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EXPERIENCES OF RURAL BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN ADOLESCENTS WHO NEVER MET THEIR OWN BIOLOGICAL FATHERS

by

EDITH DINONG PHASWANA

MINI-DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

in

ADOLESCENT GUIDANCE

in the

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND NURSING

at the

RAND AFRIKAANS UNIVERSITY

Supervisor: Prof CPH Myburgh
Co-Supervisor: Prof M Poggenpoel

September 2003
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DEDICATION

To my beloved daughter, Maselaelo.
In memory of your late father Selaelo:

"Everything I do, I do it for you"
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My sincere gratitude and thanks to:

➤ God Almighty - for giving me life abundantly, wisdom and courage from conception stage through to the completion of this study.

➤ My two supervisors Prof. C.P.H. Myburgh and Prof. Marie Poggenpoel for the commitment and expertise shown - without your there would have been no research report.

➤ Learners from Seraditola, Lebowakgomo and Kopano secondary schools, in Limpopo Province, who provided this study with invaluable information.

➤ My dear parents, Lesetja and Ramolokoane for providing me with an education - without you I will be nothing?

➤ My two beloved sisters, Dipuo and Shanini - for the love and support they gave throughout. "This is for you!"

➤ My in-laws for the cooperation and support - "The support you gave is immeasurable, especially Magogo for looking after my child."

➤ Maureen Motau for all your love and support during the long trips taken during the study.

➤ All my friends, colleagues, relatives and neighbours, who in one way or the other assisted me during the research process.
RAU - for funding the entire research process.

COD Typing for the typing and editing of this manuscript.
ABSTRACT

This qualitative study described and explored the experiences of adolescents in rural Limpopo Province who never met their biological fathers in their lifetime. The theoretical framework supporting this study is the 'family systems theory' which affirm that individuals' patterns were sustained by interactions with other individuals with whom the individual had regular contact. The roles of fathers and mothers are not duplicated, but in their separation keep the family system intact (Youniss & Smollar, 1998:82).

The research design involved "in-depth" interviews with adolescents of 13-18 years of age at three secondary schools. The research will provide a greater knowledge to parents and educators with regards to handling adolescents who never met their biological fathers.

In the light of increasing women-only households in South Africa, distinguished by poor socio-economic conditions, the experiences of adolescents growing up in fatherless homes is a critical issue facing our nation. This research established that adolescents experience a variety of feelings in different dimensions that includes feelings of rejection and hurt towards themselves, as well as feelings of blame and irresponsibility towards their fathers and mothers. They also expressed specific needs that include material needs and emotional support from their fathers. Emotional support was also expected from educators at schools.

Research is required, focussing on mothers' experience of bringing up their adolescents in comparison with the experiences of adolescents. Despite the numerous factors that are, or seem to be, beyond their control, adolescents must acknowledge that they are able to cope with their situation and reach their full potential.
Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie beskryf en ondersoek die ervarings van adolessente in die platteland van die Limpopo Provinsie wat nooit in hulle lewens hulle biologiese vaders ontmoet nie. Die teoretiese raamwerk wat hierdie studie ondersteun, is die familie sisteem teorie 'family systems theory' wat bevestig dat individue se patrone aangemoedig word deur interaksie met ander individue waarmee die individu gereelde kontak het. Die rolle van vaders en moeders word nie dupliseer nie, maar hou die gesinsteelsel intakt in hulle skelding (Youniss & Smollar, 1998:82).

Die navorsingsontwerp sluit 'in diepte' onderhoude met adolessente van 13-18 jaar oud by drie sekondêre skole in. Die navorsing sal beter inligting verskaf aan ouers en opvoeders rakende die hantering van adolessente wat nooit hul biologiese vaders ontmoet het nie.

In die lig van toenemende vrou-alleen huishoudings in Suid-Afrika,onderskei deur swak sosio-ekonomiese toestande, is die ervarings van adolessente wat in vaderlose huise grootword, 'n kritieke geskilpunt wat ons nasie in die gesig staar. Hierdie navorsing het vasgestel dat adolessente 'n verskeidenheid gevoelens in verskillende dimensies ervaar, wat gevoelens van verwerping en pyn teenoor hulself, sowel as gevoelens van blaam en onverantwoordelikheid teenoor hul vaders en moeders insluit. Hulle het ook spesifieke behoeftes uitgespreek, wat materiële behoeftes en emosionele ondersteuning van hul vaders insluit. Emosionele ondersteuning was ook verwag van opvoeders by skole.

Navorsing word benodig om te toets of moeders se ervaring van die grootmaakproses van hul adolessente ooreenstem met die ervarings van die adolessente. Ten spyte van talle faktore wat buite hul beheer is, of skyn te

**OPSOMMING**

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CHAPTER 1
RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW

1.1 RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

Current research has been dominated by the problem of absent fathers and the impact of their absence on their children. This is as a result of moral, social and political controversies surrounding relationships between parents and their children (Narayan & Bartkowiak, 1999:1). It is alleged that of all children living with their mothers only—whether as a result of non marital birth or divorce, 35% never see their fathers (Popenoe, 1999:44). He further asserts that 80% of children of children living with one parent are living with their mothers. Sidel (1996:44) says that the problem of children growing up without a father is increasing worldwide. He adds that growing up without a father can affect children in a variety of ways, often negatively. Fathers need to be involved in their children’s daily lives, for the benefit of both the mother and the children (Gobopamang, 2000:175). Men also have a vital role to play in promoting cooperation and other soft virtues (Popenoe, 1999:46).

The involvement of biological fathers in the lives of their children is a very important area of research, attracting the attention of social observers and policy-makers in South Africa. The Department of Social Welfare provides child carers with a social grant for children under the age of nine (Sapa, 2003). The Child Maintenance Law (Act no 99 of 1998) was recently enforced, making it compulsory for fathers to support their own children (Department of Justice, 1999). However, the experiences of children growing up without a biological father remains a subject that is poorly understood because of a lack of research in this field. This study aims to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring and
describing the experiences of adolescents who have never met their biological fathers.

Researchers from a variety of disciplines have been focusing exclusively on father-adolescent relationships (Way & Gillman, 2000; Strydom, 1995; Gerris, 2002; Byfield, 2001; Mackinnon-Lewis, Castellino, Brody & Anchams, 2001). Consequently, there is little understanding of how adolescents experience not knowing their biological fathers. Although a number of researchers have investigated the relationship between adolescents and their biological fathers, such research has focused mainly on western culture (not African) and particularly on Americans (Chao, 1995; Valdes, 1996, Wilson, 1995).

A reason for the lack of research on South African rural black adolescents may be attributed to the assumption that most black cultures do not consider an unmarried father as a nurturer of children. On the other hand, studies indicate that a non-residential, unmarried biological father is only seen as a provider of children (Gobopamang, 2000:175).

While agreeing that fathers are important to the well being of their children, we must accept the realities of out-of-wedlock childbearing, death, child neglect, separation and divorce. Other studies indicate that about 40% of children in father-absent homes have not seen their fathers (Policy Review, 1997:24). It is in this light that South African adolescents also need to be given attention, as an absent father may be damaging to their development.

In a study entitled "Where are all the men?", Renata (2002:579) states that there is a lack of literature on disadvantaged, non-marital fathers, adding that their role is important in the development of their adolescents. Research of this nature is needed to indicate biological fathers and mothers the importance of an adolescent knowing his/her real father. Despite the numerous factors that are,
or appear to be, beyond their control, fathers must understand that their involvement in adolescents' lives can make a positive difference to the development of young men and women.

In South Africa, a number of recent social developments make this study timely. Firstly, the number of out-of-wedlock births has sparked public concern. Secondly, the escalating unemployment rate and an increase in the number of female-headed households has led to a shift in young people's lives (Rangarajan & Gleason, 1998).

The issue of adolescents who have never met their biological father is best dealt with against the background of the researcher. As a high school educator working with rural communities where culture is more highly preserved than in towns and cities, the researcher has met several adolescents who have been concerned about not knowing their fathers. She therefore deemed it necessary to study the problem to gain insight and to be in a position to handle these adolescents appropriately.

As a consequence of raising a child whose father was killed before birth, the researcher noted that, against a backdrop of unacceptable current road accident statistics, a high divorce rate and child neglect, many children could grow up in a one-parent family. The researcher became curious about how these children experience growing up without a biological father in the family.

The researcher relates strongly to Wallerstein (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990:xii) who lost her father at a young age when she states in her research:

"My lifelong professional interest in helping children, especially those suffering loss and separation, has its roots in my continued mourning for my father and in my compassion for my mother's gallant struggles to
protect my younger brother and me from the economic and personal hardships that she faced daily" (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 19990:xii).

It appears that many children may be experiencing similar feelings, regardless of whether they come from homes broken by divorce or shattered through death.

Previous research on adolescents has been limited to a reliance on questionnaire or observational methods.

