The Effects of the Foster-care Backlog on Prospective Beneficiaries inThulamela Municipality, Vhembe District: Limpopo Province

By

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Declaration

I, Livhuwani Mafela, declare that *"The Effects of the foster-care Backlog on Prospective Beneficiaries in Thulamela Municipality Vhembe District Limpopo Province"* hereby submitted to the University of Venda for the Master's degree in SocialWork has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, and that it is my own work in design and execution, all materialscontained herein have been dully acknowledged.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the community that I worked with; for believing in the power of knowledge.

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Acknowledgement's

This emotional journey would not have been successfully accomplished without the help of many. I am fully indebted to those who saw me through the study, motivated me to keep moving, even when all hope was lost.

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Abstract

The goal of foster care is to ensure that children are provided with the necessary care and protection they are entitled to as children which is intended to allow them to , grow and develop in a safe and healthy environment. However, there is a backlog of applications presenting a severe challenge to the Department of Social Development, thus, negatively impacting the lives of its intended beneficiaries.

The aim of the study was to explore the effects of the foster-care backlog on prospective beneficiaries in the Thulamela Municipality, Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province. A qualitative research approach was employed to achieve the above aim and to understand the participants' perceptions. The objectives of the study were to explore the contributoryfactors for the non-placement of prospective beneficiaries on the foster-care grant system; to describe the views of prospectivebeneficiaries on foster-care applications' backlog; to describe the effects of foster-care applications' backlog on prospective beneficiaries; to recommend solutions that could address the foster-care backlog. The study employed an exploratory qualitative research design to understand the phenomenon under study. Data was collected through semi structured and unstructuredinterviews. Non-probability sampling was utilized as a sampling procedure in the study. Data was analyzed thematically guided by Creswell (2017). The study employed the systems theory as the theoretical framework, based on that it is preceded on the fact thatindividuals and families do not exist in isolation but within broader societal relationships;if one part of the system is interrupted; it affects the whole system. If children are not taken care of, it destabilizes society's fabric, which might exacerbate social ills.

The findings as per the participants responses highlighted that there is a lack of supervision on the other end leading to a backlog of unattended cases, It is evident that the social workers are not visible in supervision. Their difficulties to manage the foster care cases seems to be associated with a lack of resources, high caseload, andquality versus quantity in social services. The participants maintained that they relied largely on their other grants such as old age grant to make a living.

Keywords: backlog, foster care grant, supervision, beneficiaries, effects.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction of the Study

In the climate of political change and the new South African dispensation, research provides evidence that in the 1990s social workers predicted that some social problemsthat the nation is facing were directly associated with poverty and the apartheid system (Scarce Skills Policy Framework, 2003). The change, it was anticipated, would lessen poverty and safeguard children. However, the transition out of the apartheid era has given citizens hope that South Africa has emerged as a new democratic state. However,the extent to which children are viewed as the country's most vulnerable group is as troubling as the apartheid era. Globally, foster care is considered to be the most commonalternative care method for children without parental care at home. It often takes place in the family context and is a viable option for protecting children (Schiller, 2015). The South African Government, in line with international practice, has since recognized the need to establish alternative care services for children who require care and protection to ensure their own safety and well-being. The Children Act No. 38 of 2005 further defines foster care as a statutory intervention program for children in need of care and protection. Section 180 also states that a child should be placed in foster care by court order of the children's court. In support, Casey and Casey, 2012 states that when familiesare unable to care for their children, the care allowance ensures that the child welfare system uses its powers to take custody away from them. A significant number of vulnerable children still find that their fundamental rights are not being respected. For example, for some children, receiving a foster care grant is just a dream even though they meet all the requirements.

Globally foster care is regarded as the most prevalent method of alternative care for children who do not have any parental care in their homes. It often takes place within the family context and is a feasible option for safeguarding children (Schiller, 2015). TheSouth African government aligned with international practice, has since recognized the need for establishment of substitute care services for children in need of care and protection, for their own safety and wellbeing.

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The children's act no.38 of 2005 further defines foster care as a statutory interventionprogram for children in need of care and protection legislated in section 180 which further stipulates that a child should be placed in foster care as a result of a court orderof the children's court. A considerable number of vulnerable children still find their fundamental rights not being met; for example, for some children being beneficiaries of a foster- care grant is but just a dream, even though they meet all requirements. The foster- care grant ensures that when families are unable to care for their children,the childwelfare system uses its power to take custody of them (Casey and Casey, 2012). Neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse are all examplesof child abuse perpetrated by parents or primary caregivers (Children's Bureau, 2013) and as such the Republic of South Africa is in line with this concept.

The welfare system did not alleviate the social problems caused by apartheid, but rather served to maintain the status quo with regard to the social problems ofvulnerable groups. (Integrated Service Delivery Model for Social Services, 2006; Generic Norms and Standards for Social Welfare Services, 2011). With the advent ofdemocracy in South Africa, the new non-racial State eliminated past racially based policies and legislation and replaced them with more inclusive ones. A new, more child-centred foster care system was proposed in the founding policy framework for social-welfare services in the new South Africa, (White Paper for Social Welfare,1997).The government's intentions for foster-care provisioning were later codified in nationallegislation - the Children's Act, No 38 of 2005.

A progress report by the Department of Social Development (DSD, 2019) a the 2017 court order, found that deferrals made by the DSD were unauthorized, fraudulent andinvalid. The delays of court orders in respect of children in need of care and protectionhad no substantial reason such that , temporal administration for the sustained payment and management of over 200 000 foster-care orders was to be provided because they had lapsed (DSD, 2019). It is against this context that the need for an operational mechanism for the safeguarding of children is urgent. Children are classified as one of the most vulnerable groups in the history of South Africa, and as such, they need to be cateredfor, taking their best interests to heart (Generic Norms and Standards for Social Welfare Services, 2011).

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The social work profession is committed to intensifying the well-being of individuals withintheir social environments (Duncan, 2000). The author adds that individuals and societalwell-being are characteristics of socially inclusive communities that give emphasis to principles of social justice as well as respect for human dignity and humanrights, includingthe right to be part of a loving, understanding and warm family (DSD, 2019). Every childdeserves to be loved and be part of either an institution and a family set-up that fosters a sense of belonging, security, and support.

1.2 Problem Statement

Evidence from the USA Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) suggest that, universally, the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic is increasing pressure already experienced by HIV orphans and other vulnerable children who are waiting to receivea foster-care grant. The AFCARS report (2022) on adoption and foster care statistics indicates that there is a trend of high numbers in foster care from the year 2011. Moreover, Anecdotal evidence show that more and more children are being declared orphans, calling for more foster-care applications and grants to be processed. It appears,however, that these applications are not being attended to in time, resulting in poor households being unable to access their foster- care grants. Non-payment of foster-caregrants, to qualifying prospective beneficiaries has a likelihood of creating a negative bearing on the lives of the orphans and the social-work profession as service provision is not adequately reaching the public.

