systems, and policies and procedures. Although these systems are critical to the care of the child; it could add additional stressors to the grandparent as second time parent. Parental involvement is a critical factor in children's school achievement at all grade levels (Gutman, et al 2002: 371). Despite the critical role that they need to play, these grandparents may feel intimidated when dealing with the personnel and the school system. This is because they lack the necessary skills on how to deal with the evolution of the educational system as well as to assist the modern day learner (Cox 2007: 564). Understanding the technological epoch of their grandchildren might be overwhelming

for these second-time parents. Many of these grandparents might have raised their children in an age where technology was not as advanced. These new forms of communication might be viewed by some of these second-time parents as unnecessary and time consuming. These grandparents may possibly not even be aware of cyber bullying and unsavoury chat rooms that are detrimental to their grandchildren. This is only an example on how daunting raising a teenager has become to any parent. To better understand any teenager is to understand what they consider as important and what could possibly harm them in their life world.

Families provide the social, cultural and emotional support so that learners could function well in school (Deplanty, et al 2007: 36). Although the grandparents may not have legal custody over their grandchildren, it is still expected that the grandchildren in their care receive holistic parenting and that the grandparents should be held responsible for their holistic well-being. If these learners are in adolescence stage, it should be understood that adolescence encompasses not only rapid physiological and psychological changes associated with puberty, but also social transformations that follow the transition to secondary schools (Gutman, et al 2002:36). These grandparents may not be in a position to assist their grandchildren because they are not aware of their transitional stage and the changes that occurred in education due to illiteracy or limited schooling.

Some of these challenges these grandparents possibly encounter could be their inability to attend parent-teacher consultations. A vital key that these grandparents might not be aware of is to communicate with their grandchildren's educators (TAF

grandparents as caregivers programme: 31). Grandparents might feel that they are being summonsed to learn how they are failing their grandchildren.

These grandparents might be old. They possibly the oldest 'parents' at these meetings and may feel uncomfortable. They may be old and have health issues which could be a challenge for these grandparents where the schooling needs of their grandchildren are concerned (Weaver 2007: 5). Transportation to school may hinder them from participation in school events (Mudavanhu, et al: 24). Some of these grandparents are forced to work to take care of the needs of their family (Cox 2007: 20). Many of these families live in poverty and out of necessity these grandparents have to work (Mansfield 2009: 16). A teacher-parent consultation dims in comparison when a grandparent needs to work to provide food for their families. Many of these grandparents are unable to assist their grandchildren, in their care, with their homework. Some of these grandparents could be illiterate and could become frustrated and overwhelmed when dealing with their grandchildren's homework (Mudavanhu, et al 2008: 92). Understanding the amount of homework, projects and task their grandchildren must be able to do could be very confusing to these grandparents, if they do not have an understanding of the educational system. Parental educational level and occupation can be hinderers when assisting with homework (Mansfield 2009: 15).

The language that is used as language of learning and teaching at school may pose a challenge to the illiterate grandparents (TAF grandparents as caregivers programme: 36). Taking on the responsibility as second-time parent may drastically change the lives of these grandparents. Many of these grandparents might not have wanted the responsibility of raising children again but out of a sense of duty they

were forced to take the responsibility. These grandparents possibly will feel disappointment in not being able to enjoy this stage of their lives. Their feelings might manifest itself in showing impatience, shifting their responsibility onto educators or showing no interest in their grandchildren's schooling (TAF grandparents as caregivers programme: 6). Most of grandparent-headed households depend on old age fixed income which is not enough in supporting their household. This is a major concern when it comes to the schooling needs of their grandchildren. Their grandchildren might possibly not have the basic essentials, for example, books (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: 103).

Older grandparents might struggle more with their physical health. Due to their age and health these grandparents are unable to physically support their grandchildren with their schooling needs (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: 18). Some of these grandparents might find their grandchildren's school environment antagonistic. These grandparents could possibly view meetings more as interrogation than consulting with educators. These attitudes of being self-conscious or distrustful of these grandparents could be due to previous negative experiences they have encountered with schools (Weaver 2007: 5). These grandparents might not have the patience to cope with their own limited abilities or the needs of their grandchildren (TAF grandparents as caregivers programme: 5). School systems have changed over the years. Grandparents might not be as familiar with these changes and terminology. Many grandparents might still view the educator as solely responsible for the academic development of learners. These grandparents lack of education, socio-economic status and occupation might be barriers when dealing with the school (Mansfield 2009: 15).

## **2.6.2 Learners from grandparent-headed families**

Learners living in grandparent-headed households might have experienced traumatic loss. These learners may have lost or have been taken away from their parents. These learners are now living in a grandparent-headed household which could differ from the households of their peers. As teenagers they are undergoing physical and emotional changes. As learners they have to deal with the demands of education. Schools are not only where learners receive an education but where they interact with their educators and peers. Schools could be regarded as communities with their own codes of conduct, rules and regulations. Schools are excellent platforms for preparation where learners are taught, both directly and indirectly, how to interact with society at large. Largely, in this instance a strong sense of identity and a feeling of belonging could be practised and experienced by learners. Schooling may in some instances also be a disheartening experience to learners from grandparent-headed families because they feel isolated, lacking a proper identity and coming from a home that is not recognized by their peers or the school personnel (Gutman, et al 2002: 371).

These factors can be stressful to these learners and may positively or negatively influence their behaviour as well as influence their relationships with their family, educators and community. As a result of loss and separation they may not be able to form relationships of trust. It may also happen that they have been abused physically or emotionally by people they trusted and loved their parents. This may also result in them becoming loners, promiscuous, attention seekers or adopt a no care attitude

because of the trauma they might have experience. It is of paramount importance to them to be accepted by their peers because they need to have a sense of belonging to a group or organisation. Their inability to fit in with their peer group may lead to anti social behaviour. Even though these learners need more support and motivation to perform in a positive manner, their grandparents may be unable to assist them due to lack of knowledge, proper skills and financial constraints. The inability to remedy the situation may have a negative impact on their scholastic achievement (Conway 2004: 6).

The level of education the grandparent has or the degree of literacy may also directly impact on their grandchild. If the grandparent is educated he/she may be able to assist their grandchild with projects and homework. If a grandparent is illiterate or never completed his/her schooling this may lead to frustration to both the grandparent and grandchild because no assistance with homework will be given. Some grandchildren might be embarrassed by their grandparents' lack of education and may not inform them of teacher-parent consultations. Some grandparents might not realise the importance of education because they have not received any formal education (Mansfield 2009: 15).

### **2.6.3 Teachers as provider of knowledge and support**

Schools are excellent preparation to teach learners directly and indirectly how to interact with the society at large. In order to enable teachers to perform this role, the cooperation of parents and learners is very important. It becomes so stressful to the teachers if less cooperation is experienced. The teachers may be under the impression that both the grandparent and learner do not understand the importance of education (Gutman, et al 2002: 368, 371). The learner may feel lost and overwhelmed in this grandparent-headed household and could possibly manifest itself negatively in their academic performance, addition more stress to the teachers (Coall and Hertwig 2010: 23).

The teaching environment is portrayed as taxing. Educators experiences with learners raised in grandparent-headed households might add more stress. It is essential for educators to have an understanding of student's and parent's backgrounds. This will give educators the information they require to be of service to the learner as well as the parent. (Mansfield 2009: 17). Some of the stressors educators could encounter at schools are frequent absenteeism of learners, projects and task that are not handed in, learners not attending extra classes and extra-mural activities. Learners living in grandparent-headed households might have more to "cope" with then their peers. Some of these learners have to take care of their grandparents because they are old or sickly. This might be one of the reasons why these learners are absent (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: 108).

Educators might find the absenteeism of these learners as unnecessary. These educators might even feel that other arrangements could have been made for these grandparents. Although these learners are losing vital information when they absent and continuous assessment is unable to be monitored these learners might still feel their loyalty should be with their grandparents. They might feel obligated or indebted towards their grandparents for sheltering them. Educators need to be made aware of the other types of family units amongst their learners. (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: 108).

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter two theories have been discussed in order to allow one to understand the organizational complexity of families, as well as the interactive patterns that guide family interactions. It has been mentioned that grandparent-headed households are formed out of desperation and crisis. The permanent placement of these learners to these households is due to absence, abandonment or inability of biological parents to take care of their own children. Giving necessary support to these learners become a challenge to the grandparents and teachers. These challenges end up affecting these learners academically.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research method that was undertaken by the researcher. The explanation of the research design, research site, research population, data collection methods with the underlying headings of selection criteria and sampling, data gathering technique, interview schedule and data analysis is broadly given. This chapter concludes with the methods employed to ensure trustworthiness and ethical consideration.