Missing in the literature are narrative accounts of how adolescents experience growing up without a father. Questionnaire and observational methods have been unable to detect how adolescents describe, or understand, their experience of not knowing their biological fathers. Narrative methods, such as semi-structured in-depth interviews, are therefore necessary to investigate how adolescents describe the experience of not knowing their biological fathers.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The collapse of fatherhood has been the greatest social tragedy of the past 30 years. Propelled by the twin engines of divorce and illegitimacy, the percentage of children growing up in a home without their father has almost tripled between 1960 and 1990. By 1994, 24 million American children were living without their biological fathers. Stories began to highlight the connection between fathers and such social ills as crime, educational failure and welfare dependency (Policy Review, 1997:24). The Review further states that developmental psychologists have discovered that mothers and fathers approach parenting differently and that these differences may be beneficial to a child's development.

It appears that South Africa may be experiencing similar problems. The researcher's need for investigation was triggered by: the experiences shared by a
number of high school adolescents about not knowing their real fathers; her witnessing of the long queues for child support grants and maintenance claims at local tribal offices; the chaos emanating from child visitation rights and the escalating mortality rate caused by HIV/AIDS. In addition, a substantial number of adolescents from divorced, unmarried or widowed mothers at a local school also prompted the researcher to study the problem of adolescents' experiences of not knowing their biological fathers. It is against this background that the researcher believes that this study will provide greater knowledge to parents and educators on adolescents' experiences of not knowing their biological fathers.

From these circumstances, the following research questions were formulated:

- **What are the experiences of adolescents who have never met their biological fathers?**

- **What guidelines could be described for parents and educators for them to support adolescents who have never met their biological fathers?**

### 1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study will adhere to the following objectives:

- To explore and describe the experiences of rural black South African adolescents who have never met their biological fathers.

- To describe guidelines for educators and parents to support adolescents who have never met their biological fathers.
1.4 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

The content of the paradigmatic perspective consists of meta-theoretical assumptions, theoretical assumptions and methodological assumptions.

1.4.1 Meta-theoretical assumptions

The researcher believes that adolescents are very sensitive people who need greater care in order to become responsible people in life. Nurturing them can be a very challenging experience for parents and educators. They can be emotionally fragile and carry a large burden of negative emotions which may be expressed later in life. Parents and educators should therefore work towards enabling them reach full potential.

1.4.2 Theoretical assumptions

The belief systems of the researcher about adolescents are based on Maslow's theory of human needs, referred to as the hierarchy of needs (Mwamwenda, 1995:265; Thompson, et al. 1992:11). This theory states that people have basic human needs, which must be met in order to reach full potential. The lower need must be met before attempting to meet the next need in the hierarchy.
Once all these needs have been fulfilled, a person will be motivated towards self-actualisation. In view of the importance of Maslow’s (in Mwamwenda, 1995:265) theory, the researcher further examined the theory in terms of its application in an adolescent’s development and family life.

- Where there is reason to believe that adolescents are not receiving adequate food, shelter and sleep, the necessary provision should be made for this.

- The fulfillment of adolescents’ safety needs is important to their sense of security. The home and school should ensure that adolescents are protected against any threatening factors.

- The home, particularly parents, should make it possible for adolescents to feel worthy and appreciated.
- Adolescents should be helped to develop self-concepts by treating them as persons with human dignity.

- Adolescents should be assisted to mobilise their resources so that they can achieve full potential and find fulfillment in life.

The aforementioned implies that adolescents who do not know their biological fathers will grow up asking the following questions:

- Who is my father and what happened to him?
- Does he love me or not?
- How can I meet him?
- Why did this happen to me?
- What did I do to deserve this?

These questions may provide the framework for behavioural, emotional and economic problems in adolescents.

In addition, the assumptions underpinning this study are based on the family systems theory (Youniss & Smollar, 1985:82). This theory originated in clinical settings suggesting that an individual's behavioural patterns were sustained by interaction with others with whom the individual had regular contact. The theory argues that studies of parent-adolescent relationships are undoubtedly too broad to capture the detailed dynamics that family system theories have documented in actual family interaction. It appears that fathers and mothers have separate but conjunctive functions in the family system. These functions of the two parents are not duplicative but, in their separation, keep the family system intact (Youniss and Smollar, 1985:82). The researcher is therefore of the opinion that adolescents also need to know and interact with their biological fathers, as the role of a mother cannot substitute the role of a father. This also entails that in
order for them to grow in an intact family system, adolescents need both the biological mother and father to perform the conjunctive functions in the family.

Related to these is Lamb's (1986:191) view that fathers play a significant role in their children's development from birth onwards. Braude (1992:57) supports this view when he says that the best known and available support system in all societies is the family.

An assumption derived from these theories is that fathers, as part of the adolescent's family, are important during the children's development. They should not only be providers of economic needs, but be emotional and psychological providers as well.

Goode, Hopkins and McClure (1971:490) also form the basis for the assumption in this study. The authors assert that children faced with the absence of a father may develop regressive patterns. They further argue that a child rejected by its own father tended to be more hostile toward the father and lacked warmth. They also concluded that adolescents who experience rejection could engage in unacceptable behaviour by drawing attention to themselves, in an attempt to achieve an adequate place in the family. This study is therefore necessary for parents and educators to note the importance of biological fathers' involvement, interaction and role in adolescents' lives.

1.4.3 Definition of concepts

Experience - This refers to an event or series of events participated in or lived through, especially one that makes powerful impression on the mind or sense. It may be the totality of such events in the past of an individual or group (Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary, 1991:541). For the purpose of this study is to
investigate the experience of adolescents who never met their biological fathers in their lifetime.

**Adolescent** - An adjective derived from (noun). This concept refers to a person in the process of developing from a child into an adult (Pearal, 2001).

**Adolescence** - The period which commences with the onset of puberty and extends throughout teenage years (Gillis, 1994:70). Adolescence is a period of great physical, social, emotional, physiological and psychological change (Mwamwenda, 1995:63).

In the context of this study adolescents will be considered to be those within the age of 12 and 18 years.

**Biological father** - A male parent who is related by blood to a child (Pearall, 2001).

The attributes biological or natural in common usage designate a father who has actually produced the child. The so-called blood-tie, giving the first right to the possession of the child. The physical fact of having begotten a child (Goldstein, 1973:17).

Goldstein's definition of a biological father fits perfectly in this study.
1.4.4 Methodological assumptions

Methodological assumptions are based on a functional approach, which Botes (1991:19) describes as knowledge that is gathered must be of value to educational practice. The study will advance knowledge for parents and educators. The functional approach will be used to derive findings and the results of adolescents who have never met their biological fathers.

In addition, phenomenological approach as Cresswell (1994:12) described will assist the researcher to explore and describe the experiences of adolescents who do not know their biological fathers, as they represent thousands of young people growing up without a biological father. Data will be collected and analysed until saturation is reached (Field & Morse, 1985:94). The researcher will collect, record, code and analyse data in order to develop a grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:190). The developed theory will be of value to families and schools who have the interest of adolescents at heart.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

1.5.1 Research design

A qualitative research method will be employed in this study. The idea of qualitative research, as Cresswell (1994:148) puts it, is to purposefully select informants that will best answer the research question. The researcher will enter the world of the subject and place herself in their shoes (De Vos, 1998:80). The research design will be descriptive, explorative and contextual in nature. This design is selected in order to explore the lived experience of adolescents, as they are the best people who know and understand how it is to live without a biological father. More details will be provided in Chapter 2.
1.5.2 Research method

The study will be conducted in two phases. During the first phase of the study the experiences of adolescents' who do not know their biological fathers will be explored and described. The second phase of the study provides guidelines for parents and educators to support these adolescents.

1.5.3 Phase 1: Exploration and description

1.5.3.1 Data collection

Data will be collected through in-depth interviews conducted at schools. Adolescents will be asked one central question: 'How is it for you not to know your own father?' The purpose of this question is to capture adolescents' descriptions of their experiences of not knowing their biological fathers. Data collected will be used to describe guidelines for parents and educators. During the interview, the researcher will use techniques such as paraphrasing clarification, probing and non-verbal cues to motivate adolescents to talk about their experiences. More details are provided in Chapter 2.

1.5.3.2 Data analysis

Tesch's method (De Vos, 1998:343) of descriptive analysis will be used to analyse data from transcribed interviews. Two qualitative data analysts will be assisting in analysing data used in to give the study highly qualitative findings. Results will then be re-contextualised in the literature by means of literature control. More details will be provided in Chapter 2.
1.5.4 Phase 2: Description of guidelines for parents and educators to support adolescents who have never met their biological fathers

Data from the results of phase one of the study will be used to form the framework of reference for the description of guidelines for educators and parents to support adolescents who have never met their biological fathers. Literature will be used to support the guidelines.