The national department of Social Development reported on progress made to meet thenorthern Gauteng high court order deadline of the 27th November 2022 to resolve challenges of the foster care system in South Africa. The North Gauteng High Court issued an order on the 26th of November 2019 as an extension of the 28th November 2017 court order. The extended court order provides an additional twelve-month provision contained in the 2017 court order. The 2017 court order pointed out that in all nine provinces there is a backlog of applications for foster-care grants, amounting to 39102. As of August 2019, Limpopo has a backlog of 6568 applications as alluded to bya study conducted by Mokgalapa (2021), with most of these in Capricorn and Sekhukhune districts, although, these recorded figures do not fully represent the picturein the province. The current social development report dated 16th November 2022 entails

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an account by the Minister where she reported on the foster care situation. It was reported that there had been a projected backlog of 78 000 foster care orders and deviations. However, between March and November, this number had been drastically reduced to 11 000 orders. These figures are most likely to delay the finalization of theseapplications, making it impossible for prospective beneficiaries tobe registered in the foster-care system, however, there is no adequate research on children who are awaitingplacement as individual entities. A considerable number of scholarly documents tend togloss over the children's perceptions, attention is then given to caregiver's experiences with children who are already beneficiaries of the Foster care grant. Hence the focus of the study is on the effects of the foster-care backlog on the lives of its intended beneficiaries in South Africa, therefore, this study aimed to establish this. This was drivenby the researcher's observations while practicing as a student social worker and as an intern social worker at the Vhembe District office, Thulamela Municipality. This is a concerning matter, aschildren are a vulnerable sector of the population and foster-care grant is a vital welfareservice that provides much-needed care for children in need of careand protection, as stated in the Children's Act no.38 of 2005.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the study

1.3.1 Aim of the Study

The study aims to explore the effects of the foster-care backlog on prospective beneficiaries.

1.3.2 Objectives of the Study

- To explore the contributory factors for the non-placement of prospective beneficiaries on the foster-care grant system.
- To describe the views of prospective beneficiaries on foster-care applications' backlog.
- To describe the effects of foster-care applications' backlog on prospective beneficiaries
- To provide recommendations on how to address the foster-care backlog.

1.4 Major Research question

- What are the effects of the foster-care backlog on prospective beneficiaries in Thulamela Municipality?

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1.4.1 Sub – questions

- What are the contributory factors for the non-placement of prospective beneficiaries on the foster-care grant system?
- What are the views of prospective beneficiaries on the foster-care applications' backlog?
- How does the foster-care backlog affect prospective beneficiaries?
- What are the possible recommendations that can address the foster-care backlog?

1.5 Rationale of the Study

Evidence contained in previous research studies shows an increase in applications for foster-care andthis appears to have affected social welfare services to the most vulnerablepopulation, such that Vhembe District is not an exception.The vulnerable population includes the - orphaned, neglected as well as victims of sexual abuse, HIV/AIDS, Covid-19 - as stipulated in section 150 sub-section (1) and (2) of the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005.

> *"One of the reasons that the foster-care research is confusing and has insufficient information, particularly, on studies relating to children is because it glosses over the children's perceptions. Much of the existing research on foster children's experience is based on adults' retrospective accounts, which are filtered by further years and memories" (Vera institute of care, 2002)*

In view of the above, the researcher believes that the urgency of the plight of all prospective beneficiaries will be brought to light, by conducting this study and the conclusions drawn will positively contribute to social work's profession's development and an enhancement in service provision. The study will not only be advantageous to children awaiting inclusion in the foster-care system but their caregivers as well. The primary intention of the study findings will be to assist social workers, magistrates, the courts, and other systems to work together in addressing the foster-care applications backlog and to fast-track the process. The study will thus complement the existing bodyof knowledge with particular reference to social work and the law.

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1.6 Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to intended beneficiaries of the foster care grant who are between sixteen to eighteen years of age. These are children who are meant to be staying with foster families but are yet to be legally placed and are in Thulamela Municipality, Vhembe District. The researcher anticipated to collected data from 10 female youths and 10 maleyouth participants from Tshisaulu village. Data was also collected from the caregivers ofparticipants who were minors, however, only 12 participants and five caregivers were interviewed.

1.7 Definitions of Key Concepts

Foster care

Foster care is defined by the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005 as a system meant to protect,nurture, and care for a child who has been found to need care and protection.For this study, the foster-care refers to protective families and institutions available to needy children who do not stay with their biological parents. Furthermore, The placement of a child through a court order of the Children's Court, in the custody of a suitable person, willing to act as a caregiver to the child (Children's Act 38 of 2005).

Effects

For this study, the effects of the foster care applications' backlog will be explored to fully understand how this is impacting the lives of potentialbeneficiaries as Bressmer (2022) defines an 'effect' as an occurrence, condition, or an outcome of an action.

Social Worker

A social worker refers to suitably qualified and registered personnel authorized, in termsof the Social Service Profession Act, to practice as a professional social worker, as stipulated in Act No.110 of 1978 (SACSSP,1978). Therefore, the researcher used the above-mentioned definition in this study.

Prospective Beneficiary

The legal dictionary (2018) a 'prospective beneficiary' is any person who may be entitledto receive the benefits of a fund or a program but is not necessarily the applicant for the

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said benefits. For this study, a prospective beneficiary is any child who is eligible to receive a foster-care grant and legally be placed in a foster home through the courts (ChildJustice Act No. 75 of 2008);Acchild could be any person under the age of 18 years and,in some circumstances,it could be a person who is 18 years or older but under the age of 21 years. Furthermore, as stipulated in the social assistance act no.13 of 2004, a beneficiary refers to a person who receives social assistance in terms of sections 6,7,8,9,10,11,12 or 13 of the above-mentioned act, therefore, in the context of this study,the prospective beneficiary refers to the potential recipient of the foster care grant.

Backlog

The Cambridge English dictionary (2018) defines 'backlog' as an accumulation of uncompleted work requiring attention. For this study, backlog refers to unprocessed foster-care applications.

Minor

Article 1 on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a minor asan individual up to the age of eighteen years.

Youth

Refers to an individual who is transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, between theages thirteen to nineteen (Erikson, 1972; Macleod, 2003). The African Union (2006) describes youth as those persons between the ages fifteen and twenty-four years. In thecontext of the study, youth and minor will be used interchangeably.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Schenck, Nel and Louw (2015), pronounce a theoretical framework as a model that provides the researcher with a background on how to observe, understand and analysephenomena, such as people, behaviour and actions. These authors emphasize that anydecision that the researcher arrives at, on a certain theory shouldbe driven by the natureof the phenomenon.

Foster care is a process that involves different stakeholders and role players, hence, when one sector fails to carry out its duties, a backlog is also created by delays from one

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department which makes it difficult for the remaining departments to work on their caseloads. The systems theory was employed to explain and strengthen the study; families as institutions function in a way that needs to be understood as a unified system.As an attempt to strengthen the foster care backlog discourse, the researcherfound the systems theory to be the most relevant to the study and is discussed below.

1.8.1 The Systems Theory

A 'system' refers to "a complex rule-governed body of interrelating parts, which is enclosed by a boundary that controls the movement of information and energy in andout of the system" (Bertalanffy, 2015). Because the systems theory is primarily concerned with problems, relationships, structures, and the interdependence of various parts withinthe system, it therefore allows for emphasis to be placed on collaboration and inclusion of all parts of the foster-care system. (White, Klein & Martin, 2014). This implies that individual behaviour cannot be understood apart from the system to which they belong. Furthermore, individuals cannot be viewed as separateentities, according to the principleof the theory - that various parts of a system must be synthesized and viewed as being connected (Allan, 2015). In other words, what occurs in one part of the system will influence the whole system (White, 2014).