#### 3.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence that the grandparent-headed household has on the academic performances of secondary learners in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth. The essence of this study has been captured through Family systems Theory and Role play, as mentioned in Chapter two. The research question that is under investigation is: *What is the influence that the grandparent-headed family has on the academic performance of the learners under its care?* In order to investigate the influence that grandparent-headed families have on the academic performance of learners, the researcher decided on qualitative research using in-depth interviews. The reason behind using qualitative research is because it focuses on the subjective views of research participants (Esterberg 2002: 55). Researchers can exploit these rich in-depth life experiences of the participants in qualitative

research form to be presented in writing. Qualitative data is gathered from smaller numbers, but is likely to be detailed and in-depth. Since qualitative research is so in-depth it becomes an intense task to the researcher to record, analysis and de-code these interviews (Basit 2010: 182, 185). The researcher took special care during this research to link these participants' life experiences to appropriate themes and that it was followed by an analysis.

When doing qualitative research, the researcher makes a conscience decision to understand the uniqueness of each participant and the setting where the investigation will be conducted (Merriam and Associates 2002: 5; Litchman 2010: 165). Not all participants in this study were co-operative. Some participants on the other hand felt the need to share their accounts. The settings where the interviews were conducted differed from school to school and from home to home. Qualitative studies make use of numerous measures like interviews and participant observation of which the researcher made use during this study. The researcher did not embark on this journey with pre-conceived ideas neither with rigid views. The main reason that drew the researcher to qualitative research remain, unlike quantitative research where the concern is more on numerical data, to obtain an in-depth understanding of how human beings act in response to their life experiences (Springer 2010: 148; Struwing and Stead 2001: 243).

### **3.2.1 Research site**

De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002: 282) point out that an ideal research site should be easily accessible, co-operation with the participants easily achieved

and the researcher should feel at ease to acquire the information for the study. The research sites were accessible to the researcher because she teaches at one of the five secondary schools that forms part of this study. She is also a Life Orientation educator and belongs to the same cluster group as these schools. The homes of the grandparents were in the broader area of Port Elizabeth since the researcher live in Port Elizabeth these areas are familiar. These reasons played a mayor role why these schools were chosen.

This research was conducted at five secondary schools within the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth. The researcher chose these secondary schools because they are in the same cluster and also consist of learners who are living in grandparent-headed families. The Department of Education, in the Port Elizabeth District, divided schools that are logistically positioned nearer to each other into groups or clusters. This was an advantage to the researcher because these schools teach the same subjects and the educators attends the same workshops and follows the same work programme. External moderation of formal assessment tasks of learners are also moderated at these cluster meetings. All these schools teach Life Orientation as a compulsory subject. The educators who are teaching Life Orientation in grade 10 were interviewed at their respective schools. They have a lengthy experience teaching at these schools and seemed passionate about their calling.

### **3.2.2 Research Population**

A research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific query. It is also known as a well-defined collection of

individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics. All individuals or objects within a certain population usually have a common, binding characteristic or trait. However, due to the large sizes of populations, researchers often cannot test every individual in the population because it is too expensive and time-consuming. This is the reason why researchers rely on sampling techniques. A sample is simply a subset of the population. The concept of sample arises from the inability of the researchers to test all the individuals in a given population. The main function of the sample is to allow the researchers to conduct the study to individuals from the population so that the results of their study can be used to derive conclusions that will apply to the entire population. The population gives the sample, and then it takes conclusions from the results obtained from the sample (Springer 2010: 189; De Vos, et al 2002: 198).

The sample of the population in this study consisted of sixteen learners, their sixteen grandparents and five educators from each selected school. The learners chosen for this research are grade ten learners who are doing Life Orientation at these five selected secondary schools. The researcher asked a name list of all learners in grade ten who are living in a grandparent-headed household from the principals at these selected schools. This resulted in three learners per school; the only exception was at one secondary school where the set of twins were drawn, making four learners to be interviewed. The respective principals assisted the researcher in the selection process of the educators at these particular schools who taught Life Orientation in grade ten. The selection of grandparents was based on being the caregivers of the selected learners.

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

#### **3.3.1 Selection criteria and sampling**

The researcher used purposive sampling to select the participants. Purposeful sampling is a random sampling that is providing a sample of information-rich participants (Struwig and Stead 2001: 122). In this method of sampling, the researcher use discretion, knowledge or experience to choose the sample which suits the purpose of the study. This method is useful for small-scale studies in which the researcher knows exactly what kind of sample is required and how it can be accessed (Basit 2010: 52).

In this study the researcher focused on three groups of participants, the learners who are living in grandparent-headed families, the grandparents who are primary caregivers to the selected learners and the grade ten Life Orientation educators who teaches these learners. The researcher was made aware which learners in grade ten were living in grandparent-headed families during an information session with the respective principals. These respective principals then provided the researcher with name list of these learners. The researcher randomly picked names of learners from these lists. The researcher contacted the grandparents who are the caregivers to the selected learners telephonically after they have signed the consent letters for their grandchildren to participate in the interviews. The reasons for these telephonic conversations were to thank the grandparents for allowing their grandchildren to voluntary participate in the interview and to ask these grandparents to be participants in the study on voluntary basis.

### **3.3.2 Data gathering technique**

Data gathering has to do with generating or bringing together information that has been systematically observed, recorded, organized, categorized, or defined in such a way that logical processing and inferences may occur. The idea of gathering data in qualitative research is to take a large quantity of information, which could be bulky and to interact with it in such a way that it makes sense (Lichtman 2002: 195). In this study the semi-structured interviews were conducted with the respective participants. The video recorder was used to audibly record these semi-structured interviews with the participants. At first the participants were sceptical of the recordings but as the interviews progressed they became more at ease. The information received especially from most of the grandparents and Life Orientation educators were in-depth. Only a few of the learners felt at ease to give a more vivid description of their family life.

The semi-structured interviews enabled some of the participants to guide the researcher with their responses. This allowed these participants to tell their life story. This in turn guided the researcher to observe and at the appropriate time to enquire the participants to elaborate their experiences as educators, second-time parents and learners who are raised in grandparent-headed households.

### **3.3.3 Interview schedule**

Although the researcher had drafted semi-structured questions all of the participants were granted flexibility in their response. It was of utmost importance to the researcher that the participants could share their values and life experiences in an authentic manner. These sixteen learners were interviewed at school, after obtaining written and verbal consent from them and their grandparents. Each learner was asked six questions relating to the relationship, involvement in school activities and supporting nature that their grandparents are providing. They were also asked about their living conditions and barriers, if any, limiting equality and effective educational support.

The learners were interviewed in English because their language of instruction is English and some do English as an additional language. This, however, did not prevent the participants to respond to the questions in their home language. This decision was prompted by a request of the principal from one of the participating schools. The principal also asked the researcher to state this agreement in the letters the learners had to sign before the interview commenced. For the sake of clarity, the researcher also had to translate, explain and simplify some of the questions to the learners.

The five educators were interviewed at their respective schools after they gave their verbal and written consent. Their questions encompassed their experiences regarding the learners from grandparent-headed families, the scholastic performance, the behaviour and the availability of support to cater for their needs.

The grandparents were interviewed in a naturalistic setting, namely at their homes after they have given their written and verbal consent. They were given the flexibility to answer the questions relating to their experiences in caring for their grandchildren who are learners, the barriers they might have and the availability of support. Some of the grandparents preferred to be interviewed in their home language. The researcher was able to translate the interview questions into Afrikaans. Where a grandmother asked to be interviewed in isiXhosa the help of her grandson and niece were used. They in turn translated the participant's answers into English. For the sake of clarity, the researcher also had to explain some of the questions to the grandparents.

Written consent was also obtained from the principals at the respective schools to conduct these interviews on the school premises. These principals were very accommodating. A consultation with the acting District Director at the Department of Education at his office in Sidwell, Port Elizabeth was scheduled. He gave permission in the form of a letter for the research to take place at the selected five secondary schools in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth. The acting director was extremely helpful. He made a verbal and written appeal to the researcher to submit the findings of this investigation.