1.5.5 Measures to ensure trustworthiness

Guba’s model of trustworthiness (De Vos, 1998:349) will be used to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. The principles of truth value leading to credibility, transferability, consistency, thus promoting dependability and neutrality and ensuring confirmability, will be followed closely by adhering to set standards for qualitative research (Krefting, 1991:216). This aspect will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 2.

1.5.6 Ethical measures

Chapter 2 will provide a set of ethical principles to which the study will adhere in order to protect participants from any kind of harm or risk (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996:39). Participants need to be ensured that they will not be exploited by the study in any way. Details will be given in Chapter 2.

1.5.7 Sample

The research employs purposive sampling (De Vos, 1998:198). Respondents will be selected from a pool of adolescent volunteers who have never met their biological fathers. These adolescents will be between 12 and 18 years of age.
The study will be conducted at secondary schools around the Greater Lepelle-Nkumpi in Limpopo Province. These sites are chosen for data gathering because of the availability of adolescents who have experienced life without a biological father. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

1.6 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

This study is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Rationale and Overview;
Chapter 2: Research Design and Methods;
Chapter 3: Discussion of Results and Literature Control
Chapter 4: Recommendation, Limitations and Conclusions.
CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the objectives that informed the study. The researcher's choice of methodology, an overview of the research design and methods, ethical considerations and measures to ensure trustworthiness, as adhered to during the implementation of the study, are discussed.

2.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to explore and describe the experiences of adolescents who have never met their biological fathers. It also aims to describe guidelines for parents and educators to support adolescents who have never met their biological fathers.

2.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design that informed this study is qualitative, which is descriptive, exploratory and contextual. The following paragraphs explain these three elements.

2.3.1 Qualitative research

Schumacher and McMillan (1997:42) state that qualitative research is an approach that assumes that people act on the basis of their interpretations of experience. In addition, Mouton and Marais (1990:175) assert that qualitative
research is characterised by the fact that the researcher tries to get to the heart and soul of the issue to understand it. In view of this notion, the researcher chose to conduct a qualitative study, as she was interested in adolescents' experiences and interpretation of the experiences of not knowing their biological fathers.

The researcher wanted to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the adolescents' experiences and to describe guidelines that parents and educators could use to support those adolescents. This notion is congruent with Guba and Lincoln (1981:371) who define the purpose of qualitative research in two ways, first, to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the group under study, and second, to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social process. In the case of this study, the second purpose will be compilation of proposed guidelines, based on the results of the study.

A review of literature suggests that a qualitative study needs to be explorative, descriptive and contextual.

2.3.2 Explorative

According to Babbie (1992:84), to explore a topic is to provide a beginning familiarity with that topic or to yield new insights into a topic for research. Little is known about the experiences of South African adolescents who have never met their biological fathers. This strategy is followed as little is known about these experiences and the researcher is therefore interested in exploring these experiences to gain new insight (Mouton, 1992:103). Again, this exploratory study is designed to generate hypotheses about adolescents' experiences of not having known their biological fathers. Listening closely to a purposively selected number of adolescents until the data is saturated will do this.
The insights gained by conducting semi-structured, in-depth phenomenological interviews will be used to describe guidelines that educators and parents can use to support adolescents to deal with the situation.

2.3.3 Descriptive

The term *descriptive* means to describe a situation or events (Babbie, 1992:84). As the term implies, the purpose of a descriptive study is to describe a phenomenon. Data from the interviews will be used to obtain insight and understanding. Once the meaning that the adolescent attaches to his/her experience of not knowing his/her biological father, a description will be given of insights obtained through words (Cresswell, 1994:145).

2.3.4 Contextual

De Vos (1998:281) states that in order to understand the dynamics of human beings as fully as possible, the main objective of a contextual study is to study people in their habitat. Her view is supported by Valle, King and Halling (1989:7) as quoted by Huysamen (1994:167), who says that human behaviour cannot be understood without appreciating the context in which the behaviour takes place. The information obtained is specifically about adolescents' experience of not knowing their biological fathers. It is therefore of the utmost importance to remain within the unique experience of the adolescents. The context is that of a rural community setting. There are many cultural, socio-economic and religious backgrounds in which these adolescents find themselves. To disregard these backgrounds will be to deny this study its main objectives, which is to explore and describe the experiences of rural black South African adolescents who have never known their biological fathers.
2.4 RESEARCH METHOD

The research will be conducted in two phases. In the first phase the adolescents’ experience of not knowing their biological fathers will be explored and described. In the second phase, a description of guidelines for parents and educators to support these adolescents will be proposed, based on the results obtained in phase one of the study.

The following paragraphs give a detailed description of phase one.

2.4.1 Phase 1: Exploration and description of the adolescents’ experiences of not knowing their biological fathers

This phase consists of the following components: population and sampling, data collection, data analysis and literature control. Each component will be discussed in detail.

2.4.1.1 Population and sampling

Population refers to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics. De Vos (1998:190) also defines population as all potential subjects who possess attributes which the researcher is interested in studying. For the purpose of this study ‘rural black South African adolescents who have never met their biological fathers’ constitutes the population under study.

A purposive sampling method will be used in this research, which, according to McMillan (2000:10), asserts that the researcher selects particular individuals or cases, as they will be informative about the topic.
Sampling criteria are those characteristics that are essential for inclusion in the target population (Burns & Grove, 1995:226; Depoy & Gitlin, 1994:173).

The criteria for inclusion used in this study are:

- Willing participation;
- The ability to speak Sepedi and/or English;
- Being 12-18 years old;
- Coming from a rural background;
- Never having met one's biological father; and
- Being a black South African citizen.

In a qualitative study, the sample is determined by repetition of the data obtained from the interviews with the adolescents, which is referred to as data saturation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995:24). In this study, the adolescents will be interviewed until they are seen to add little to what the researcher has already learned from them.

2.4.1.2 Data collection

Data will be collected from adolescents who share their experiences with the researcher and will take place at schools where the adolescents volunteer to take part. During data gathering, the researcher needs to apply skills such as prompting when appropriate, listening, encouraging, elaborating, paraphrasing and clarification (McMillan, 2000:270).

Data will be gathered by means of phenomenological interviews and by taking field notes.
2.4.1.3 Phenomenological interviews

The researcher will conduct in-depth personal face to face interviews in this study (De Vos, 1998:90). The purpose of conducting a phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the experiences of participants in order to understand the essence of the experiences as perceived by the participants (McMillan, 2000:270). During the interviews the researcher may not make any assumptions. As much information as possible should be gathered (Ornery, 1983:61) so that a description of adolescents' experiences of not knowing their biological fathers can be given. This will be done until data is saturated and no new information is obtained (Field & Morse 1985:94).

The researcher will have a half-hour session with each participant and the interviews will be audiotaped. The adolescents have been chosen as they have experiences of not knowing their biological fathers and are willing to share their thoughts about these experiences. One central question will be asked during each interview, i.e. ‘How is it for you not to know your own father?’

Ensuing questions will be guided by the conversation. Interviews will be concluded when themes are repeated and data becomes saturated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:202).

2.4.1.4 Field notes

Glatthorn (1998:173) states that field notes are a detailed description of what was observed. After each interview, field notes will be made, not merely as summaries of events, but as detailed reproductions of what occurred (De Vos, 1998:285).
Schatzman and Strauss (1973: 99-101) divides field notes into four categories:

- **Observational notes** - a description of events as experienced by watching and listening. De Vos (1998:285) stresses that observational notes give an account of what happened. The researcher should employ techniques for observing events as they occur.

- **Theoretical notes** - purposeful attempts to derive meaning from the observational notes. The researcher reads through observational notes to try to get meaning and understanding of what transpired during the interview.

- **Methodological notes** - these are instructions to oneself, being critical of one’s tactics and reminders about methodological approaches that might be fruitful. These are messages to the researcher (Cryer, 1996:73).

- **Personal notes** - notes about one’s own reactions, reflections and experiences. The researcher will note experiences that relate to herself to gain insight on the topic. These experiences include her doubts, anxieties and pleasures.

The construction of these notes enables reflection on the internal dialogue, questions about what one knows and how that knowledge was acquired, the degree of certainty of such knowledge and what further lines of inquiry are implied (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983:165).

### 2.4.1.5 The role of the researcher

Denzin (1978:6) states that the aim of interviewing is to actively enter the worlds of people and to render these worlds understandable from the standpoint of a
theory that is grounded in the behaviours, languages, definitions and feelings of those studied. In such interviews, questions should be spontaneous and not deliberately formulated.

In supporting this view and as the researcher can picture herself in the adolescents' shoes, she will try to understand their circumstances (Huysamen, 1994:166).

As an interviewer, the researcher will:

- Ensure that adolescents are settled and relaxed and assure them that the interview is of value.

- Ensure that honesty and sincerity is vital during the interviews. The use of a tape recorder will be explained so that the adolescents feel free to talk.

- Treat adolescents with respect and courtesy and will always reflect empathy.