Potgieter (2010) notes that a system can be seen as a unit of people who share somesort of connection, through a relationship for a particular function. Every system operates through certain norms and rules and is structured in a specific format or hierarchy; this is based on the premise that every section has a specific rank, and each rank has its specific task, role, and authority. Potgieter (2010) adds that an individual is a physical, emotional, intellectual, social, sexual, and spiritual being. In the hierarchy of the family composition, an individual is considered a member of the married couple system, whichis a sub-system of the family system, which shares a social environment with friends, neighbours, and significant others; together it forms part of a more extensive system called the 'community'. The inter-connectedness between every single part of the systemis influenced by one factor of the system, hence, when one part of the system is disturbed, it brings disequilibrium to the whole system and other sub-systems.

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In this study, the systems theory underpins the research because the experiences, behaviour and feelings of foster children and foster parents will influence other parts of the family system. This notion is premised on the fact that individuals and families do notexist in isolation but within broader societal relationships; if one part of the system is interrupted, it affects the whole system. If children are not taken care of, it destabilizes society's fabric, which might exacerbate social ills. The systems theory isessential and valuable in this study because it allows social workers to put together pieces of a familysystem by understanding and having access to all the system's separate parts. The theory is based on the idea that behaviour is motivated by factorsthat work together, such as family, friends, social and economic classes, and the environment. It is believed thatthe systems theory has great potential in influencing how an individual thinks, how an individual feels and how he / she acts in response tocertain factors. Social workers can then identify, observe, and analyse all these various systems that may contribute to a child's overall behaviour and welfare; they work together with the children to improve the negative aspects of their lives.

The structural approach to the systems theory is an intervention that draws its strength from identifying and observing interactive patterns in a family system. This approach is valuable because it looks at essential problem areas and gives structural and systematicsolutions that involve the family or individuals to explore different avenues to curb challenges, which often leads to better outcomes.

The systems theory is also an intervention that is more concerned with looking at factorsthat cause dysfunctional trends in a family system in totality, rather than focusing on theindividuals. The approach is concerned with discovering rules, regulations and ideologies that sustain dysfunctional patterns and it works well with the structuralapproach because it motivates change, not blaming other parts of the system.

In addition, maslows hierarchy of needs was used in the study following the gratificationof basic needs. Fulfilment of these needs fosters the need for belonging and love, whichone would normally find within families and friendships. Maslow postulated that it is onlywhen humans are placed within a community or institution where they are able to fulfil the need for self-esteem and to find a belief in their worth as an individual that they will be able to successfully transition from one phase to the next. When these children are

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certain about their existence within the context of their environments, they are most likely to become well rounded societal beings with optimized levels of thinking.

1.9 Synopsis of the Research Methodology

Cresswell (2017)regards a research methodology as a technique utilised to answer research questions thereby arriving at a resolve to the research problem. In addition, Cresswell (2017) points out that the research design is a plan based on the underlying philosophical assumptions and the selection of respondents and data gathering techniques to be used. For this purpose, the following processes to address the researchquestion will be explained in the sections below: the research approach, design and setting; population and sampling; data collection and analysis; pilot study;measures to ensure trustworthiness, as well as the ethical considerations adhered to.

1.9.1 Research Approach

Whittaker (2012) refers to the research approach as "the detachment between qualitative and quantitative traditions in research." The researcher adopted the qualitative approach which is defined by Babbie & Mouton (2011) as "the approach that attempts to recognizeand understand participants in their natural setting by interpreting a social phenomenonin relation to the sense attributed to it."

1.9.2 Qualitative research

A qualitative approach was utilized in the study., Babbie and Mouton (2016) explain qualitative research as a method that deliberates more on human experience and produces theoretical observations that cannot easily be reduced into numerical figures. A qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate as it would enable a better understandingof the research question and the flexibility it affords the researcher when conducting the study.

1.9.3 Research design

Creswell (2016) explicates a research design as a strategy or organized framework of how the researcher anticipates conducting the research process to solve the research

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problem, hence, describes how data will be collected and examined. Babbie and Mouton(2016), note that a research design is primarily understood as the researcher'ssummaryof the ways to solve the research problem, or challenge a research theory.

An explorative qualitative research design was used in this study. Cresswell (2017), succinctlypoints out that an explorative study is conducted through exploratory experiences that translate into perceptions through, data-collection instruments such as inductive interviews and discussions as well representing them from theparticipants' perspective. This type of research design is appropriate for this study dueto its explorative nature, thus, the design allowed the researcher to acquire more knowledge and understanding of thestudy's phenomenon.

1.9.4 Research setting

The research setting is a place or location where data will be collected (Creswell, 2017);this study was located at Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality, Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. There are four municipalities in Vhembe District: Thulamela, Collins Chabane, Musina and Makhado. The researcher chose the proposed study area after having discovered that there is very little published Academic literature on the subject matter concerning the Limpopo Province.

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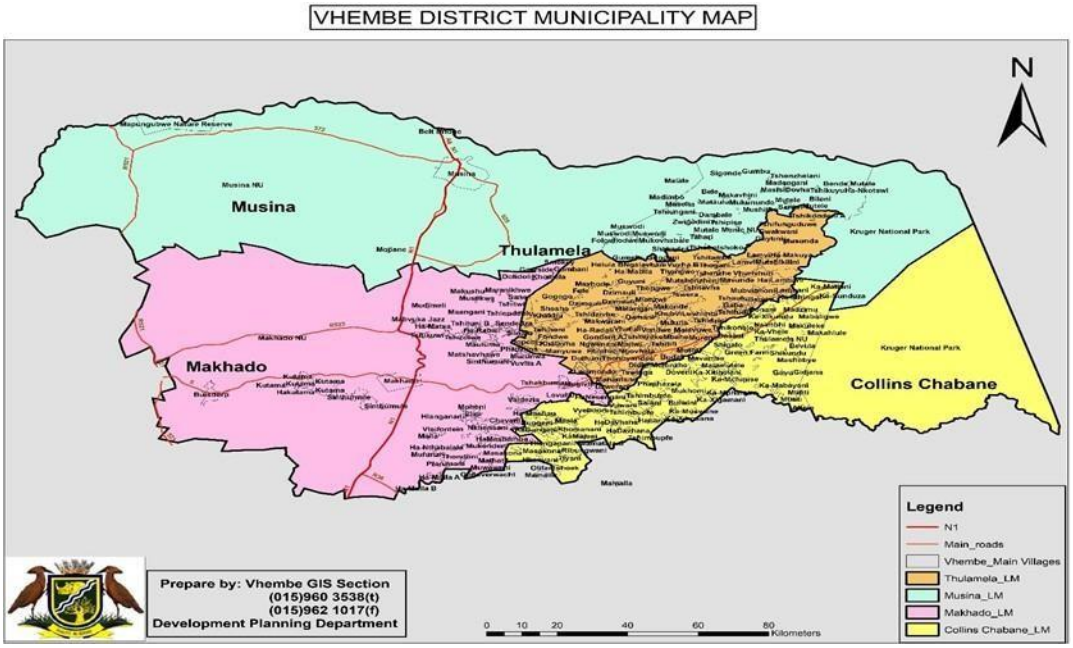
Below is the Vhembe District map with the four municipalities.