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

According to Struwig and Stead (2001: 144) data interpretation focuses on the holistic interpretation of raw data. Interpretation is not merely the reporting of data but provides the reader with insights that were not obvious at first. The researcher

analysed the data by conducting data tabulation, data coding, and constant comparative method of coding, interpreting qualitative data and writing a report. Constant comparative method of coding is when data is inductively analysed (Struwing and Stead 2001: 169). These methods of data analysis enabled the researcher to organise the raw data which has been collected from the semi-structured interviews. The raw data was tabulated into hard copies and then organised according to themes or categories. The raw data was grouped into themes by using codes.

Data analysis in qualitative research involves the categorizing and systematically arranging of large quantities of data (De Vos, et al 2002: 178). As soon as an interview was typed the researcher tabulated and de-coded the interviews. The researcher scrutinized for similarities and differences in the typed and recorded interviews. The researcher also highlighted the similarities and differences in these typed interviews. The results from these interviews allowed the researcher to group the similarities and differences. The themes that come from the interviews should always be interpreted from the basic observations and interviews of the participants (Merriam and Associates 2002: 209). Things that might not seem as important during the initial interview were recorded by the researcher. The tone of the participants' voices, their mannerisms, body language and the manner in which they answered the questions shed valuable information to the researcher.

### **3.5 METHODS TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS**

The researcher needed to be emphatic towards the needs of the participants in the study. During the research the well-being of the participants was of utmost importance to the researcher. The element of trust between the researcher and the participants is of paramount importance. There might be a risk to the study if the trust factor between the researcher and participants are weak. To ensure there was trust the researcher made the participants aware of the purpose of the research and what is expected from them.

### **3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Research ethics provide researchers with a code of moral guidelines on how to conduct research in a morally acceptable way (Struwig and Stead 2001: 66). The research was conducted at five secondary schools in The Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth. Before the research commenced, written consent was signed by all participants. The Department of Education in Port Elizabeth was requested to give a written consent before research commenced at these five secondary schools. Consent from the learners' grandparents, learners and Life Orientation educators were obtained before the interviews took place. The respective principals also provided the researcher with written consent to conduct these interviews on the premises of these five Secondary Schools.

The researcher used pseudonyms to safe guard the identity of the participants as well as to ensure confidentiality while conducting the research. The participants in

this study were given pseudonyms; their real names are not used. They were informed that they are not compelled to participate, that they are free to withdraw at any time and that the participation is voluntarily and no compensation will be offered. They were respected and treated with dignity throughout the interviews.

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the researcher explored in details the methods that were used to gather data for this study and how the collected data was analysed. It was highlighted that data was collected through interviews and observation, and the process of analysis was done through tabulation, coding and finally grouped into themes. The findings of these interviews will be discussed in the next chapter. The responses given by the participants during the interviews and observations will be analysed in full and conclusions will be drawn.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of the findings that were obtained through the interviews with the selected participants. These research findings are presented in biographical profiles as well as in themes and sub-themes. To enable the research to have the required impact, the biographical profiles of the participants are presented in a table format and not in a narrative format. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis are discussed and supported by the recurring extracts from the participants' utterances and input received. The recurring extracts are linked to the literature review, where possible.

#### 4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE OF GRANDPARENTS AND LEARNERS

##### 4.2.1 Learners

|                                     | Girls | Boys  |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| 1. Gender                           | 11    | 5     |
| 2. Age                              | 15-18 | 15-18 |
| 3. Grade                            | 10    | 10    |
| 4. Ethnic group                     |       |       |
| • Black                             | 5     | 2     |
| • Coloured                          | 6     | 3     |
| 4. Years staying in this family     |       |       |
| • since birth                       | 8     | 5     |
| • from the age of six               | 2     |       |
| • from the age of twelve            | 1     |       |
| 5. Receiving government child grant | 1     | 1     |

The researcher interviewed sixteen learners who are currently living in grand-parent headed families. The following observations were made during the interviews held. It is evident that most of these learners live in informal settlements and despite their home environment; their uniforms were mended and faded but neat. The other learners come from more privileged households and they were neatly dressed in their school uniform. Some of the learners were not wearing the required uniform. The researcher also noticed that the male learners were more guarded and reticent with their answers than the female learners. Some of the learners showed nervousness and difficulty when reading the consent letters. This could be that the letters were written in English which might be their additional language. Some of the schools in which these learners are attending are known for gang related activities and high crime rates prevalent within the geographic environment. These schools have security guards on the premises. These schools are all government schools and in some of these schools the buildings are old and show signs of vandalism. The researcher noticed broken windows, peeled paint and general neglect.

#### 4.2.2 Grandparents

|                           | Female | Male  |
|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| 1. Gender                 | 15     | 1     |
| 2. Age                    | 50-80  | 50-80 |
| 3. Ethnic group           |        |       |
| • Black                   | 7      | 1     |
| • People of colour        | 8      |       |
| 4. Marital status         |        |       |
| • married                 | 3      | 1     |
| • widowed                 | 9      |       |
| • never married           | 3      |       |
| 5. Employment information |        |       |
| • employed                | 2      |       |
|                           | 1      |       |

|  |    |   |
|--|----|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work part time</li> <li>• unemployed</li> </ul> | 12 | 1 |
| 6. Educational level   |    |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• illiterate</li> </ul>                           | 2  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• up to grade 3</li> </ul>                        | 1  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• up to grade 6</li> </ul>                        | 3  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• up to grade 9</li> </ul>                        | 9  | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• up to grade 12</li> </ul>                       | 0  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diploma</li> </ul>                              | 0  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• degree</li> </ul>                               | 0  |   |
| 7. Number of learners in their care  |    |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-2</li> </ul>                                  | 14 | 2 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-5</li> </ul>                                  | 2  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more than 5</li> </ul>                          | 0  |   |
| 8. Years caring for these learners   |    |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not more than 5 years</li> </ul>                | 6  | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not more than 12 years</li> </ul>               | 4  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not more than 18 years</li> </ul>               | 5  |   |

The researcher interviewed sixteen grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren. Most of these grandparents live in low income households. Some of these grandparents use paraffin because it is the only affordable source of energy. All these homes were neat. One grandparent and her grandson lived in an out building in her daughter's yard. Some grandparents' had their own homes while others paid a monthly rent. A grandmother, who works as a full time domestic worker, lives in a servant's quarters with her granddaughter, on her employer's property. Other grandparents had more comfortable life styles than other participants in this study. Most of these grandparents were not very knowledgeable about what learning areas and which curriculum their grandchildren were taught at their respective schools. Some grandparents had very little schooling and the changes that occurred in education since they raised their own children were unfamiliar to them.

### 4.3 EXPERIENCES OF GRANDPARENTS WHO ARE CARING FOR LEARNERS

There are a number of themes that emerged under this section such as living conditions, health conditions, educational barriers and lack of support.

#### 4.3.1 Living and health conditions

The researcher has stated in her observation that the living conditions in some of the homes of the participants were tragic. The households were characterised by poverty as one of the participants stated: *“There is no money....I try to give her what she asks... I don't have money but if she needs something I try to give it to her...”* This is confirmed by Hayslip and Kaminski (2008: 84) when saying many grandparent-headed families are in the mix of poverty. A few of the grandmothers had to seek employment after becoming a second-time parent: *“ At first it was hard you know cause I was not working, I'm a domestic worker... but I make sure that everything she wants she get it”*. Second-time parents would rather seek employment to care for their families than to ask for assistance from social workers in obtaining social grants that they are entitled to (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008:103).

The issue of health conditions dominated the interviews as the participants shared how their physical pains obstruct them from caring for their grandchildren. Some participants echoed that *“I have arthritis...my arms pain when I do laundry...I can't do housework because of my asthma...when my leg is too painful I ask them to help...”* Conway (2007: 6) also concurs with this statement when elaborating that many grandparents are not able to perform task as they have done while they were younger because they are no longer physically capable due to different illnesses and

age affiliated diseases. In addition, Hayslip and Kaminski (2008: 18) stated that grandparents raising their grandchildren have more health problems.

The lack of affordable housing is an issue for many South Africans, however; grandparents and other relatives face certain unique barriers related to their particular circumstances, varied ages, and the usually unexpected experiences which led to their family arrangement. Many of these grandparent-headed families live on fixed incomes and often in small subsidised housing which may not be suitable for children. It was a shock to discover that some of these grandparent-headed families make use of a communal tap and not have running water in their homes. As some of them said: *“We don’t have any running water... fetch water from a tap in the yard.”* This shows that these grandparents face a range of challenges related to securing basic services and provisions for the children in their care. Furthermore, they have difficulty in accessing health care, obtaining legal services, enrolling children in schools and finding appropriate housing in order to provide for the diverse needs of the learners in their care.