- Assure the adolescents that their identity and the information provided will be treated as confidential.

- Not raise false expectations, e.g. about possible financial assistance to adolescents.

- Indicate to the adolescents when the interviews are to be conducted (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:366).
2.4.1.6 Data analysis

Transcripts and field notes of the data gathered will be analysed. According to Cresswell (1994:153), in qualitative analysis, data analysis is conducted simultaneously with data collection, data interpretation and narrative report writing. The researcher will reduce information to patterns, categories or themes and then interpret this information.

The researcher chose Tesch's approach (in Cresswell, 1994:155) for data analysis and the following eight steps were followed:

1. All transcripts were carefully read to enable the researcher to gain a sense of the overall picture.

2. The most interesting transcript was selected to find the underlying meaning of the adolescent’s experience of not knowing his/her biological father. Thoughts were written in the margin.

3. The researcher listed all the topics, grouping similar ones together and then identified major topics.

4. The researcher took the list and compared this with the data. Topics were abbreviated as codes and were written next to appropriate segments. New categories emerged during this stage.

5. The most descriptive words were turned into categories. Topics that related to each other were grouped together. Lines were drawn to indicate inter-relationships.
6. A final decision on the abbreviated categories was made and the codes were arranged alphabetically.

7. Data material belonging to each category were assembled and a preliminary analysis performed.

8. The transcribed data was given to two independent coders who are specialists in data analysis. The researcher consulted with the coders for consensus discussion.

A protocol on the method used was handed to the independent coders, together with clean sets of transcripts and field notes (Krefting, 1990:216). After the data analysis, the researcher and independent coders met for a consensus discussion.

2.4.1.7 Literature control

A literature control was applied to confirm the results of the investigation and the experiences of adolescents who had never met their biological fathers. Woods and Catanzaro (1988:136) emphasise that a comparison of results with theory from literature promotes the confidence of the research. The researcher consulted books, journals, dissertations, theses and other documents as these sources contain the most recent information on the subject. Computerised databases like the Internet, Ebscohost and Emerald were also consulted. Information from these sources serves to enrich knowledge. The purpose of including literature in this study is to logically integrate the argument. At least two sources were used in this study to support the findings and the interview quotes.
2.4.2 Phase 2: Description of guidelines for parents and educators to support adolescents who have never met their biological fathers

The data collection of this phase is discussed below.

2.4.2.1 Data collection

The results gathered in phase 1 are used to formulate guidelines that parents and educators can use to support adolescents who have never met their biological fathers. These guidelines will be discussed with colleagues to ensure applicability.

2.4.2.2 Data analysis

A study of the literature will be carried out to describe and verify guidelines. The guidelines will be discussed with educators at participating schools so that they are able to support adolescents who do not know their biological fathers.

2.4.3 Measures to ensure trustworthiness

Guba’s model to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:219) is used to establish the validity and reliability of this qualitative research. The model is based on the identification of four aspects, namely truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. These aspects will be discussed with the control measures used in this study.
2.4.3.1 Truth-value

Krefting (1990:215) states that in qualitative research, truth-value is obtained from the discovery of human experiences as they are lived and informed by informants. In this study, truth-value was obtained from the discovery of adolescents' experiences of not knowing their biological fathers and how they lived and perceived the situation.

Credibility is the control measure for truth-value.

The following techniques were applied to represent the reality of adolescents' experiences of not knowing their biological fathers.

- **Prolonged engagement**
  According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:302), the researcher should spend more time with respondents. In this study, the researcher visited all adolescents to be interviewed several times before the interview process begins. This was done to give the adolescents an opportunity to get used to her. The adolescents were then asked to volunteer for participation in the study. The interview commenced after the researcher and participant familiarised themselves with each other.

- **Reflexivity**
  During research process the researcher used a personal diary (Krefting, 1991:218) to reflect on her frustrations, questions and problems. This made her aware of her preconceived assumptions. She changed her approach to data analysis and sought the assistance of two data analysts.

- **Member checking**
  The views of and information given by adolescents had to be translated into data. This was done with the aid of a tape recorder (Krefting, 1991:219). The
taped interviews were played to adolescents so that they could confirm what was said.

- **Interviewing process**
  Credibility can be enhanced within the interview process (May (1989) in Krefting, 1991:220). In this case the researcher received special training for interviewing. In addition, pilot interviews were videotaped. Reframing and the expansion of questions and effective listening are ways that increase credibility in this study.

- **Peer examination**
  Peer examination entails the researcher discussing the research process and findings with impartial colleagues who have experience in qualitative research methods (Krefting, 1991:219). In this study input was sought from two qualitative researchers (refer to Annexure 4).

- **Triangulation**
  Triangulation ensures credibility, as it provides more than one method of data gathering. The researcher uses interviews and field notes in data collection. A literature control is performed to ensure credibility.

2.4.3.2 **Applicability**

Applicability is the degree to which the results of the study can be applied in similar contexts on different respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). To comply with this, the researcher will ensure that the study is transferable and that the same results will be achieved if replicated in a similar context (De Vos, 1998:349). The following paragraph presents transferability as a control measure to ensure applicability.
• **Transferability**

According to De Vos (1998:351), the burden of demonstrating the applicability of one set of findings to another context rests more with the researcher who makes that transfer than with the original investigator. The researcher in this study aims to provide a ‘dense’ database. This will include background information on adolescents, what criteria were used for selection, as well as verbatim quotes from the interviews.

**2.4.3.3 Consistency**

De Vos (1998:350) states that data consistency ensures trustworthiness. This means that the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same subjects in a similar context. As subjectivity is a factor, this is a difficult requirement for qualitative work. Consistency is not possible without the application of dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:316). Dependability will therefore be discussed as a control measure of consistency.

• **Dependability**

The researcher will emphasise the uniqueness of each participant as well as his/her experiences. Methods of data gathering, analysis and interpretation will be described to increase dependability. This will provide information on how repeatable the study might be (Krefting, 1990:220).

For the purpose of increasing dependability, a code-recode procedure (Krefting, 1990:221) on data analysis is used. The researcher coded the transcribed interview after which a protocol for the analysis of data was given to two independent coders, experienced in qualitative research, to code. The researcher then met with the coders for consensus discussion.
2.4.3.4 Neutrality

Neutrality is the exclusion of the researcher's own prejudices from the research procedure and results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:300). The control measure to ensure neutrality is confirmability, which will be discussed below.

- Confirmability
There are three measures that will be used to assure confirmability in this study, namely: auditability, reflexive analysis and triangulation.

a. Auditability
This suggests that another researcher could arrive at a comparable conclusion given the same data and research context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:300). The researcher kept a record that includes field notes, audio recordings, data analysis products and theoretical notes.

b. Reflexive analysis
The researcher kept a journal to reflect on information about the methods she used. The journal consists of interview schedules, a personal diary and notes about methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:327).

c. Triangulation
The researcher's sources will be tested against other sources in order to test the reliability of the data. Differences that occur will help to describe the adolescents' experiences of not knowing their biological fathers.

2.4.4 Ethical consideration

De Vos (1998:24) defines ethics as a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group, is widely accepted, and which offers rules and
d. **Feedback**

The summary of the findings, including the guidelines described in the study, will be made available to the schools and the parents of the participants.

e. **Benefits and freedom from harm**

Adolescents taking part in this study were assured of their safety, as the interview sessions were conducted during school hours. They were also assured that the study would not harm them in any way. Since this is a sensitive topic, a counsellor was sought to assist the adolescents. The telephone number and address of the counsellor was made available to them.

2.5 **SUMMARY**

The researcher will have completed data gathering and data analysis at this stage and therefore the findings will be available and be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3
DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND LITERATURE CONTROL

3.1 OVERVIEW

In Chapter 2, the methodology to be followed when analysing data was discussed. In this chapter, the findings on how adolescents experience growing up without knowing their biological fathers will be presented. To analyse data, the researcher first read through the transcript of each interview with the aim of summarising data. The purpose was to obtain a sense of the overall picture (Tesch (1990) in Cresswell, 1994:155). The most interesting transcript was selected to find the underlying meaning thereof. The researcher then handed in a protocol for analysis to two data analysts. Some of the themes detected were discarded due to lack of consensus. This process of code-recode to detect themes in the data is one of the approaches in qualitative data analysis.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 21 adolescents aged between 13 and 18 years of age (mean age 15.5 years), who attended secondary schools in Limpopo Province. All attend public schools. The schools consisted predominantly of learners from low-income families. The gender diversity reflected the larger population in secondary schools (13 girls and 8 boys). The adolescent’s family structures were also diverse - 4 lived with the mother and stepfather, 12 lived with their mothers only with no ‘father figure’ present, 5 lived with a ‘father figure,’ a grandfather, uncle or a male relative. Some of these adolescents think that their father had died, whereas others believe that their biological fathers are still alive. One to one, semi-structured, phenomenological interviews were conducted with these
adolescents. All participants were free to communicate in either English or Sepedi, but many used Sepedi during interviews.