MDB 2011 Vhembe District Municipality

1.10 Population and Sampling

Population

A study's population is the aggregation of elements from which a sample is selected (Babbie and Mouton, 2016). For this study, the targeted population consisted of two setswhich were the caregivers and the prospective beneficiaries. The prospective beneficiaries interviewed were twelve youth participants from five ruralcommunities in Thulamela Municipality. The participants ranged from ages fifteen to eighteen where three females were eighteen years of age, three females seventeen years of age and two females were fifteen years of age on the other hand the male participants consistedof one eighteen-year-old male, two seventeen-year-old male and one sixteen year old male participant. The youth were accessed from different local villages in Thulamela Municipality, Vhembe District, with the assistance of Vha- Musanda and the civic members.

Upon realisation that a few of the participants were minors, the researcher included the caregivers as part of the population but also to enhance the validity and credibility of theresearch findings. The caregivers interviewed were four females and one male participant.

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Sampling

Sampling is a statistical method of acquiring representative data from a study population (Sukhutame, 2014). Neuman (2014) and De Vos et al, (2014) Explain thata sample is asmall group of cases chosen by the researcher from a large pool to be generalized to the population.

For this study, non-probability sampling techniques were used. Neuman (2011)mentionsthat non-probability sampling is used when the likelihood of including each element of the population as a sample is unknown. For this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling. In this type of sampling procedure, researchers dependprimarily onsources such as, their experience, resources, and findings of previous research, to identify their participants. The units to be observed were selected based on the researcher's judgment as Hattori and Lance, (2016) put it. These authors highlight that purposive sampling is used mainly by experts who rely solely on their judgment and expertise.

1.11 Data collection method

De Vos et al., (2011), note that data collection is an organized process of collecting information for specific phenomenon and finding answers to research problems. Scholars, such as Bryman and Neuman (2011) refer to data collection as a process of gathering and singling out relevant information on variables of interest established in a systematic manner that enables one to answer the research questions. Data was collected after the researcher was granted ethical clearance.

The researcher in this study utilized interviews to collect data. Whisker (2018) states thatinterviews are a specialized mode of communication between people for a specific purpose. Interviews assisted the researcher to obtain as much information from participants based on their feelings and experiences.

The type of Interview used was semi-structured and unstructured interviews, which wereconducted in English and Tshivenda. The unstructured interviews assisted the researcher to identify critical variables, formulate and probe essential questions, which allowed essential discussions of the phenomenon. Unstructured interviews do notnecessarily follow aninterview schedule as used in structured interviews and although

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Whisker (2018) argues that unstructured interviews are time-consuming by nature and can be disorderly, the researcher, nevertheless perceives its relevant for this type of study especially, when probing for more information.

All Covid-19 regulations were adhered to since there were face-to-face interviews withthe participants. The interview proceedings took place at the youths' respective homes. Ethical issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and employing the principlesof social work, such as allowing participants to purposefully express their feelings and the researcher individualizing the participants. These ethical principles were duly explainedto the children and their caregivers. The researcher requested permission from participants to use a tape recorder during interviews to ensure that all data is recorded; this ensured that no data was forgotten.

1.12 Data Analysis

Data analysis entails - organizing information into segments to establish meaning and trends; interpreting the data and relating the findings to real-life situations so as determine whether they refute or support interpretation (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Clarke and Braun (2013), state that this process aims to assemble or reconstruct the data in a comprehensive manner. When the data collection phase was completed, the researcher proceeded to analyse, interpret the gathered data as well as selecting relevant information in line with the research topic. The researcher selected data and analysed it as per the essential themes of the research as guided by Creswell (2017)in the following steps.

- ✓ **Planning for recording data**

The researcher recorded data in an organized way that is appropriate for the participantsand by seeking permission before collecting data. The researcher ensured that the techniques for recording, observations, interactions, and interviews were not excessivelyinterfered with during the ongoing flow of the proceedings (Creswell, 2017). The researcher used recordings and took notes during the interview proceedings; this was done with consent from the participants.

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✓ Data collection and preliminary analyses

De Vos, Strydom and Delport (2011) explain that data collection and analysis naturally go together to build a clear and consistent interpretation of data. Primary concepts andemerging ideas guided the researcher; however, the researcher modified them as the data collection progressed (De Vos et al, 2011).

✓ Managing (organizing) data

Researchers can shape their data into file folders, index cards, or computer files at anearly stage in the analysis process. Also, by organizing files, researchers adjust their files to appropriate text units such as a word, or a sentence for analysis, either by computer or otherwise (De Vos et al, 2011). Data was collected and assembled basedon emerging themes which were supported with rich information before data analysis.

✓ Reading and writing memos

Writing memos in the margins of field notes or under photographs helps organise thedatabase. These memos are usually short phrases, ideas, or critical concepts that randomly occur to the reader. After organizing and converting data, the researcher continued by analysing the data (De Vos et al, 2011). During the review process, the researcher created notes of keywords, themes, and sub-themes that served as guidesin the process.

✓ Generating categories, themes, and patterns

The process of category generation is based on noting irregularities in the setting or the people chosen for the study. As categories of meaning emerged, the researcher used the qualitative information to develop themes, and other dimensions of information. The process involved knowing and understanding the data, reducing it tosmall, manageable portions or sets of themes that enabled the researcher to write thefinal narratives (De Vos et al, 2011). The collected data was coded and identified as themes.

✓ Coding the data

Coding data is the formal representation of the narrative. The analytical work involved generating categories and themes. The researcher coded the data numerically in her

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notepad as per each participant; this enabled the analysis to be carried on without anytechnical glitches (Creswell, 2012). The researcher assembled similar themes together.

- ✓ **Testing emergent understandings**

The researcher began evaluating the credibility of her developing understandings andexploring them through the data (Creswell, 2012). The researcher evaluated the collected data through the interviews looking at each code, theme, and pattern.

- ✓ **Searching for alternative explanations**

As the researcher acquainted herself with the codes and patterns in the data, the researcher was now able to challenge the very patterns that seemed so apparent, critically. The researcher searched for other relevant, reasonable explanations for thedata and their links and started the introductory analysis (Creswell, 2012).

- ✓ **Writing the report**

This is the final phase where the researcher presented the collected data, packaging the narratives that were found in text or tabular forms (De Vos et al, 2011). The researcher presented the findings in the research report.

1.13 Measures to Ensure Trustworthiness

The researcher ensured trustworthiness by following the guidelines as laid down by & Cresswell (2017). These authors describe trustworthiness as how the inquirer can persuade readers that the findings from the study are worth paying attention to and thatthe research is of high quality. To do this the researcher paid attention to the following aspects:

Credibility

Norris and Moules (2017) avows that credibility is defined as the assurance that the researcher's conclusions are based on the data. This study's credibility was ensured through extensive engagement with all parties. The scheduled time for every session with the participants was not fixed, however, it was dependent on how participants
expressed themselves, as this is a qualitative study.