#### **4.3.2 Educational barriers**

There are numerous educational barriers grandparents face daily when it comes to the scholastic performance of their grandchildren. One of the barriers some grandparents reported: *“ek verstaan nie skoolwerk (I don’t understand the schoolwork)... I am not educated...I can’t read properly...if I went to school I would have been able to help him...”*. Cox (2007: 564) agrees that if a parent is illiterate it becomes a major barrier for the learner to get the required support and the

grandparent to give guidance on how to complete the school tasks. The grandparents are expected to attend parent-teacher consultation or school events but for most of the grandparents it becomes a barrier as some of the participants stated: *"I don't have transport to take me to the school... the meetings are at night I can't get there..."*. None of the participants had their own mode of transport and were either depended on extended family or public transport. Some of the grandparents indicated that they are employed as domestic workers and their working hours make it impossible for them to visit the schools: *"I leave home early, I'm a domestic worker"*. It becomes a challenge for these grandparents to adjust their working hours in order to attend the school events. They are aware they have to compromise on something because the schools expect them to financially provide for these learners. They end up compromising on attending school events than not taking the financial responsibility of raising these learners (Coall and Hertwig 2010: 19).

The language of learning and teaching in most South African schools is English although this language is not spoken in most homes. This causes obstacles in the event where such learners may require assistance from their grandparents as was recorded during these interviews: *"it was a bit difficult for me in English..."* I was stated that some of these grandparents cannot read and write which proves that they are not exposed to any other language than their home language. The illiteracy and lack of the necessary skills frustrate, overwhelm and make it difficult for them to be involved in the education of these learners (Cox 2007: 564; Mudavanhu, et al 2008: 92).

### **4.3.3 Lack of support and financial constraints**

Grandparent-headed families need support from the school, community and government agencies. The national government has skirted the issue and has generally failed to recognize grandparent headed care families as permanent families, leaving them in limbo and without support. Some of the participants supported this when indicated that: *“no support is given from the community.”* Szolnoki and Kahn (2008: 3) emphasise the fact that grandparents need support in their role as second-time parents. When these grandparents receive individual counselling they would be in a better position to guide their grandchildren (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: 35).

Financially most of these grandparents are unable to provide solely for their grandchildren. Some grandparents depend on an old-age grant which is not enough to provide for the needs of these learners. This is captured in the statement from some of the participants as they said: *“I do get a grant, so I use most of the time...”*. These second-time parents face the challenge of raising their grandchildren on a fixed monthly income which financially limits their ability to provide (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: 103).

## **4.4 EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS WHO ARE RAISED IN GRANDPARENT HEADED FAMILIES**

There are a number of themes that emerged under this section such as grandparents' capabilities, grandparents' involvement in their school activities, the overall relationship and support.

#### **4.4.1 Grandparents' capabilities**

When it came to their grandparents capabilities some learners mentioned the financial constraints in their homes. *"Money is a barrier... sometimes I don't get what I need for school"*. Grandparents as second-time parents may not always have sufficient finances to raise their grandchildren. These families' limited finances directly influence the grandchildren's schooling needs. Many of these learners who are participants in this study are raised by grandparents that are either a pensioner, unemployed or domestic worker. Due to these financial constraints the majority of these learners are raised in low-income households (Cross and Day 2008: 561). Some of the participants also mentioned that their grandparents are not able to provide them with suitable housing and have to do their schoolwork in the living room where there is noise: *"...to do my homework... I have to do it in the living room when everybody is watching TV..."*. The biographical details of grandparents also show that they have low educational level, most of them are unemployed and have advanced in age. This may be other reasons that make them to be incapable of giving these learners necessary support. Weaver (2007:5) supports that grandparents are incapable of fulfilling their duties as second-time parents due to their health issues or old age ailments and advancement in their age.

#### **4.4.2 Grandparents' involvement in learners' school activities**

Most of the learners interviewed reveal that their grandparents were supportive because they encourage them to do their home works. But they could not practically get involved because of health problems and the lack of the understanding of the

curriculum. One learner surmised this by saying: "... *grandmother doesn't help me with my education... she has a problem reading...because of her eyes*". Another learner pointed out that the grandparent "*does not understand the syllabus because the syllabus changes...*" This is supported by Moyi, Pong and Frick (2004: 9) when highlighting that the grandparent's lack of involvement in learners' schoolwork may be caused by the lack of education, age and health related issues. Cox 2007: 564 also echoed the same sentiments when saying the grandparents they lack the necessary skills on how to deal with the evolution of the educational system as well as to assist the modern day learner. In addition Mansfield (2009: 15) felt that it is very difficult for the grandparents to cope with the amount of homework, projects and tasks because of their educational level.

#### **4.4.3 The overall relationship and support**

The relationship between learners and their grandparents is portrayed by most of the participants as positive. This was captured in a statement by one of the participants: "*she is supportive...she is always there for me....*" The other participant said: "*I feel safer in my grandmother's house...*" While another learner positively expressed that: "*when I'm sad I don't feel like walking away...*" The above extracts from the participants show that grandparents do play a significant role in the life of the grandchild/ren as second-time parent (Hayslip and Kaminski 2008: xv). This research also found that some grandparents are willing to do anything in their power to ensure that these learners get necessary support. Some learners reported that: "*I know I can ask her for anything... they buy me anything I want...*" This shows that

these grandparents maintain a good relationship with their grandchildren and make sure that that they give them necessary support where possible.

#### **4.5 EDUCATORS' ROLE WITH REGARD TO LEARNERS AND THEIR GRANDPARENTS**

There are a number of themes that emerged under this section such as learners overall behaviour, their scholastic achievement, teachers role regarding these learners and the availability of support groups or counselling.

##### **4.5.1 Learners overall behaviour**

Most of the participants expressed that there is no difference in behaviour between the learners who are raised in grandparent-headed families and those who are raised by their biological parents. They felt that the only thing that can affect the behaviour of these learners is the personality of the person who is taking care of them. This is best captured in this statement: “...*at school we have quite a few pupils that live with grandparents and they are excellent pupils...and then (other) pupils that live with grandparents that are just ill disciplined. ...I don't think it's living there or not living there but it is the strong personality of the grandparent.* In addition, another participant who is a grandparent also confirmed that: “...*I also had in my life a granddaughter who lived with us and she is one of the best...*”. This supports Conway (2004: 16) when he clarifies that any family unit influences the individual in how to interact with people and how to be a productive member in society.

It was also discovered through these participants that although the learners are behaving quiet well, they are not immune from emotional stress. Some of the participants had noticed that these learners: “...*they battle in subject LO (Life Orientation) when you do relationships. When we speak, for example, about deaths, divorces and dysfunctional families...then you see these children become withdrawn and they do not participate...*” The hidden grief was highlighted in this study. It was stated that some children hide their grief because of fear of upsetting the caregivers. Consequently, these learners do not only have to deal with their new living arrangements but they may also be dealing with a traumatic experience and have emotional scars (Letiecq, et al 2007: 352; Cox 2007: 562).

The main concern raised by some of the participants was the high rate of absenteeism amongst the learners from grandparent-headed households: “...*what is a concern to me is that as an educator, children who live with grandparent have high absentee rate...*” Hayslip and Kaminski (2008: 108) reported that the frequent absenteeism of learners, projects and task that are not handed in, learners not attending extra classes and extra-mural activities becomes a stressor to educators. But they feel that it should be understandable that learners who are living in grandparent-headed households may have more to cope with as compared to their peers. Some of these learners have to take care of their grandparents because they are old or sickly. Although they are aware that they are losing vital information when they are absent, they still feel their loyalty should be with their grandparents. Some of them also feel obligated or indebted towards their grandparents for sheltering them.

The lack of trust became apparent when some of the participants reveal that “...kids tend to misbehave and they use their grandparents as a scapegoat to protect them...” This makes it clear that some of these learners are not given necessary support because most educators believe that they use the situation to their advantage. Consequently, Mansfield (2009: 17) felt that it is essential for educators to have an understanding of the learners’ home background.