Adolescents from local secondary schools were asked to volunteer. Of the 30 adolescents with whom rapport was established, 21 agreed to participate. Seven of these were not included in the study, as their mothers did not sign the consent form.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

Data is collected by means of interviews and field notes (Krefting, 1990:216). Adolescents shared their experiences with the researcher. In an effort to motivate the adolescents to talk freely during data gathering, the researcher used skills such as prompting when appropriate, listening, encouraging, elaborating, paraphrasing and clarification (McMillan, 2000:270).

3.3.1 Phenomenological interviews

On successive days, the researcher spent a half-hour session with each participant. As the schools are far apart, this process took one and a half weeks. The interviews were audiotaped. One central question was asked during each interview, namely "How is it not to know your own father?" Although each interview commenced with the central question, follow-up questions were open-ended and were guided by the conversation. This was done to capture the adolescents' own ways of describing their experiences of not knowing their own fathers. Interviews were concluded when themes were repeated, thus saturating data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:202).
3.3.2 Field notes

The researcher worked well with the participants. As a high school educator, she understands the behaviour and language spoken by adolescents. This relationship provided great opportunities as an interviewer. The researcher’s reflection about some of the painful experiences that the adolescents verbalised caused minor problems during interviewing. It was painful to listen to some of the sad stories of these young people. It was also difficult to observe how willing they were to tell their stories in their own words. All these experiences were noted as field notes.

Some of the adolescents visited during the interview confused the researcher with a social work who had come to their rescue. They were looking forward to financial assistance from the government. The researcher had to clarify this misconception. The interviews took place at the same time when social grants for children living with single mothers were being approved. Some adolescents requested to be interviewed even though they knew their fathers. The researcher explained that this could not be done, as it would deny the research its main objective, i.e. the exploration of the experiences of adolescents who had never met their biological fathers.

3.3.3 Findings

As a result of code-recode process, two themes about the experiences of adolescents who had never met their biological fathers were detected in the interview data. These two themes were that:

a.) Adolescents experienced a variety of painful feelings in different dimensions relating to growing up without knowing their biological fathers, and
b.) Adolescents expressed their specific needs about growing up without knowing their own father.

The two themes have both categories and subcategories and these findings have been further integrated with field notes and literature.

Table 3.1 summarises the findings.

Tesch's (Cresswell, 1994:154-156) coding procedure for the analysis of qualitative data was used.

**Table 3.1 Theme 1: Adolescents’ experience a variety of painful feelings in different dimensions relating to growing up without knowing their biological fathers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1</th>
<th>Adolescents describe their personal feelings.</th>
<th>Intense need to know their true identity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Angry/betrayed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Discriminated against/rejected/not loved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Embarrassed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Miss fathers’ physical closeness protection, guidance and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Self-blame and feelings of guilt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 2</th>
<th>Adolescents express their feelings towards their fathers.</th>
<th>Father (biological) confirms true identity and cannot be substituted.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Father is responsible for them and should fulfil his role.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first theme detected in the interview data related to the ways adolescents express their personal feelings, feelings towards their fathers, mothers and the
family. This will be discussed in detail below and followed by a discussion of the second theme later.

3.4.1 Adolescents describe their personal feelings

The findings in this study reflect that most adolescents who have never met their biological fathers have an intense need to know their real identity. This is highlighted by the following direct quotation.

“Who am I? Who is my real father?”
[Ke nna mang? Papa wa ka wa nnete ke mang?]

The search for identity becomes a preoccupation. The adolescent wants to know who he/she is, what values he wants to adopt and whether he or she is capable of commanding the respect of others (Mwamwenda, 1995:73). Adolescents spend considerable time examining themselves physically and this can contribute either positively or negatively to their self-concept. In addition, Hughes (2002:500) says that minority adolescents are more likely to identify themselves by their race or ethnicity, largely because members of majority cultures tend to identify them as such. Under these circumstances, establishing ethnic identity appears to be essential for healthy personal adjustment. This tendency is particularly strong in African-American adolescents. This is also appears to be true in South Africa, as one adolescent verbalised in the interview in his search for identity through the father’s family:

“Ke nyaka go šomiša fane ya papa mara ga ke e tsebe. Ke ya go tšea pasa ka fane efe bjalo?”
[What surname am I going to use when I apply for my identity document? I want to use my father’s surname but I don’t know it.]
Statements such as these provide the framework for identity crises in adolescents. Perhaps the most significant factor contributing to this need to confirm true identity is the continuous absence of a biological father in their lives.

Adolescents also demonstrate anger and hurt when they do not know their biological fathers. They explicitly stated that 'it is painful' not to know who your real father is. The following example demonstrates this.

"I don't feel well not knowing my father. The one who begot me. You know too that it is painful."

This painful experience causes them to display feelings of anger towards themselves. They blame themselves as they had set standards for themselves (Gillis, 1994:27). In the literature, Johnson (1997:330) believes that anger is a strong defensive emotion that signals that the person feels frustrated, thwarted or attacked. Anger occurs when they do not get something that they want or would like. Anger often erupted during the interviews and adolescents spoke about their increasing frustration as they grow older.

Most of the adolescents interviewed were of the opinion that they are not loved and feel discriminated against, unlike other children who know their biological fathers. They feel rejected by their own fathers. The following quotation indicates this rejection:

"A ke bone o ka re o a nthata... Ke direle eng gore ke sware ka mokgwa wo."
[I think he doesn't love me... What did I do to deserve this?]

Eastwood (2001:18) states that at the core of being a child, a young person wants to love his father and wants to be known and loved by him in return.
The above notion indicates that adolescents also express a dire need for love and acceptance from their fathers. Adolescents associate the father's absence with rejection and discrimination. Even those who lived with their stepfathers felt that they needed a 'special' love from their biological fathers. Goldstein (1973:20) believes that only a child who has at least one person to love, and feels loved, valued and wanted by that person, will develop a healthy self-esteem. Where this positive environmental attitude toward a child is missing from the start, the consequences become obvious in later childhood and adult life. These consequences take the form of the individual's diminished care for the well-being of his/her own body, his/her physical appearance and clothing, or for his/her presented image. This attitude may also be transferred to his/her own children.

Adolescents who have never met their biological fathers feel that they miss their physical closeness, protection, guidance and support. The following direct quotation highlights this:

"Ke tlo šireletsša ke mang ge ke le kotsing."
[Who is going to protect me when danger appears?]

"Ke nyaka go ba le yena, ke sege le yena ke mo sware, ke nyaka motho wa go nthekga bjalo ka papa."
[I want him to back me up. I want to talk, touch and laugh with him.]

Lamb (1986:191) asserts that a father's masculinity, nurturing, limit setting, power and participation in the family are all factors that have been found to be important in a child's development. Adolescents believe that a father is magic. He can reach out through time and space. He can make things happen when something is beyond the capacity of the child (MacLean, 1999:40). Adolescents
He can reach out through time and space. He can make things happen when something is beyond the capacity of the child (MacLean, 1999:40). Adolescents feel unsafe and think that security can be greatly assured by the presence of a father in the family. They experience fear and feel insecure and hence Johnson (2000:364) asserts that of all human experience, fear is perhaps the most chronically troublesome. Fear and anxiety rule our lives, particularly the fear of being rejected.

### 3.4.2 Adolescent express their feelings towards their fathers

Adolescents express feelings of anger towards their fathers. They feel that their fathers are responsible for their identity and material needs. On the other hand, they feel that their fathers are immoral and corrupt. They also express an image of a perfect father. This will be discussed in detail.

Adolescents feel that their biological father confirms their true identity. A grandfather, uncle or stepfather cannot be a substitute for a father. Although they appreciate what these family members do for them, adolescents do not want them to be seen as their fathers. One respondent highlighted this:

"Ke nyaka Papa wa nnete, e sego rakgolo. Ke gona ke tla kgotsofalo? [I want my real father, not my grandfather ... it is then that I can be satisfied.]

Le Francois (2001:511) relates the term *identity* with Erikson’s (1968:87) words, that in order to experience wholeness, the young person must feel a progressive continuity between that which has come to be during the long years of childhood and that which he promises to become in the anticipated future. Adolescents' identity is closely related to their parents. They believe that a father should fulfil his role as a father and provide for their material needs.
Adolescents have an image of a perfect father who will be able to look after them, had they had a chance to know them. On the other hand, the ideal father is also described as ‘corrupt’ and ‘immoral’ to have a child and then desert him/her. Although they have an image of a perfect father, their yearning for a father is such that they love him unconditionally. There are ambivalent feelings in this regard. MacLean (1999:40) says fathers are the unsung heroes of children’s lives. A quotation to demonstrate this is:

“Papaka ge nkabe a le goña o be a tla ntirela tšohle tše ke di ngakago ka lerato a kwešiša gore ke morwedi wa gagwe.”