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Prolonged engagement

Moser and Korstjens (2017) indicate that prolonged engagement is the amount of timetheresearcher spent with the participants during the gathering of information and building trust. Prolonged engagement was possible because the researcher spent considerable time interacting with the participants, before, during and after the interviews.

Reflexivity

It is one of the strategies used by qualitative researchers to maintain rigor and qualityin their work. Reflexivity is also perceived as the 'gold standard' for determining trustworthiness (Teh & Lek, 2018). The researcher was part of the research proceedings as she fully engaged with the participants, providing support, and creatinga conducive atmosphere needed for the interview process to proceed, successfully.

Triangulation

This is a procedure in which a researcher employs a variety of data collection methods from various participants to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon(Flick, Moser and Korstjens, 2017). The researcher triangulated the responses from thecaregivers.

Peer debriefing

Janesick (2011) postulates that peer debriefing increases credibility. This is where the researcher and her peers work together to review the study holistically and for a critical scrutiny. Promoters, in the form of supervision and colleagues were involved to ensure validity and increased credibility.

Dependability

The degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings occurred as the researcher claimed was referred to as dependability (Creswell, 2017). The identified themes were discussed with participants to ensure that they accurately represented whattranspired throughout the process (Creswell, 2015).

Transferability

The researcher provided a thorough description of the study's context and methods, and the information about the study's topic was clearly outlined. As a result, readers will be able to apply the findings of this study to other contexts, as explained by Maree (2010)

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and further strengthened by (korstjens & Moser,2018).

Confirmability

This concept refers to the extent to which the research study's findings can be confirmedby other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with demonstrating that the data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but are clearlyderived from the data gathered. (Korstjens & Albine Moser,2018). Member and data checking was clearly done and continuous discussions and feedback with the participants were done.

1.14 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is the cornerstone for conducting effective, moral and meaningful research. Neuman (2014) lists measures ensuring ethical research as - informed consent, privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. According to Best and Kahn (2006) and Strydom (2011) and Maruli (2020), ethical behaviour of both the researcher and the respondents is underunprecedented scrutiny. The researcher adhered to the following ethical principles throughout the research process:

Informed consent

As Maruli (2020) postulates, it refers to comprehensively informing the respondents about the study. Informed consent means obtaining consent from respondents after providing them with sufficient information about the study and assuring them of their rights in the process (De Vos, 2011) and since the study involved youth, consent from their foster parents /guardians was sought by the researcher, before the commencementof the data collection.

Voluntary participation

The researcher made sure that participants understood that their participation in the study was subject to their consent. Participants were well informed about their participation being voluntary, furthermore, they can withdraw anytime they so wish, andthat no payment as a form of gratitude, will be made (Cresswell, 2017).

Confidentiality

Maruli (2020) refers to confidentiality as respect for the rights and interests of the participants, so that any information about the study and the respondents' responses,

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which are shared inconfidence, with the researcher is preserved (Strijdom, 2011). The researcher ensured that all data collected from the participants would remain confidential.

Privacy

De Vos (2011) & Maruli (2020) note that every individual has the right to privacy. Participants have the right to choose when, where, to whom, and to what extent their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour will be revealed. The researcher used pseudo-names to protect the participants' identity.

Anonymity

De Vos (2011) & Cresswell (2017) note, anonymity' as ensuring that participants remainunknown unless they give permission to the contrary. The participants' personal information andresponses to the questions are presented in such a manner that they cannot be tracedto them or divulged to anyone. The researcher ensured that participants' identities remained unknown throughout the process and in the final report.

1.15 Chapter Layout

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background of the Study

This chapter introduced the study by discussing the research problem, operational definition of key concepts, theoretical framework, and the rationale of the study. The aimand objectives of the study have been outlined as well as the research methodology, sampling, and data collection. The chapter concluded with measures to ensure trustworthiness and the ethical considerations observed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is centered on the core themes that underpin the research. Chapter Two provides a detailed literature review focusing on the history and background informationof foster care in South Africa, its legislative framework, contributory factorsleading to thebacklog, theoretical framework, effects of the foster-care applications' backlog. The consequences of the backlog on prospective beneficiaries, social work profession as wellthe state of the Vhembe DSD regarding the foster-care backlog areelaborated upon.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The research methodology is the lens through which the study must be seen,therefore, this chapter elaborates on the operational framework which guides the research project.

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The research approach, the population that was considered and sampling techniques that were used are clearly discussed. Included in the discussionswere the data collectionand analysis methods as well as the ethical issues explaininghow participants in the studywere handled in accordance with research principles.

Chapter 4: Data Interpretation, Presentation and Analysis

This chapter is on the presentation of results obtained through in-depth qualitative interviews with prospective beneficiaries. A detailed analysis and interpretation of the data are presented supported by verbatim quotations.

Chapter 5: Summary of Major Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

This lastchapter presents a summary of the major findings, conclusions, recommendations and implications of the findings for various stakeholders.

1.16 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the study entitled - *The Effects of the Foster- Care Backlog on Prospective Beneficiaries*. The Chapter has presentedthe introduction and background of the study, problem statement, theoretical framework, its aim, and objectives. In addition - the rationale for conducting the study, operational research concepts underpinning the study, the limitations, and the structure of the whole study – were detailed. The chapter after this, focuses on the literature review.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter delivers a detailed literature review, focusing on - the history and background information of foster care in South Africa, legislative framework, contributoryfactors leadingto the backlog, theoretical framework, effects of the foster-care backlog, consequences of the situation as well the state of the Department of Social Developmentregarding foster-care applications' backlog. The review focused on sources to ensure the study's objectives are met, interacting with appropriate literature to contextualize foster care and its effect on potential beneficiaries. This study adopted the systems theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs to fullyexplore and contextualize the effects of backlogs on the overall well-being of affected children.

2.2 History of Foster Care in South Africa

The historical nature of foster care within South Africa speaks highly of foster-care services. However, we must discuss them in collaboration with providing the historical context. South Africa has changed from apartheid, a colonial regime, to democracy. Thisnotion is supported by Ngwabi, 2014, where the author states that South African Fostercan be traced back to a colonial regime in 1856, when the Servant and Master Act cameinto force. Within a few years, legislation was changed to prioritize child protection. Themost remarkable noticeable aspect has been the move from a racially based Apartheid system before 1994 to a system of democracy post-1994. The White Social Welfare White paper (1997) delineated the South African historical policy framework, which differs from other countries based on a race-based colonial apartheid system on social needs. The South African former policy was overpowered by the migrant employment systems, the nature of the distinguished family-care method, and how these services were delivered to families.

The Children's Protection Act of 1913 repealed the Masters and Servant Act, which wassubstituted by the Children's Act (CA) of 1960, followed:

The Child Care Act 74 of 1983, and recently the Children's Act 38 of 2005, which is reviewed continuously. Even though the South African social welfare system was

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based on Colonialism,Apartheid and Discrimination, the new democratic government executed the rights-based developmental social welfare approach after 1994 (Patel, 2015; As Lombard & Kleijn,2006).