#### **4.5.2 Their scholastic achievement**

Most of the participating educators were in agreement with what participating grandparents said. They also pointed out that: “*grandparents do not have the skills and the ability to help learners with their work...*” Mudavanhu, et al (2008: 92) pointed out that if grandparents are illiterate they become frustrated and overwhelmed when dealing with their grandchildren’s homework. Understanding the amount of homework, projects and task their grandchildren are given from school confuses them. This does not only frustrate the grandparents but also these learners. Some of these learners may be embarrassed by their grandparents’ lack of education and not inform them of teacher-parent consultations. It may also happen that some grandparents do not realise the importance of education because they have not received any formal education (Mansfield 2009: 15).

It was very interesting to discover that the academic performance of some of these learners is not hampered by their situation as most of the participants stated that: “...*these learners do their homework, they study and pass well...*”. In addition, some participants stressed how excellent these learners are, academically as well as

in their leadership positions “...she (learner) got 97% and she lived all her life with her grandmother... (Other girl) excels and is a head girl of this school...but also sometimes children who grow up with their parents and grandparents do not study so we have different scenarios...” The participants believed that the will or drive of the learners to learn is most important than their family situation. There will be no academic difference as long as these learners are goal oriented: “But on a scholastic performance wise I don’t think there is a difference. It ultimately depends on the individual ...it depends on the child because if the child is goal orientated he/she will work towards the goal...” This means guidance, support and intrinsic motivation are vital in academic achievement.

#### **4.5.3 Teachers’ role regarding these learners**

Most educators revealed that they are not only teachers to the learners who are from grandparent-headed families but they are also parents. These educators are very comfortable in playing both parts, as a parent and educators because they want these learners to trust them and also know that they are always there for support. Some educators reveal that: “they see me as an educator and as a parent...every child is my child...” while others confirmed that “...learners feel comfortable speaking to some educators...” It is true that educators play a major role in assisting learners on educational, emotional and social spheres (Christenson 2004: 84).

Most of the participants acknowledged that educators play significant roles in the life of these learners as they commented that: “...the learners look up to me....see in me their own parent...” They stated that support and guidance is crucial in order to instil

the sense of belonging and pride to these learners. They pointed out that it is their duty to “...give the necessary support that the child requires to become a better individual...” Christenson (2004: 84) felt that educators are expected to be role models so that these learners will emulate their good behaviour and become responsible citizens. In addition, Gutman, et al (2002: 372) concurred that support is important to ensure that these learners have the possibility to become a productive member of society. They also confirmed that every learner with the support from significant others has a good chance of having positive achievement related outcomes.

#### **4.5.4 The relationship between the learners and educators**

The positive academic achievement outcomes depend mainly on how the learners and their teachers relate. The lack of this relationship may hamper learners' academic achievement, their socialisation and the smooth running of the school. Most of the participants revealed that they have good relationship that is based on trust with these learners: “*Many learners also confide in me and I also have an open door policy for them as well to come and sit and talk to me.*” Social support from educators gives these learners a feeling that somebody other than their family members loves, cares, and values them as individuals (Gutman, et al 2002: 372). Some of the participants pointed out that: “*They do come to me because in my capacity as Life Orientation teacher they come to me and speak about their difficulties at home. Usually I give support.*” The level of support, trust and positive relationship are regarded as crucial. Educators are expected to gain this relationship

by being involved in these learners' lives and understand their home backgrounds (Mansfield 2009: 17; Christenson 2004: 84).

It was discovered in this interview that some participants are afraid to discuss the sensitive issues with these learners. They only ask them general questions which does not address the real issues *"I don't think children normally speak out about situations unless it is very, very bad...so yes we share. I would usually ask how things at are home... but those are general questions that I normally ask but no specific one..."* If educators are afraid to address the most crucial issues in the learners lives, this will make these learners not to open up and to withdraw socially and academically. The relationship that is expected between learners and educators may be hampered.

#### **4.5.5 The relationship between the grandparents and the educators**

The relationship between grandparents and educators is important because grandparents as second-time parents might not be as familiar with the school setting. It is also important that educators make the school processes and procedures more grandparent-friendly. Most of the participants acknowledged that *"...the grandparent is older and does not have the time, energy. ...does not have the skills and ability to help learner with that work... as should the parent have the ability as the learner should have for her scholastic performance."* This acknowledgement calls for educators to provide positive relationship and support to these grandparents. It shows how important it is for educators to be mediators between the grandparents

and these learners. When all three role players; grandparents, educators and learners work together the academic performances of these learners will improve.

Most of the participants confirmed that there is consultation between grandparents and educators when the need arise *"...where there is a problem they call the grandparents to the school and speak to the grandparents. Basically the grandparents are taking the role of the parents so they speak to the grandparent as if they are speaking to the parent."* This can be seen as strengthening the relationship between the educators and grandparents. Educators need to be aware of who is the parent of each learner entrusted in their care. They should know whom to contact if there is a need. Grandparents need to be given necessary support by these educators in order to fulfil the gap left by the biological parents who failed or not available to fulfil their classically defined role as parents (Szolnoki and Cahn 2002: 2). Some participants felt that these grandparents are not cooperative as they make excuses when they are requested to come to school *"Our grandparents must walk up to school if we need them, which mean there are always excuses."* These excuses frustrate the educators as they do not know who to turn to if these grandparents do not attend parent-teacher consultations. But Mudavanhu (2008: 92) felt that they should be a level of understanding and mutual trust because some of these grandparents lack finances, due to the distance between schools and their homes they are compelled to use public transport which could be costly and unreliable.

Most of the participants felt that the grandparents lack discipline when it comes to these learners. Some of these learners get away with lies because the grandparents

do not check their school work, they just take the learners words that the school work has been done “...*grandparents do not have the time to check up on their work... they take their word as if they say they don't have homework...*” Other participants were in agreement with this when saying: “...*grandparents only ask how your day was...they have other priorities, like looking after the children...*” In addition to these statements some participants stated that “...*learners in class take their grandparents for granted.*” This shows that the force that should be formed by these grandparents and educators is not strong enough.

Communication is an important tool that can help the two or more parties to reach an agreement, to build positive relationship, to know the expectations of one another, to be able to provide required support and to trust in each other's abilities. Most participants revealed that there is lack of interaction and communication between these grandparents and educators: “...*there is no communication...there is a lack of communication between grandparents, educators and learners...*” Some participants went further as saying: “...*we don't have that interaction with the grandparents...we only get to see the grandparents when they come the first year with them to school...so we never ever see them...that is actually a problem for us...*” It is clear that these grandparents do not understand the roles that they are expected to commit to regarding the learners entrusted to them. As it was discussed under Role Theory, they may be shocked or overwhelmed by circumstances resulting to role conflict. The transition from grandparent to parent poses internal conflict for them. The situation is worsened when the reality of being a parent and not enacting a traditional grandparent role sets in and it contributes to a sense of conflict. It becomes so challenging to them to assume a parental role which comes with a

responsibility of being a disciplinarian, provider, and authority figure in a parent-child relationship. It was discussed in length that these grandparents may have agreed or forced by the circumstances to take over parenthood of their grandchildren. When the emotional state that they were in when they took over parenthood subsides, they begin to wonder if they are capable of fulfilling the needs of these learners (Landry-Meyer and Newman 2004: 1019).

#### **4.5.6 The availability of support groups or counselling in the school premises**

Different views emanated regarding the availability of support groups or counselling in the schools. It was discovered that some schools have professional experts that these learners are referred whereas other schools are not privileged to have these experts. This was gathered when some of the participants confirmed that: *“there are qualified psychologists.... School psychologist.... That is available to these learners.”* Other participants also expressed the same sentiments when saying: *“...we have the school psychologist who meet with different individual children... there is some form of mechanism in place regarding a support group for the kids at our school.”* A variety of support provided to these learners was captured in this statement: *“...yes our welfare organisations are really always available...”* But it was not all the participants who confirmed the availability of support groups and counselling, some revealed that there are no professional experts in their schools and it becomes the role of educators to provide support *“...the help usually comes from the educators...they give support...”* It is possible that learners living in grandparent-headed households might have experienced a traumatic loss of parents which requires professional intervention. Schooling may in some way also be a

disheartening experience to them because they feel isolated, lacking a proper identity and coming from a home that is not recognized by their peers or the school personnel. As teenagers they may be undergoing physical and emotional changes. These factors can be stressful to these learners and may negatively influence their behaviour as well as influence their relationships with their family, educators and community. It may also happen that they have been abused physically or emotionally by people they trust and love. This becomes a major challenge if some of the schools cannot acquire immediate intervention of professional experts (Gutman, et al 2002: 371).