[My father would do everything for me with love and feeling that this is my daughter.]

The following quotes highlight the ambivalence:

"This man is immoral, how can he leave me like this? ... but anyway, I will still accept him because I love him."

Badat (1999:67) argues that adolescents sometimes deliberately disguise their true feelings of despair by pretending that they are happy. In support of this notion, Johnson (2000:153) states that adolescents’ suppression of feelings can cause relationship problems with those who are taking care of them. Sometimes it is difficult to detect what the adolescent really feels, as he/she disguises this feeling.

An absent father can still have an ongoing psychological impact on his child. The child may develop a perception of his father from what others tell him/her.
3.4.3 Adolescents express their feelings towards their mothers

The findings below indicate adolescents’ experiences of their mothers. They describe their feelings towards their mothers as irresponsible, immoral, evasive, secretive, guilty and suffering.

Adolescents describe their mothers as irresponsible, immoral and corrupt to have borne them without a commitment from the father to stay and be part of the child’s life. This blame is rested upon the mother as the only known parent. A quotation in this regard:

"Mma o direleng Papa? Ke sola yena. E kaba o nthekile? Empa ga go kgonege. O bontšhité go híoka maikarabelo!"

[What did my mother do to my father? Have I been bought? That’s impossible. She acted irresponsibly.]

Another said:
"I think she is corrupt to have a child out of wedlock. Now she is even afraid to show me my dad."

Hetterington, Henderson & Reiss (2002:87) cites that mothers had more conflicting relationships with their own children than with stepchildren. Hughes (2002:503) supports him by saying that conflict typically increases more with mothers than with fathers during adolescence. In the light of this, it is not surprising why adolescents feel negative about their mothers.

The mother is also described as evasive, non-transparent and secretive about the father’s identity. This is perceived as she sometimes promises to find the biological father but never does and often shuts them out when they want to know their real fathers. One of the respondents highlighted this:
"O a befelwa, o a nkholela, a ba a mpotša gore ke se bolele le yena ka taba ye gape"
[She becomes very angry and keep quiet and tell me never to talk about this again with her.]

"Go tseba mang, mohlomongwe ke yena a tšhabetšego tate. Ga a nyake le go mpotša gore bothata ke eng."
[Who knows, maybe my mother ran away from my dad and left him. She does not want to tell me what went wrong.]

A research by Vilakazi-Tselani (1998:45) says that although the South African Constitution acknowledges that the child has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom to seek, receive, impart information and ideas of all kinds, traditional rural people do not acknowledge this right. Often parents do not give their children a chance to express themselves. It is always "shut up" or "you are too big for your boots". They never listen to their children's problems or feelings (Perlam, 1997:81). The two statements may indicate why some mothers become secretive about the whereabouts of adolescent's fathers.

Hughes (2002:503) also states that another obstacle to parenting teenagers is that interaction with them can become very unpleasant. Even the simplest request can turn into a major argument.

Empathy is expressed towards the mothers who suffer in raising adolescents alone. Some ambivalent feelings are experienced. While they feel that the mother is immoral, they also feel sorry for the suffering (of raising them) she experiences because of them. One of the adolescents remarked:
"Mma o goga bolma. O leka gore thabiša."
[My mother is suffering, she is trying to make ends meet.]

"Ke boditše mama gore o a sokola ka lebaka la ka, mpotše gore papa ke mang ke mo late a tie a kgone go go thuša."
[And I told her you are suffering because of me - tell me who he is so that I can ask him to help you.]

Most adolescents are growing up under difficult situations, as expressed during the interviews. Research by Gobopamang (2000:175) indicates that female-headed households are more prone to poverty than male-headed households. Wilson (1995:18) wrote that children in fatherless homes are five times more likely to live in poverty. MacLean (1999:40) also believes that children from single mother households are predisposed to a wide range of social problems and handicaps. Adolescents feel their suffering is related to the 'loss' of a biological father.

3.4.4 Adolescents express their feelings about their family and community

The adolescents describe their families as not caring. They feel they are not loved like other children in families with biological fathers. They perceive their families as incomplete. They believe that a father brings acknowledgement and respect to a family. They also believe that the community in which they live will respect their families if they had fathers. An example in this regard would be:

"I am at a disadvantage growing in a family with no father. Other children enjoy the comfort of knowing two real parents while I don't. They are better off because they are loved by their parents and respected by the community."
Braude (1992:57) asserts that the best-known and available support system in all societies is the family. Golan (1981:244) perceives a family as a natural support system. Getzoff and McLenahan (1984:93) state that children who did not have contact with one of their parents experienced an enormous loss in their lives. Nothing is more devastating than to lose a natural parent. Children need an enormous amount of love from their parents and when one parent is gone, children do not know if that parent loved them or not. They need to find out if that parent loved them. Wilson (1995:18) says that we must recognise that the best environment in which to raise children is in a loving home with both a father and a mother.

In addition, Santrock (1990:347) says it is important for adolescents to be accepted by parents.

3.5 THEME 2: ADOLESCENTS EXPRESS THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS ABOUT GROWING UP WITHOUT KNOWING THEIR BIOLOGICAL FATHERS.

The second theme identified in the interviews was that adolescents express their specific needs. They want their material needs to be met. In addition, adolescents want their emotional needs to be respected and addressed. The following discussion indicates how this theme was identified.

3.5.1 Adolescents want their material needs to be met

The most common need that adolescents described was for material things, for example, shoes, food and clothing. They describe it more as a father's responsibility to provide for these needs. A direct quotation in this regard highlights this:
"Ke nyaka diaparo le dijo empa a ke na tšona. Tate a tle a thusē mma. Ke gotše boima ke sena dieta le tšehele te ya sekolofisi."
[I need good food and clothing but I cannot afford them. My father must come and help my mother. I grew up under tough situations. At times I had no shoes, clothing or school fees.]

Related to this is Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Thomson et al, 1992:11) that states that people have basic human needs, including food, clothing, oxygen and water. Consequently, the absence of a biological father frustrates these needs for physiological requirements. According to Sidel (1996:47), children whose fathers do not reside in the household are at a great disadvantage compared to their peers who have fathers at home. He adds that children who grow up in households with only one biological parent are on average worse off than children who grow up in households where both biological parents are present (Sidel, 1996:44). The repercussions of poverty are unbearable for adolescents. Our society needs to curb fathers’ irresponsibility with regard to their children, before this problem escalates. Fathers need to realise that they should care for their children both financially and emotionally.

3.5.2 Adolescents want their emotional needs to be respected and addressed while growing up without their biological father

Adolescents are very sensitive and feel that they need to be respected and addressed. They become very sensitive when school activities involve their fathers. An example of this is:

"I don’t like it when people or my teacher asks who my father is."
Galinsky (1999 in Strom, et al. 2002:133) cites that cognitive and emotional changes are believed to be the reason that adolescents seem overly sensitive to their privacy and less willing to share feelings than when they were younger. Wilson (1995:18) asserts that fathers need not be only economic providers or money machines, they should be nurturers, disciplinarians, mentors, moral instructors and skills coaches. This need for emotional support prompted adolescents to provide specific guidelines in this regard.

3.6 GUIDELINES

In the interviews, adolescents provided the data to derive the following guidelines, which are inferred from themes and identified by means of data analysis and literature control.

3.6.1 Guidelines for parents and educators to handle adolescents who have never met their biological father

During the interviews, adolescents expressed painful feelings that included feelings of anger, hurt, rejection and a lack of identity. A variety of painful feelings were expressed towards their fathers and mothers that included describing their mothers as irresponsible, immoral, evasive, secretive and suffering. Fathers were also described as confirming identity, ideal, but 'corrupt' for deserting them. It is therefore important to provide guidelines for parents and educators to apply when dealing with these adolescents. These guidelines will be discussed below.
3.6.2 Guidelines for assisting adolescents to deal with their own painful feelings

These guidelines are directed at assisting adolescents to reach their full potential. Painful feelings need to be expressed so that they can be reframed in such a manner that the adolescent no longer regards himself/herself as a victim.

3.6.2.1 Painful feelings of anger, hurt, rejection and a lack of identity

Educators should assist adolescents to accept themselves and their situations. Techniques that can be used to do this are:

- **Role play** (Hanley, 1994:29-30, Hamblin, 1993:83-90) during which adolescents can act out the words they would like to say to their biological fathers if they were present, or by writing letters to them and expressing their wishes.

- **Skills** that educators can use to support these adolescents are:
  - **Empathy**, which is the ability to enter into and understand the world of another person and to communicate this understanding to him/her (Egan, 1986:950);
  - **Active and reflective listening**, where educators and parents listen for the feelings and meaning behind what is being said;
  - **Encourage** open expression and acceptance of feelings;
  - **Demonstrate** to adolescents that they are not alone;
  - **Act as a role model** and acknowledge that adolescents desperately need male role models. Paternal absence does not rule out the presence of other male models. A brother, uncle, grandfather, male neighbours and teachers may provide the adolescent with much adult male contact (Bilher, 1971:16); and
- **Know** adolescents’ family details.