This new tactic needed a move from a residual and institutional treatment approach centred on legislation, such as the Children's Act 74 of 1983, to a developmental approach based on legislation, such as the Children's Act 38 of 2005. Foster care occurredon an ethnic basis duringthe apartheid times. However, new non-discriminatory legislationwas developed in democraticSouth Africa; unfortunately, the growing HIV/Aids pandemichas added another dimension, urging the state and society to explore various forms. Foster care and other alternative forms of care have become more popular policy options. Despite the emphasis on a developmental approach that focuses on early detection, prevention, and remediation, unsatisfactory statutoryinterventions in family lifethat negatively affect the lives of vulnerable children continue to exist.

Kadungure's (2014) study argues that communities in South Africa bear the heavy burden of many children needing foster care due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Consequently, the burden of orphans and vulnerable children in the state has grown asthese children depend on foster care to restore balance and stability (Bezuidenhout, 2008). Kadungure (2014) postulates an overwhelming number of abused and neglectedchildren based on their parents' inability and powerlessness to maintain them, a phenomenon strongly prompted by the persistent grinding poverty in several communities. The number of children in foster care grew from 454 199 in 2008 to 512 055 in 2014 due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Bezuidenhout, 2008).

Foster-care placements have increased exponentially in post-apartheid South Africa (SA) due to the prevalence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Because of the rising number ofHIV/AIDS infections, the number of orphans and vulnerable children is growing. They relyon kinship andnon-kinship foster care as part of alternative care arrangements to restorestability (Bezuidenhout, 2008). The Department of Social Development (DSD) took a proactive stance, advocating foster care to accommodate the growing number of HIV/AIDS orphans. Poverty, unemployment, and family breakdowns all put a strain on the new democratic government's resources, and these same factors created a high demand for foster-care services provided by trained social workers.

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The poorest in South Africa are overwhelmingly 'black,' according to demographic data (Post Apartheid). They are also the most affected by the rising number of new infections,resulting in the politicization of the foster-care issue. The need for increased access to foster care has significant implications for the new developmental approach to integratedsocial-servicedelivery (Foster Care System, 2009).

Section 27 of the Constitution states that everyone has the right to social security basedon theirincapability to cater for themselves and their significant others. Fortune (2016) elucidates thatSouth Africa has a large-scale social assistance system that is mainly based on payments that are made monthly. These monthly payable cash grants are directly linked to childcare,particularly the child support grant (CSG) and foster care grant(FCG). Subject to a means test,the child support grant is paid to any caregiver caring fora child, including a biological parentor other relatives. The foster-care grant is paid to a foster parent and thus not subject to a meanstest. It has been placed on record that in 2013, over 11 million children were registered for child-support grants and over half a million children were registered for foster care. This is evident in the annual report by the department of social development (DSD Annual report, 2020).

Children who qualify for a grant but do not receive what is due to them become very disadvantaged and, therefore, susceptible to abuse. Reasons have been advanced reasons why these vulnerable children are not benefitting from the social security systemat all by researchers like Mokgalapa (2020) and Ngwenya and Botha (2012) research. As Mokgalapa (2020) puts it, children in South Africa form 44.2% of the population, andthe extent of child poverty has been labelled as ‘distressing’. Research conducted by Fortune (2016) states that children are seen to be the most vulnerable group, and they make up half of the population. Therefore, implementing children’s rights laws is critical to the State’s growth. The most convenient way in which child poverty can be addressedis through the provision of social security to the people. A child in need of care and protection is also classified as a ‘poor child’in terms of the Children’s Act no. 38 of 2005this is any child below the age of 18 who lacks access to what is crucial to fulfilling his/her basic human needs.

The researcher supports the above assertion by Mokgalapa (2020) but also argues that childrenwhose applications are pending or have not been worked upon are in a similar

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situation as these delays have severe life-threatening impacts on their lives. These children clearly will not have a suitable place called home as they have yet to be placed,so they are not benefiting from the grant. When these children have no access to the grant through their caregivers, they become impoverished, and social ills are exacerbatedand investing in their education becomes a dream. Children are the most vulnerable population in South Africa (SA). The ability of the state to provide care and security to itschildren is critical to a society's overall success. If children arenot included in a country'sultimate realization of providing for their basic needs, then all otherneeds will gradually not be met. As a result, foster care is viewed as an essential tool in South Africa for preventing challenges faced by children needing care and protection.

Foster care has been widely described as a substitute for family care for children who cannot be adequately cared for in their birth families. The concept of the child needing care and protection captures children's suitability for placement in substitute care; thus, for a child to beplaced in the foster care system, the child must be considered in need ofcare and protection, as provided in Section 150 (1) of the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005.(RSA, 2005). Furthermore, the aim of foster care placement is to care and protect children by providing a healthy a safe and healthy environment with optimal support (Gill,2006 and Nicker, 2021)

Section 180 of the South African Children's Act 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2005) states that a child may be placed in foster care with:

> *(a) a person who is not a family member of the child, (b) with a family member who is not the parent or guardian of the child; or (c) in a registered cluster foster care scheme.*
> This study, therefore focuses only on the effects of the backlog on prospective beneficiaries to be placed in kinship foster care.

2.3 Type of Foster care practised in South Africa

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (The United Nations, 1989) and the 1999 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (ACRWC) (Organization of African Unity, 1990) advocate for children to be placed in alternative care with their relative families as priority, with the aim to reduce the disturbances in the children’s education, social and cultural life (The United Nations, 1989; Organization of African Unity, 1990). Agreements of the above organizations and conventions provide direction

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with which children who are without parents are to be cared for in alternative care placements, with kinship care as a priority and popularly practiced in South Africa. The United Nations adopted guidelines for the alternative care of children in the year 2009, which intended to reinforce the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (The United Nations, 1989) and as such, South Africa has aligned its legislation concerning children with the international treaties, endorsing their commitment to protecting children in alternative care as described in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa, 2010). According to the Children's Act, children who are placedin foster care are those who were found by the Children's Court to be in need of care and protection in terms of section 150 of the Act (South Africa, 2010). As such, placing a child in alternative care placement such as kinship foster care is associated with a childin need of care and protection in terms of section 156 (1) with an appropriate foster parent who is found suitable in terms of section 156 of the same Act, placement is therefore issued by the Children's Court (South Africa, 2010).

2.4 Grandparents of teenagers in kinship foster care

In a study conducted by Kgomo (2009), grandparents and aunts are the most preferredkinship caregivers in South Africa. Grandparents seem to be the preferred caregivers when choosing who to care for orphaned grandchildren, because they have a sense of feeling and obligation to care for their youth offspring (Helton, Boutwell & DiBernardo, 2017). Font (2015) postulates that"Grandparents often yearn to uphold the child's stability and there is often a pre-existing bond between the child and the grandparent(s);they share history, culture and tradition ". However, the challenges of fostering a youth are amongst others a lack of parenting skills in raising millennials, lack of social support,and limited resources such as accommodation and finance (Maundeni & Malinga- Musamba, 2013; Ge & Adesman, 2017). In South Africa in particular, kinship care is associated with challenges relating to inadequate housing, economic hardship, difficultyin dealing with loss, illiteracy, fear of the unknown, and stigmatisation (Perumal, 2011& Mosimege, 2017).