Some participants gave reasons of the unavailability of support groups and counselling in some of the schools: *“I would say no support ... presently the limitations are that most of our learners come from disadvantaged areas.”* There are a lot of challenges facing some of the learners who are raised in disadvantaged areas. Their situation may lead to low self-esteem, minimal sense of belonging and inability to fit in with their peer group. Even though they need more support and motivation to perform in a positive manner, their grandparents may be unable to assist them due to lack of knowledge, proper skills and financial constraints. The inability to remedy the situation may have a negative impact on their scholastic achievement (Conway 2004: 6).

#### **4.6 THE AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORT PROGRAMMES FOR GRANDPARENTS**

Providing these grandparent-headed families with support is a necessity. A grandparent-headed family need to be uplifted and strengthened. It was discovered

that grandparents in this study do not receive any support from their respective communities. Grandparent-headed families are a reality and society should be made aware that these families need their support. During the interviews most of the participants reveal that support programmes are not available in their schools and in the community at large. This was revealed when some of them say “*no support groups are available...*” Communities must be able to provide support for all the members living in a grandparent-headed household. This support could be in the form of support groups or counselling from professional experts. The schools should also give immediate support to these families. Schools should be the centre where grandparent-headed families could receive information on alternative support groups and counselling. The partnership between the school, community and professional experts is encouraged in order to maximise intervention or support that these grandparents need (Christenson 2004: 86).

#### **4.7 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the analysis of the findings, the relationship of the findings to literature, theory and practise were discussed. The experiences of the members of the grandparent-headed families were related as well as barriers that prevent grandparents from assisting these learners. The trials and joys of educators who are teaching these learners as well as the involvement or lack of involvement of grandparents were presented. It was discovered through the interviews that members of the grandparent-headed families have enormous challenges and need support.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter the summary of the study as well as recommendations for intervention strategies to cater for the needs of grandparents and learners from grandparent-headed families will be provided. The limitations of this study will be discussed. The researcher will share her research journey during this study.

#### **5.2. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

This study investigated the influence of grandparent-headed families on the academic performance of secondary school learners in Port Elizabeth education district. The aims of the study as indicated in chapter one were reached through literature review in chapter two which led to the formulation of interview questions.

It was discovered through literature review in chapter two that the grandparent headed family is an alternative family unit which originated as a result of the absence or inability of the biological parents to cater for the needs of these learners. A wide range of studies indicated that the learners who are living in a grandparent headed household have challenges or barriers that compromise their academic performance. Some of these challenges or barriers stem from the ill-health of their grandparents due to age, their lack of understanding the ever changing curriculum, being illiterate or have received very little schooling. The limitation of financial, emotional and social

resources was also pointed out as the main barrier. The literature review coincided with most of the findings as labeled in chapter four. The participants mentioned health, finance, education as the main factors that limit them from fulfilling the educational needs of these learners.

Some learners admitted that their grandparents were unable to assist them with their school work. They confessed that their grandparents did not understand their school work because in some cases there was a language barrier and they did not have the necessary education to be of assistance. These learners also admitted that their grandparents have problems with their health. All these factors indicate that these learners receive very limited assistance from their grandparents with their schoolwork. It was also revealed that a number of these learners lived in poverty due to the inaccessibility of government child support grants. These learners also seemed shocked that I visited their homes and were ashamed because of living in low cost housing, shacks, a wendy house or in a servant's quarters. When I visited their homes to interview their grandparents, sometimes I sat on floors because there were no extra chairs available. In other homes I sat on beds because that was the only place to sit. Sitting on a chair during these interviews became a luxury.

The educators were more approachable. They shared their frustrations and joys teaching learners raised by grandparent-headed families. According to some educators, these learners' grandparents did not attend meetings because they are too old or sickly. Some educators felt that the grandparents did not understand how to assist their grandchildren scholastically. While other educators felt that these grandparents were too old to really understand what is expected from raising a

teenager in this changing milieu. Most educators felt that these grandparents did not want to admit that their grandchildren needed educational and emotional assistance, even though the educators were able to provide proof that these learners needed intervention. Some educators emphasized that there is no difference in behaviours of learners raised by their grandparents and those raised by their parents.

Grandparents as second-time parents deeply care for the well-being of these learners. Some of these grandparents in this study are illiterate or have limited education but they still deem it necessary that these learners should receive the best education that they are able to provide. Grandparents stated that they are not able to assist these learners with their school work because they do not understand the changes in the curriculum. Some grandparents said that they have health problems. A few of the grandparents work as domestic workers while others live on a monthly state allowance for pensioners. It becomes difficult to give financial support to these learners. The limited or unavailability of support groups that were able to assist grandparent-headed families was a cause for concern, as most of the participants indicated that no support group was available.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERVENTION STRATEGIES**

#### **5.3.1 Counselling and support for grandparents**

Voluntary grand-parenting is usually an informal arrangement that is reached by the family members because of crises. The crises that necessitate these grandparents to take the responsibility to care for their grandchildren have been broadly mentioned in

this study. It has been also reported in this study that most grandparents do not know how to go about obtaining legal custody which may help them to apply for government child support grants for these learners. Some are afraid that when they apply their applications will be denied on bases of their health, financial states and age. They believed that this may result from these learners being removed from their care and might be placed into foster care. The crux of the matter is that these grandparents are still responsible to parent these learners. These grandparents due to their lack of education, health and economic status need support and counselling from social workers, health workers, pastoral leaders, other second-time parents, educators and society to assist them to be more effective second-time parents. All Government departments should work in harmony when dealing with grandparent-headed families.

Counselling from various professionals could only benefit these family units. Counselling from educational specialist would help these grandparents to better understand the school procedures and processes in order to meet these learners' educational needs. Counselling and assistance from social workers will help these grandparent-headed families to deal with matters such as what is required to receive social grants. Grandparent-headed families need support from their extended family members. Extended family members could help with basic needs such as food and clothes. To confide in health-workers about their ailments these grandparents could receive the necessary medical attention they require. These grandparents could only benefit when they communicate with other grandparents which are also second-time parents. Schools could be of assistance. Educators could identify which learners live with their grandparents. Educators could assist grandparents living within the same

areas to form support groups. Support from their own peer-groups who have the same responsibilities as being a second-time parent would allow these grandparents a forum where they could ask for assistance, share their frustrations and feel a sense of belonging. When society comprehends the reasons why grandparents became second-time parents; this family unit would be able to seek the assistance they require without fearing disparagement.

### **5.3.2Counselling and support groups for learners**

Learners' life revolves around school and family (Cross and Day 2008: 85). This is where the learner is taught how to interact with society. When both the family and school become daunting for the learner, intervention in the form of counselling should empower the learner with coping mechanism. This intervention and counselling could positively affect the learners' behaviour at school and within the family. The learner will not feel isolated because these coping mechanisms will enable the learner to interact within a group.

Support groups under guidance of a counsellor or an educator could assist learners who live in grandparent-headed households (Deplanty, Canlter-Kern and Duchane 2007: 361).Forming school-based support groups consisting of learners who are raised in grandparent-headed families may help these learners to know that there are other learners at their school who are also raised in a similar situation. Peer-support might be more effective because these learners would be able to share their home circumstances with those that might have similar circumstances without the fear of being marginalized. Educators stated that these learners hide behind their

circumstances. They do not want to own up to their mistakes. Unfortunately this behaviour is not acceptable at school or society. The peer group will enable them to cope better with their home situation and school environment.

Professional counselling received from social workers would benefit these learners to deal with their additional obstacles that they have living in a grandparent-headed family (Cox 2007: 565). These learners have older caregivers that are unable to assist them with their schooling. These learners have caregivers that have health conditions associated with age. They live in a household where they have been placed because their parents are unable to care for them. These factors influence their behaviour within the classroom and the family. Each learner should take ownership of their behaviour at school and within their families but unfortunately these learners in this study are not always able to do that. It becomes important then that educators know the living conditions of their learners so that they are able to assist and find assistance for these learners if they are unable to cope. These learners are vulnerable. These learners need assistance and counselling to become a more productive and to have a better understanding of how to deal with their family life and to be an asset to society. The learners' language of instruction also hindered some of the grandparents to give them assistance with their schoolwork (Cox 2007: 564).