It is said that the school serves as a secondary source of support for adolescents. It is a place where they spend most of their time. Wallerstein and Kelly’s (1990 in Golan, 1981:244) research indicates that children who were able to use support from parents, siblings and peers were those that could turn to teachers for support and comfort. Belkin (1975:463-464) advises that it is extremely important that teachers be aware of which students are from single families. This not only enables them to be particularly sensitive to any problems that may arise because of these situations, but also assures that he or she will not place the adolescent in any embarrassing situations that could have been avoided.

Teachers should try to work out day-to-day problems with the adolescent without approaching the mother unnecessarily.

### 3.6.2.2 Describing the mother as irresponsible, evasive, secretive and suffering

This guideline aims at assisting mothers living with these adolescents to help adolescents transcend their adversities.

Mothers should take the initiative by doing the following:

- Identify male role models for the adolescents, either among relatives or in the community;
- Be open with their children about their father’s whereabouts. If this is difficult, a friend, minister or school counsellor should be approached to talk to the adolescent.
- Never denigrate the absent father, even if the allegations appear to be true.
- Provide social and life skills that will enable them to cope with these situations. Adolescents can, for instance, be assisted to learn about the importance of abstaining from sex so that they can avoid or be prepared for situations of this nature.
- It is also important to point out to the adolescent that conception, and thus the creation of a new life, is a consequence of being intimate with a girl or boy.

Belkin (1975:464) argues that children increase their demands and express their aggression toward the person with whom they have most frequent contact, which usually is the mother. These guidelines may help reduce these demands and aggression.

3.6.2.3 Describing their fathers as confirming identity, ideal and perfect, but immoral for deserting them

These guidelines aim at helping fathers (biological) to realise how important they are in the lives of their own children.

It is important that fathers involve themselves in their adolescents’ lives, even if they do not live together. Adolescents desperately need fathers in their lives and the latter can try the following strategies:

- To establish contact with the adolescent even if it seems too late to do this;
- Talking to the mother of the adolescent indicating that he would like to see him/her;
- Have regular contact with the adolescent and help fulfil his paternal role by providing for his/her needs;
- If possible, register the adolescent in his own name. This is believed to confirm the adolescent's identity; and
• Explain to the adolescent why he left him/her and his/her mother.

3.6.3 Guidelines for economic and emotional support from fathers and educators

During the interviews, adolescents provided guidelines for economic and emotional support. Two needs were expressed - economic or material needs and emotional support. Each will be discussed below.

3.6.3.1 Guidelines for fathers to provide for economic and emotional support

The main objective in providing these guidelines is to encourage fathers to provide for the material needs of their children. Strom, et al. (2002:132) states that fathers are said to be the main source of income and suggests the following:

• Fathers need to provide for material, financial and/or economic needs.
• Fathers are supposed to provide emotional support for their children. They are expected to guide, discipline and show love for their children.
• Fathers are expected to contribute to the education of their children through continuous interaction with them. They should offer life and social skills to them.
• Fathers need accurate information about adolescence and be aware of how they can continue to influence their children favourably.

(Strom, et al. 2002:132)

Biller (1971:32) states that the base of the father’s power is his ability to provide for his children.
3.6.3.2 Guidelines for educators to provide economic and emotional support to adolescents who have never met their biological fathers

This guideline serves to help educators take the initiative to assist these adolescents. During the interviews, adolescents expressed a need for economic and emotional support. The following suggestions are made to enable educators to deal with adolescents:

- Organise donations to provide feeding schemes and distribute second-hand clothing at secondary schools.
- Arrange with a social worker to negotiate social grants for these adolescents.
- As this is a very sensitive issue, involve an educational psychologist to assist with the counselling of the adolescents.
- Avoid enquiring about their fathers' details in the presence of adolescents' peers. They tend to want privacy in this regard.
- Provide learners with updated information about child maintenance, social grants and rights.

The researcher suggests that integrating these guidelines and suggestions will enable parents and educators to support adolescents who have never met their biological fathers. Maximum impact can be achieved when working with adolescents in the context of their family background.

3.7 SUMMARY

The findings of this study seem to confirm numerous research findings about adolescents growing up without their biological fathers. Their stories indicate that they experience different feelings. The weakening of two-parent
households and increasing poverty among female-headed households is cause for major concern.
CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3 the findings of the study were given and a literature control was conducted to substantiate the study. Themes were identified that describe adolescents’ experience of never having met their biological fathers. Chapter 4 presents the limitations, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

4.2 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the research was two-fold. First, to explore and describe the experiences of adolescents who have never met their biological fathers and, second, to describe guidelines for parents and educators to support these adolescents.

In contrast to quantitative research methods, qualitative and descriptive research was conducted to assess the role of non-residential, unmarried biological fathers and their adolescents (Gobopamang, 2000:175). This study listened to the voices of the young people themselves. It was an illuminating experience to learn that adolescents are aware that he who begot them had a role to play in their lives. This exploratory study of a small group of adolescents is a necessary step in understanding the complexities of growing up without a biological father. The use of qualitative methods of exploration and description provided the richness of this study. It allowed informants to express themselves in any way they feel comfortable. The adolescents were able to use their native language and style to put across thoughts and perceptions.
As an instrument, the researcher was able to effectively utilize her interviewing and communication skills. The training she received to improve her listening, reflection and clarification skills, was also very helpful.

From the findings of the phenomenological interviews, two themes emerged. The first identified theme (which is that adolescents experience a variety of painful feelings in different dimensions) indicated explicitly that biological fathers are both physically and psychologically absent in their own children's lives. The adolescents expressed their desire that their wishes should someday be fulfilled. Their stories indicate that they experience anger, hurt and rejection and that they do not get support from the family, as both the father and mother are perceived or described as being 'corrupt' and 'immoral' to have conceived them without a proper commitment. They place much blame on their mothers, as they, more than anyone else, are the only people who know of the fathers' whereabouts.

The second theme detected in the interviews was that adolescents express their specific needs. They typically wanted their father to provide for their material needs or to give them emotional support. Some believe that if their fathers were present in their lives, life would not have been difficult for them. Adolescents believe that their fathers are perfect and love them unconditionally. One of them said: "I want him (father) even if he is a drunkard. Just to see him."

Overall, the data show that adolescents need a lot of emotional support from the educators at school. They become sensitive and feel that their privacy need to be respected, particularly on issues involving their biological fathers. One of the most interesting aspects noted in this study was that the adolescents regarded it as 'therapeutic' for them, for example, "I feel better talking to you. I have shed the load". This indicates that adolescents need support.
Based on these results, guidelines were developed and described for parents and educators to support adolescents who have never met their biological fathers. These guidelines will help in assisting adolescents to reach their full potential, in spite of not having any contact with their biological fathers.

If the government listens to the voices of these adolescents, it can act as a catalyst to bring about change in the enforcement of stricter child care and support laws in the country. It can also make the public aware of the dangers of conceiving children when people are not yet ready for parenthood.

It can therefore be concluded that the research questions of the study have been answered and the objectives achieved.

4.3 LIMITATIONS

Adolescents use their own language with unique terms. Although the researcher understands their language, there were times where clarification was needed. This made note taking and operating the tape recorder difficult to maintain at times.

The study was also limited by the exhaustive focus on adolescents from a rural background, the small size of the sample and the use of only one type of research method to investigate a complex research question. Further study should examine larger samples of adolescents who are from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.

Most participants expected some form of financial help from the researcher. This study took place simultaneously with a child grant recruiting drive and some participants in the study had expectations of financial assistance.
Some principals denied the researcher access to possible participants, citing the topic of the study as a sensitive issue. They maintained that the discussion might later create problems for their learners. One principal withdrew from participating in the research.

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations from this study will be made with specific reference to education, practice and further research.

4.4.1 Education

It is believed that education can improve the lives of people. If we want our children to learn values, education will allow them to reverse the trend of absent biological fathers when they grow up. We must encourage and permit biological fathers to be involved in their children's lives at home and at school. In this way we will be educating them. It is evident that programmes and policies need to be put in place at schools that would improve the lives of adolescents who have never met their biological fathers. Some of the programmes may include providing young people with life and coping skills for survival. People who have custody of such adolescents need to be educated and helped by professionals.

There is a need for incentives to encourage more males to become teachers of adolescents. This will have a greater positive influence on adolescents. Male teachers might be able to facilitate certain types of cognitive functioning in paternally deprived adolescents and contribute to their development.
4.4.2 Research

Studies that focus on mothers' experience of bringing up adolescents without the presence of a biological father are needed to examine if and how their perceptions correspond to those of their children. Studies should integrate questionnaires, observational and interviewing methods. Important information is acquired by means of each of these methods. Researchers should continue to explore the experience of adolescents who have never met their biological fathers. The gap between policymakers and young people needs to be bridged to ensure that the voices of adolescents are heard.