2.5 The State of Foster Care in The Department of Social Development, South Africa.

Foster Care service is executed by social workers within the DSD to ensure necessary care aswell as to protect the children it serves. This protection and care are offered on

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a greater scaleand deal with the children's needs for social security. The provision of FCG, which caters tochildren's socio-economic needs, enables foster care to achieve itspurpose.

In studies conducted by Mokgalapa (2020) and Ngwenya (2012), the findings showed that theDSD needs to provide more social workers. Issue no: 8 of the DSD Report (2015)revealed thatapart from the four-year Social Work Degree, students can study for two years, and after that,they may enter the work field as social-auxiliary workers employedby the DSD. The scope ofwork they do is enormous. However, they are limited in their skills and ability to conduct fieldwork investigations for the children's court, although these workers do not render the services required to go to court.

The government mistakenly believes that the foster-care applications backlog is an administrative task. When social workers cannot offer services to children needing careand protection, this means poor service delivery, which means that the state interventionis not working in the child's best interest. Ngwenya and Botha (2012) confirm the above intheir studytitled - *A threat to the retention of social workers*. A high staff turnover leads toorganizational, health and personal challenges; similarly, lack of support from management, unequal distribution of work, lack of resources and inconsistency of commissioners in the courts all hurt quality services. All of these have the likelihood of increasing the backlog.

This research has mirrored the provisions contained in the Children's Act no.38 of 2005and the Constitution of South Africa, which reflects the importance of South Africa gradually progressing towards a system that promotes a child-first approach. For the Republic of South Africa to successfully implement this approach, it must remain clear that the principle of 'bestinterests of the child' must be the critical principle; this should apply to placing children into the foster-care system. If any new policies or amendmentsare made to the CA, they should be done in alignment with this principle.

The Social Work profession undertakes a vital role in dealing with the needs of vulnerablechildren (Department of Social Development, 2009). The Department of Social Development is the primary employer of social workers in South Africa; they areemployed to carry out the mandates of the DSD. Policies and programmes are

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implemented by social workers directed to alleviating social problems, such as working with foster-care applicants. Social workers are confronted with an increasing demand forsocial welfare services, such as foster-care grants, and sometimes, it is challenging for them to cope with all these demands.

Mokgalapa (2020), in line with Khoza (2011), asserts that many children need visible means of support in South Africa. The foster-care system is overburdened due to increased demand for its services. The shortage of social workers, mainly those currentlyemployed by the DSD,can only be kept in the profession for a short period. (Ngwenya, 2011; Ngwenya and Botha, 2012 and Mokgalapa, 2020). They move to other related professions with better salaries, whileother social workers migrate to other countries forbetter salaries (Department of Social Development, 2009). Social workers in South Africaresign from the profession or seek substitute employment in first-world countries as theyare provided with more support,supervision and lesser workloads, leaving them with feelings of satisfaction rather thanoverburdened (Ngwenya, 2011).

Ngwenya and Botha (2012) argued that social workers need help with the foster care system, which is challenging to manage due to the high demand for this service. Many of these social workers need more training to perform the duties that come with statutory specialization, contributing to the backlog. The Department of Social Development has dealt with a backlog of foster-care applications since 2010. Consequently, applications for placement and grants are piling up, causing unmanageable caseloads. Similarly, Ngwenya (2011) and Manukuza (2013)contend that foster-care cases take longer to process and finalize in children's courts, resulting in massive caseloads for social workers due to the high demand for services. It is also difficultfor them to give each case the individual attention and time it deserves.

The DSD turnaround strategy to address the backlog in 2019 discovered that apart fromthe backlog of new applications for placements and grants, 49 534 foster-care orders had to be extended to December 2017, and another devastating 30 232 cases would lapse between January and March 2018. According to the South African Social SecurityAgency (2018), therewere 345 560 foster-care beneficiaries as of December 2018. Thenumerical findings of the foster-care grant stood at an alarming rate of 386 021 as of March 2019. The information presented above reflects the extent to which foster care

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services are desperately needed in SouthAfrica for those in need .

2.6 Legislative Framework on the State of Foster Care in South Africa

The above discussions outlined the historical context and background of foster care. Now we will give a brief overview of selected legislation that deals with the child's rightsin foster carein South Africa. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, The WhitePaper on SocialWelfare, 1997 (that led to the White Paper on Families) and the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, herein referred to as UNCRC, are all fundamentally linked to child protection issues in SA and globally; they will form the backdrop to the study.

2.7 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 (SA, 1996) speaks vastly onsafeguarding children's rights in terms of Section 28 (2), which declares the child's best interests as principal law. As noted by the Department of Social Development (2011), the Constitution of South Africa utilizes a human rights-based approach to builddiverse dimensions for people to claim and exercise their rights and for service providersto meet theirobligations to respect, protect and fulfil those rights.as a result,

> *"the Constitution establishes minimum social and economic rights standards, such as social security, social assistance, and social services. Section 28 (1) states that every child has the right (a) to a name and nationality from birth; (b) to family or parental care and appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment; and (c) to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health-care services, and social services when removed from the family environment".*

As amended, every child who requires care and protection under Section 150 (1) of theChildren's Act No 38 of 2005 has the right to be placed in foster care with a suitable foster parent whom a designated social worker has recommended.

The Constitution of SA has also made it a priority that the country's citizens are well versed with the Bill of Human Rights. Adjustments to the Children's Act that governs childprotectionand foster care have been made. Hence, the foster care grant policy was alsomodified to ensurethat foster children receive substitute care and protection in terms of the Children's Act no. 38of 2005 (see also new regulations, section 71(6) of 2010) .

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Considering the Child Support Grant,a primary concern is that some families view the foster-care grant as a way to alleviate povertyin their households. The researcher arguesthat the child support grant should not be seen as a means to the end. It must work for the child's best interest and not be utilized to lessen the financial burden and strain on their respectful households. In this regard, foster care grant is not an exception.

> *"The Bill of Rights in the Constitution supports human rights for adults and children. Section28 1(d) states that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuseor degradation".*

Previous research from scholars such as Mokgalapa (2020) and Fortune (2016) indicates that the faltering of foster care orders by virtue of social workers not being ableto carry out their mandate results in the delayed placement of children in need of care and protection which, therefore, translates into dishonouring the best interests of the children. The researcher supportsthe above point in that malpractice affects the well- being of the children and their caregivers, who may also have parental rights and responsibilities in connection with their biological children.

Chapter Two of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) converses on the Bill of Rights, whichis viewed as the foundation of democracy in South Africa and preserves the rightsof all peoplein the country with particular reference to section 28 of the Constitution whichlists the rights of children (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). The rightsof children in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa that directly apply to thosein foster care are Section 28 sub-sections (1), (2) and (3):

> *"the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment; the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic healthcare services andsocial services; the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation; the right to a legal practitioner assigned by and at the state's expense and the child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child".*

South Africa signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)and has committed to realizing children's rights; as a result, it must ensure their safety

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(Department of Social Development, 2005). The UNCRC is one of the international treaties that ensures allchildren's social, economic, health, and civil rights (Van Dyk, 2012; UNAIDS, 2001). Since many countries sign the UNCRC, they must follow the convention's standards and principles. South Africa is committed to adhering to the Convention's guiding principles, which include, among other things, that all children havethe right to life and that the principle of 'best interests'should be applied in all policies anddecisions affecting children.