### **5.3.3 Provision of the educational bridge between the educators and the grandparents**

Educators need to become aware of this fast growing substitute family structure. The need to explain the importance of grandparent-headed families' involvement in their grandchildren's schooling should be explained and encouraged. Grandparents may perhaps be under the impression that if they send these learners to school they have fulfilled their duty. It might be out of ignorance, ill health or lack of education that those grandparents expect teachers to be solely responsible for these learners schooling. "Partnering with families to enhance learning outcomes is essential to meet the new accountability demands of schooling" (Christenson 2004: 86). Schooling has changed considerably since the days that the parents of these learners went to school. Grandparents may be ignorant of these changes or brusquely do not care. Here educators play a key role as part of the learner's village to reach out to grandparents who do not cope with the demands placed on them. Educators need to use creative methods to involve grandparents in grandparent-headed families to become involved in these learners schooling and regain their interest in the future generations' education.

Researchers have also found that support from different sources, for an example, peers, teachers and other adults may be differentially related to achievement related outcomes (Gutman, et al 2002: 372). By encouraging grandparents to share their experiences with the schooling system and with each other in a non- threatening environment might help them not to feel so isolated. Educators could also organise workshops for these grandparents to explain what is expected from them to assist

these learners in their school careers. Grandparents could also form support groups which may assist other grandparent-headed households. Inviting these grandparents to extra-mural activities and on excursions may well give them the opportunity to speak to educators in a less formal environment (Christenson 2004: 83).

Educators are expected to stress the importance of grandparent involvement in the schooling of these learners and it must be seen as a partnership and not as the sole responsibility of the educator. They should implement programs within their respective schools and involve grandparents, these learners scholastic achievements could improve. If educators assist grandparent-headed families in understanding the schooling system these grandparents possibly will feel less stressed and more informed which may give better co-operation in the future. Educators that are in service of their community will be of greater help not only to the learner in the classroom but also to the parent of that learner. They should make learning fun for the learners under their care and more user or school-friendly to their grandparents. This will enforce a strong bond between the school, grandparent and learner. Educators should be aware of the uniqueness of each learner's circumstances in their class this will make it easier for the learner and even their grandparents to disclose relevant information that will benefit the learner in their care.

It is also recommended that educators should be aware that secondary school learners, adolescents, want to fit in with their peer group. The dynamics of families should be understood as these learners may not live in the conventional family structure, which consists of the father, mother and siblings but live in alternative

family structures. Many of these learners went through traumatic life experiences and may be the victims of their parents' state of affairs. Educators should be sensitive towards these learners. These learners should be advised to speak to a counsellor or an educator. Concerted efforts should be made by educators to encourage these learners to participate in school programs and extra-mural activities. Optimistically these learners will experience a sense of belonging, school pride and camaraderie with their peers. Peer support groups under guidance of a counsellor should also be formed for learners who live in grandparent-headed households (Deplanty, Canlter-Kern and Duchane 2007: 361). Within this non-threatening environment these learners will have the freedom to fend and speak about their parents and grandparents without feeling guilty. They could also give recommendation and assistance to other learners who have the same living conditions.

The learner, grandparent and the educator should form a three-legged pot which is an allegory of education. When one of the legs is missing or is too short, the pot will not be able to stand by itself. Without the educator the learner will not be able to learn. Without the learner the educator will not be able to teach. Without the parent/grandparent, the educator will not be able to guide the learner to reach his/her full potential. They are interlinked and responsible to fulfil their roles. Thus, it becomes of cardinal importance for the educator to take the first initiative to assist the grandparent by building a parent-teacher relationship. In their capacities as educators they are able to guide the grandparents to be actively involved with these learners' education. By initiating the relationship educators are taking the position as an outsider to the relationship that could be stressful for the grandparent and

grandchild. The educator is able to assist and explain the demands of the education system to the grandparent in such a manner that they are able to understand its requirements.

The educators should also become part of the support group for the members of the grandparent-headed family. These grandparents may not feel as isolated from the learners' lives if they have an understanding of the education system that forms part of the milieu of the learner. Learners could possibly see the educator as a person that takes an interest in them as an individual. The learner could form such a positive relationship with the educator that is based on trust and mutual respect that could positively influence their schooling.

### **5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

One of the limitations of this study was that only sixteen learners from five schools within the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth were participating in this research. The researcher used Qualitative research and that limited the number of participants. Purposeful sampling focusing on grade ten learners also restricted the number of participants. Only five educators were interviewed and this might have inadequately influence the study.

The researcher teaches at one of the five secondary schools where survey was conducted. The learners interviewed at the school she teaches knew her and felt more at ease while the learners at the other four secondary schools were more guarded; it takes time to build trust with participants. These learners briefly met the

researcher for the first time when the consent letters were handed to them to give to their grandparents. The second encounter with these learners was during the interview session. This might have had an impact on these learners' responses before and during the interviews. Another limitation was that the researcher interviewed the learners at their respective schools. A more naturalistic setting might have been more suitable to these learners. Language barriers between the researcher, learners and grandparents may have resulted to the loss of important information during translation of the interviews.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STUDY**

- Recommendations for further research according to the researcher are that more grandparents raising school going children should become participants.
- Counselling from professionals such as social-workers, pastoral leaders and educational psychologist are needed to support these families.
- There should be a statement in the National Census data to indicate how many alternative family units there are in South Africa.
- The same support that the child-headed family is receiving should also be awarded to alternative family units.
- In Port Elizabeth there are schools for learners with special needs like autism, re-medial education, physically handicapped, learners with behavioural problems, etc. These schools have full-time social workers and qualified councillors to assist these learners. The researcher emphasises the need for social workers and qualified councillors to be part of the staff establishment at government schools.

- The notion of offering temporary support or financial assistance has to be considered at National Government level to enable the goals and Constitutional Rights of these families to attain the objective of building safe, loving, permanent homes for children.
- At National Government level the significance of the grandparent-headed family should be considered as a realistic alternative to foster care or adoption, one that provides stability and permanency for the child, while also providing flexibility for the caregiver if the child's parent's situation improves.
- Home visits from educators should be encouraged.
- Implementing a homework period during school hours under the supervision of educators could benefit the learner with regards to academic performance.
- While safety concerns are equally important for children living with family or not, conducting background checks, home studies, training and other licensing requirements can delay access to financial supports for relatives suddenly caring for a child. Therefore, the result would be attainable where a subsidized guardianship program may solve the gap between foster care and grandparent headed families.

## **5.6 REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCHER'S JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY**

This journey was propagated by personal as well as educational reasons. Personally, the idea of this journey began ten years ago when I got married to a man who was raised in a grandparent-headed household. He was raised by his grandparents and the bond they had was that of parent and child. Although both his grandparents were illiterate they made sure he attended school and obtained tertiary

education. They raised him in poverty, without the assistance of a social grant, but he was raised with love. Both his grandparents are deceased but their parenting styles had a direct influence on the man he became.

Despite the personal reasons, when I started teaching at a secondary school in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth I noticed that during parent-teacher consultations, the grandparents who are raising their grandchildren did not attend parent-teacher consultations. I began to ask myself whether the learners from grandparent-headed families get necessary support to achieve academically. This is what led to this particular research. However, once embarking on this research, many obstacles were encountered. I was very nervous visiting these grandparent-headed families. On arrival many of these grandparents were welcoming while others were abrupt with the conclusion that I was from social services. Interactions with these grandparents were very emotional. Mainly these grandparents just needed someone to listen to their life experiences. They saw themselves as the parents and not as grandparents to their grandchildren. On more than one occasion these grandparents wept tears for their adult children who are unable to parent their children. I cried with these grandparents and on many occasions just held their hands while they narrated their story of being a second-time parent.

Although the living conditions of these grandparent-headed families were heart breaking, an incident that stood out was when I interviewed a grandmother in one of the informal settlements. She invited me to share a meal with her family. It was only cooked potatoes; the luxury of this meal was a sliver of butter on the table. This family said grace and ate with relish. There was so much laughter while we ate out of

cracked plates. It was one of the best “dinner parties” the researcher was privileged to attend. All these grandparents took enormous pride in the knowledge that they are able to give their grandchildren a secondary education. The pride that these grandparents took in providing education and a home for their grandchildren was evident in their voices during the interview session. All of these grandparents were deeply religious. They believed that their creator would provide for them and those under their care. A majority of these grandparents had a great sense of humour. Off the record they shared humorous anecdotes on how they had to adjust to being second-time parents to their grandchildren.