Research should examine why certain women remain unmarried or without constant male companionship during their lives. Long-term absence of fathers is, in some cases, much a function of the mother's attitudes toward men. The child or adolescent is therefore left with no choice.

4.4.3 Practice

With the rapid growth of mother-only households, it is recommended that adolescents should accept the absence of a father and persist in trying to find him. Adolescents should receive adequate support both at school and at home. Educators need to respect adolescents' concern about their biological fathers. Educators and parents need to acknowledge adolescents' coping strategies and build on these. They should involve organisations to provide 'therapeutic' support for those who are willing to talk. They also need to understand the context of adolescents who have never met their biological father. Adolescents who have never met their biological fathers must learn to be positive and accept themselves in order to reach their full potential.
Guidelines derived from this study should be implemented by parents and educators as guiding principles.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hurlock, E. 1978. Child developmental. Auckland Park:


ANNEXURE 1

S is an 18-year-old boy in Grade 9

R: Tell me how is it not to know your own father?

S: I feel very bad, it's hurting because all my friends know their fathers and everything that they tell their fathers. Nobody is helping me and I don't have many things. I lack quite a number of things but through prayers sometimes I see many things happening. During holidays I do piece jobs at Doctor's residence and get some pocket money.

R: Is this affecting you in a way?

S: Of course it does affect me. Have you ever seen when you don't know who your father is? Ever since I was born I ask myself many questions... Who is my father? ... Why do I deserve this? ... What did my mother do to him? ... Have I been bought? ... sometimes I just sit down in class, keep quiet and think (looks very disturbed). And one day I asked my mother could you please tell me the truth... actually who is my real father? My mother tried to deviate and asked me why did I ask on that day. And I told her it looks like you are suffering because of me, tell me who he is so that he can be able to help you. She said: “Don’t worry I will always try to meet your needs” ... but it is still difficult up to this day.

R: How difficult is it for you?

S: I want this man to pay... (looks emotional). I want him to pay for my maintenance from day one. The day I was born until now. According to
the background given by my mother about our upbringing... it looks like she was suffering trying to make ends meet. One day I asked my granny who my father is. She told me he is a very tall man from Mokopane and is light in complexion. He drives a brown car. And then one day I lied to my mother and said I met my father... he is like this and that he was driving a car. She then jumped with excitement. I was having some money in my pocket and I lied to her and said he gave me the R20 piece I had. She was surprised and we didn’t talk about it again.

R: Why did you stop talking to her about that? Why did you have to lie as well?

S: I was just strategising to cool her down by lying. I wanted to make her aware that I know about my father’s whereabouts. The reason why we didn’t talk about it again is because I am staying with my uncle and I haven’t seen my mother after a long time. I only visited her last week when I wanted to apply for an ID. What surname am I supposed to use on my ID.

R: Whose surname are you using presently?

S: At the moment I am using my mother’s surname but I would be glad to use my dad’s. How do I do that when my mother is not even interested in helping me?

R: Are you saying your mother is not interested in helping you? ... What could be the reason?

S: I don’t know maybe she is afraid of that man. But I am not, I am going to sit down and talk. I’ll tell him I don’t mind if he is married now! One
thing is for sure, his wife will have to understand me. I won’t have a problem with her she will be my stepmother. And if my dad has other kids they are also my half-brothers and sisters.

R: Mmmmmh... I’m listening. And then?

S: Listen! In the first place I want to know how much does he get from his salary advice slip? He must tell me his monthly budget... Maybe he may want to talk to my mother about maintenance. But I wanted him face to face.

R: Are you saying you want to know his financial status if I get you well.

S: He must tell me why they were so corrupt and separate so that is must suffer at the end.

R: How corrupt are they? And to whom are you referring to when you say they?

S: My dad and my mom, they were corrupt because they made a child out of wedlock... Now my mother is even afraid to show me my dad. She knows very well that if she shows me I will find him. She also knows that whatever I plan to do I always make sure that I do. No matter what I don’t care how hot it is. I know someday I will get him as I move around.

R: You seem to be very upset and angry with him?

S: Yes I am. He must just know that I am angry. And I am following him and I am searching for him. If he has a problem with my mother it
doesn't mean he must not care for me. I am innocent. I didn't apply to be born. He must care for me simple as that.

R: What is it that you wish both your mother and father could do for you?

S: My father should take care of us. My mother is not a bad person – she is not after men. I have never seen her with a boyfriend. She is very cool but I'm not sure as to whether my sister is also my father's child or not.

R: What do you think can be done to ease this situation?

S: My mother must tell me the truth and I confront that man who ran away from me. You know what... I am busy growing. There will come a time when I don't need him. I will be having my own things and he will think that I am undermining him. I will use force and my mother will show me the place.

R: Why do you have to use force?

S: Not in a bad way but they know very well that once they tell me where my father is, I won't have a stumbling block I will simply go there with no fear.

R: What gives you the courage to go to him?

S: I want him to know me. We have a very important relationship. He is my father and he left my mother for some reason. What about me? No reason. Therefore I am here to let you and your family know that I am part of you. I want to be included in your budget for my school expenses.
R: Ooh... I see! Anything else?

S: If he does not comply the law will catch him. Fathers are forced to look after their kids these days.

R: Who is looking after you presently?

S: My mother is not working... therefore my uncle is looking after me.

R: You count yourself lucky to have an uncle like that.

S: Yes... I will always do. Do you know of anybody or company that help people like us who don’t have fathers.

R: No... I only know that social development offer grant to fatherless children under the age of seven.

S: So for teenagers it’s everybody for himself.

R: Maybe in the future there will be such grants but at the moment I don’t know of any.

S: I feel much better talking to you about this. It is for the first time that somebody shows interest in my problems.

R: I am pleased to hear that. Thank you very much for your time. I wish you well in your studies. God bless!
Department of Educational Sciences

Dear Participant:

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am Edith D Kekana, a masters student at the Rand Afrikaans University, Faculty of Education and Nursing, Department of Educational Sciences. As a requirement of my studies I am engaged in a research study, entitled "Experiences of adolescents who never met their biological fathers in their lifetime." I invite you to participate in this research.

The purpose of this research is to explore and describe the experiences of adolescents who never met their biological fathers. Professor CPH Myburgh and Prof Marie Poggenpoel supervise the study.

To complete the research study I need to conduct interviews of more or less forty to sixty minutes with adolescents from your school. The interviews will be audio taped and then transcribed for verification with the supervisors and the independent coder. These will be the only persons who will have access to the tapes and the transcriptions.

I undertake the following ethical principles throughout the research process:

- Informed consent to participants.
- Voluntary participation and freedom to participate and to withdraw from the study without penalty.
- To omit names when discussing information pertaining to this study to protect the names and the dignity of the participants and that of your institution.
- Safeguard confidentiality by keeping all raw data and field notes confidential and under lock and key.
- Erase audiotapes and destroy field notes used in the study as soon as convenient.
- Make a summary of the research results available to participants and to you should you so wish.
- Leave my contact number should you want to establish contact related to the research study.
The benefits for the adolescents in participating in the research study are that the participants are awarded the opportunity to describe their experiences.

My contact numbers are: (015) 632 4514 (h) and 082-405-7547

Sincerely yours
ED Kekana (Ms) BA, B.Ed.


Prof Marie Poggenpoel (RN, PhD, L.Akad.)
(a:KekanaE)
Dear Sir or Madam:

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am Edith D Kekana, a masters student at the Rand Afrikaans University, Faculty of Education and Nursing, Department of Educational Sciences. As a requirement of my studies I am engaged in a research study, entitled "Experiences of adolescents who never met their biological fathers in their lifetime." I invite you to participate in this research.

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Sincerely yours
ED Kekana (Ms) BA, B.Ed.


Mare Poggenpoel
Prof Marie Poggenpoel (RN, PhD, L. Akad.)
(a:KekanaE_participant)
Dear Colleague

Please code the transcriptions of the phenomenological interviews following Tesch’s Method of data analysis (Tesch, Cresswell, 1994: 154-155).

Please adhere the following eight steps:

- Read through all transcriptions carefully and jot down some ideas as they come to mind.
- Write down your thoughts in the margin.
- Complete all documents and then make a list of all necessary topics, putting similar ones together and arranging them in major topics and unique topics.
- Take the list and consult with data. Topics should be abbreviated, as codes written next to appropriate segments of the text.
- Find the most descriptive word for the topic and turn into categories. Topics that appear to relate to each other will then be grouped together. Draw lines between categories to show interrelationships.
- Make a final decision on abbreviated categories and alphabetise codes.
- Data material belonging to each category should be gathered and put in one place and a preliminary analysis done.
- The transcribed data is enclosed here in for coding.

My contact number is: 082 405 7547

Yours Sincerely