These interviews changed my mind-set. The learners live with their grandparents because their parents are unable to raise them. Their grandparents are unable to assist them academically and financially but the bond they have for their second-time parent was palpable. What seems as an alternative family unit to me was home to these learners. These grandparents acceptance of their role as parent to their grandchildren and the barriers they encounter daily just to feed them is a testament of the triumph of the human spirit.

## 5.7 CONCLUSION

There are some cases where a nuclear family due to circumstances might not always be able to function well. During these times the nuclear family may involuntarily need the intervention of the extended family. These learners' grandparents came to their aid. These learners are not living with their grandparents on an ad hoc basis but that is their permanent residence. These learners might be a minority group at school. They face additional obstacles than their peers. These learners in this study stated that their grandparents are unable to assist them with their homework. This might influence their academic performance more negatively than learners raised by their parents.

It was reported that grandparents are unable to assist these learners educationally whilst educators presume that the grandparents are not interested in the academic performances of these learners. Now it becomes imperative for the educator and the grandparent to take dual responsibility of the learner in their care. The educator and grandparent are both accountable to educate and guide the learner to become a responsible adult. The researcher agrees with Hayslip and Kaminski (2008: 14), Christenson (2004: 94) and Cox (2007: 563) that the grandparent-headed families are in dire need of assistance and intervention to assist these learners scholastically as well as socially. Assistance and intervention from significant role-players would help these learners to develop holistically. This journey started and ends with this saying: "It takes a village to raise a child."

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**Table 1: Biographical information of participants (learners)**

|                                     | <b>Girls</b> | <b>Boys</b> |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Gender                           | <b>11</b>    | 5           |
| 2. Age                              | <b>15-18</b> | 15-18       |
| 3. Grade                            | <b>10</b>    | 10          |
| 4. Ethnic group                     |              |             |
| • Black                             | <b>5</b>     | 2           |
| • Coloured                          | <b>6</b>     | 3           |
| 4. Years staying in this family     |              |             |
| • since birth                       | <b>8</b>     | 5           |
| • from the age of six               | <b>2</b>     |             |
| • from the age of twelve            | <b>1</b>     |             |
| 5. Receiving government child grant | <b>1</b>     | 1           |

**Table 2: Biographical information of participants (grandparents)**

|                                     | Female | Male  |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-------|
| 1. Gender                           | 15     | 1     |
| 2. Age                              | 50-80  | 50-80 |
| 3. Ethnic group                     |        |       |
| • Black                             | 7      | 1     |
| • People of colour                  | 8      |       |
| 4. Marital status                   |        |       |
| • married                           | 3      | 1     |
| • widowed                           | 9      |       |
| • never married                     | 3      |       |
| 5. Employment information           |        |       |
| • employed                          | 2      |       |
| • work part time                    | 1      |       |
| • unemployed                        | 12     | 1     |
| 6. Educational level                |        |       |
| • illiterate                        | 2      |       |
| • up to grade 3                     | 1      |       |
| • up to grade 6                     | 3      |       |
| • up to grade 9                     | 9      | 1     |
| • up to grade 12                    | 0      |       |
| • diploma                           | 0      |       |
| • degree                            | 0      |       |
| 7. Number of learners in their care |        |       |
| • 1-2                               | 14     | 2     |
| • 3-5                               | 2      |       |
| • more than 5                       | 0      |       |
| 8. Years caring for these learners  |        |       |
| • Not more than 5 years             | 6      | 1     |
| • Not more than 12 years            | 4      |       |
| • Not more than 18 years            | 5      |       |

## **Interview questions**

### **Grandparents**

1. Describe changes that have occurred in your life as a result of assuming care for your grandchild/ren.
2. What are the barriers that limit you from providing educational support to your grandchild/ren?
3. Tell me about your involvement in your grandchild/dren's schooling?
4. Are you able to do house chores or do you depend on your grandchild/ren to help you, regardless of homework given at school?
5. Which support systems are available in your community or your grandchild/ren's school, to help you raise your grandchild/dren?
6. Describe your role or contribution as a grandparent regarding your school-going grandchild/ren.

### **Learners**

1. Do you regard your grandparent as supportive or indifferent towards your schoolwork, interests or social life?
2. In what way does your grandparent help you with your schoolwork?
3. Tell me about your relationship with your grandparent. If you consider it good, give reasons and if it is bad, give reasons?
4. Do you consider your lifestyle at home good or bad? Why?
5. Have you ever been absent from school because of your grandparent's illness?
6. Tell me about the barriers that you think limit your grandparent from providing you with educational support.

### **Educators**

1. According to your observation, does the behaviour of the learners living in a grandparent-headed household differ from the behaviour of learners raised by biological parents? What causes you to come to such a conclusion?
2. Do you regard scholastic performance of learners raised by grandparents as different from that the scholastic performance of learners raised by biological parents? What makes you say that?
3. Can you provide me with names of any support groups or organisations to which you can refer these learners and their grandparents?
4. Does your school offer any counsellors or support groups for the learners raised in grandparent-headed households? If no, what are the limitations and if yes, in what way?

5. Do any of these learners confide in you or any other teacher about their home circumstances? If no, what are the limitations and if yes, in what way?
6. Describe your role as a teacher regarding the learners from grandparent-headed families.



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**Port Elizabeth District**

Ethel Valentine Building • Sutton Road • Sidwell • Port Elizabeth • Eastern Cape  
Private Bag X3931 • North End • Port Elizabeth • REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA  
Tel: +27 (0)41-4034400 • Fax: +27 (0)41-4510193 • Website: [www.ecdoe.gov.za](http://www.ecdoe.gov.za)

Enquiries: Dr Nyathi Ntsiko

Email: [nyathi.ntsiko@edu.ecprov.gov.za](mailto:nyathi.ntsiko@edu.ecprov.gov.za)

Mrs P.M. Plaatjies  
Researcher

Dear Mrs Plaatjies

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN DEPARTMENTAL  
SCHOOLS: PORT ELIZABETH**

I refer to your letter dated 12 July 2011 and proof of registration for the current academic year (issued by Unisa) dated 14 July 2011 respectively.

Permission is hereby granted for you to conduct your research on the following conditions:

1. Your research must be conducted on a voluntary basis.
2. All ethical issues relating to research must be honoured.
3. Your research is subject to the internal rules of the school, including its curricular programme and its code of conduct and must not interfere in the day-to-day routine of the school.
4. On completion of your research you are expected to provide my office with a copy of your bound research report.

Kindly present a copy of this letter to the principal as proof of permission.

I wish you good luck in your research.

Yours faithfully

**R.N. BEUKES**  
**DISTRICT DIRECTOR: PORT ELIZABETH (ACTING)**  
/ab

building blocks for growth



*Isimva elizakambileyo!*

Mrs P Plaatjies

The Principal

Address

Dear Dr/Sir/Madam

**RESEARCH STUDY ON LEARNERS RAISED IN GRANDPARENT-HEADED FAMILIES**

I am hereby applying for permission to conduct research at the above mentioned school. I am doing research on learners living in grandparent-headed families.

The focus will be on grade 10 learners and educators teaching Life Orientation.

These research findings are confidential and the names of the school, learners or educators will not be mentioned in the study or during the interviews.

Thanking you in this regard.

Yours truly,

.....

Paulsha Plaatjies

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby give Paulsha Plaatjies permission to interview me on grandparent-headed households.

I am an educator at a Secondary School in the Northern Areas. I teach Life Orientation to this grade 10 learner who is raised in a grandparent-headed household.

I voluntarily participate in this interview.

Participant: .....

Date: .....

Interviewer: .....

Date: .....

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby give Paulsha Plaatjies permission to interview me on grandparent-headed households. I am a grandparent raising my grandchild/ren.

I voluntary participate in this interview.

Participant: .....

Date: .....

Interviewer: .....

Date: .....

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby give Paulsha Plaatjies permission to interview me on grandparent-headed households.

I am a grade 10 learner at a Secondary School in the Northern Areas. Two of my learning areas are Life Orientation and English Home Language/English Additional Language. I live in a grandparent-headed family.

I voluntarily participate in this interview.

Participant: .....

Date: .....

Interviewer: .....

Date: .....

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby give Paulsha Plaatjies permission to interview my grandchild on grandparent-headed households.

I understand that the interview is voluntary and confidential.

Grandparent signature: .....

Date: .....

Witness signature: .....

Date: .....