The researcher believes that while social workers place foster children with foster parents, in line with Ngwabi (2014), social workers can consider the child's best interestsby allowing thechild to exercise his/her right to freedom of speech. Children should be allowed to say whom they want to stay with, and the researcher avows this, as it is alsomaintained in Ngwabi (2014)and Fortune (2016).

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children was enacted in November 1999 toensure that the principles outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rightsof the Child are followed (OAU, 1999). In addition to the above-mentioned guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rightsand Welfare of the Child envisaged the child living in a space compatible with his/her social, educational, and health needs and being nurtured in a warm, loving, and happy environment . Social workers should ensure that children are placed with an appropriatefoster parent, and the 'best interests principle should always be followed (Fortune, 2016).The researcher is of the view that all children have the right to "*survival, protection, development, and participation*" in all decisions that affect them, as stated in the Children's Act and further explained by Fortune (2016); and Van Dyk, (2012).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the systems theory adopted for this study recognizetheimportance of a family environment in the healthy upbringing of a child. Foster care is and always will be the best and most feasible form of protection for children when thefamily of origin fails to care for them as it should.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child speaks directly to children's rights, such as "the right to enjoy the freedom of expression, thought, religion and

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association". The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 follows Milner's (2005) viewpoint that if achild can form his orher own opinions, taking into account the child's age and maturity, the child should be allowed to be heard in any judicial or administrative proceedings affecting him or her. According to Section 61 of the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005, the presiding officer in a children's court mustallow the child to participate in the proceedingsdepending on the child's age, maturity, and stage of development; however, the child's best interests must be the primary consideration. All countries that signed the Conventioncommitted to putting in place safeguards to ensure that the child is protected and that the child's best interests are prioritized.

The United Nations has declared that the child has the right to special care and assistance. Thefamily is viewed as the leading group of society and the environment forthe growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children. Children and their families should be protected and helped so that they can fully assume their responsibilities in the community. As Fortune (2016) puts it –

> "*The United Nations recognize that for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, the child should grow up in a stable and happy family environment".*

The researcher agrees with Fortune (2016) in her stress on the best interest of the child'sprincipal. Children are regarded as one of the vulnerable groups in South Africa; as such, they need to be protected at all costs from all kinds of harm. As was discussed, when children's most immediate needs are not met, they become susceptible to malnutrition and possible discrimination from the broader society . Children need to feelthat they belong to a specified institution, and in that institution, they are well cared for; this encourages a more developed sense of self. Regarding the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005, a child protection system must be applied to safeguard children in need of care,and these must subscribe to the different types ofprotection procedures outlined by the UNCRC . The Act is regarded as an all-inclusive portionof legislation which carries a mandate which purposefully allows children to enjoy the benefits of appropriate care, protection, and assistance to ensure that they can develop to their full potential and reachself-actualization (Fortune, 2016 and Department of Social Development, 2010).

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The declaration of the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 benefits all children, meaning that each child must be treated equally without looking at their – background, the colour of their skin, or religion, among others - therefore, there is an urgent need for equal distribution of social services, such as foster-care services.

The Children's Act no. 38 of 2005 slightly differs from the previous Child Care Act no. 74 of1983, as it satisfactorily addresses all challenges the country encounters regardingchildren being involved. All these legislations are aligned with social welfare developmental principlesas envisioned in the White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997 . Themain strength of the Children'sAct no. 38 of 2005 is its firm commitment to preventing theill-treatment of children and early intervention services with particular reference to children needing care and protection. Programmes and structures of the Children Act no. 38 of 2005 are specifically anticipated to curb children's abuse, neglect and maltreatment. However, this was not included in the old Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

Fortune (2016) argue that prevention and early interventionservices are cost-effective because they reduce demand for more expensive services like state alternative care in children's homes. Such services are also valuable regarding human capital because theyensure children reach their full potential. Dawes (2009) mentioned that the realization of one of the essential services stipulated in the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005 wasservicesdirected to families deemed to be vulnerable and the children of such families.

The previous Act focused on statutory care and not on early intervention. Fortune (2016)assertsthat the goal of the new legislation is to shift emphasis to early intervention whilemodifying and strengthening statutory processes. The researcher shares the sentimentsof Fortune (2016)as, in line with this study, early intervention by social workers is crucialto curb social ills before they fully penetrate and take over the lives of children. As mentioned in the Bill of rights, children's rights need to be recognized and, as such, givenpriority, as children are saidto be one of the most vulnerable groups in South Africa.

Since the passage of the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005, challenges have arisen; the shift to a court-based system for determining possible placement and grants has resultedin an over- reliance on the foster-care system to provide adequate income support to families caring for orphaned and abandoned children. (Sibanda, 2013 and Fortune, 2016).

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All these challenges stem from weaknesses in the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005, particularly the pre-statutory, statutory,and post-statutory processes .

2.8 The White Paper on Families

One of the most recent policy documents based on the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997)is the White Paper on Families (2013). The latter was the first post-apartheid welfare policy reaffirming South Africa's commitment to essential welfare services and human rights. It focused on the family and its life cycle, including children, youth, and theelderly. The White Paper on Families (2013) intervention strategies were based on values such as promoting healthy family life, strengthening, and preservation, with a strong emphasis on preventing childabuse, neglect, and exploitation. The new policy strategies are based on assisting children in socioeconomic distress by strengthening foster care mechanisms to ensure rapid placement. These mechanisms also promote and provide support services to families.

Perumal and Kasiram (2008) argue that children are the "experts in their own lives", oftenbringing valuable ideas, information and viewpoints to light that adults may have overlooked. It is of the utmost importance to listen to the voices of these children, especially foster children,in this regard because the decisions taken directly affect their lives; they need to be part of thedecisions that are taken about them, and for them, hence, they must be given the platform to exercise their right to freedom of speech.

The White Paper on Families considers the shift to a developmental social-services approach,which includes the most recent fostering legislation, Children's Act No. 38 of 2005. Since the White Paper on Families (1997) has promoted service outreach to families, vulnerable young children require protection from family-care services. One suitable option seems to be within the foster-care system, thus placing children with appropriate families (white paper on families, 2013). The goal of the final version of the White Paper on Families (2013), based on the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), isto improve the socializing, caring, nurturing, and supporting competencies of families sothat their members can contribute efficiently to the overall expansion of the country. Empower families and their members can be done by enabling themto identify, negotiate,and maximize economic, labour market, and other prospects available inthe country, aswell as to expand the proficiencies of families and their members in establishingsocial

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interactions which provide a solid contribution towards a sense of community, social cohesion, and national solidarity.

The White Paper on Families (2013) considers that vulnerable groups, such as childrenneeding care and protection, include those in foster care (White Paper on Families, 2013). the White Paper on Families is eager to prevent vulnerable children from falling through the safety net for families. In promoting the inclusive social development policy approach, the White Paper on Social Welfare (1997) and the White Paper on Families (2013) generally advocate the much-explained Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM)by placing a strong emphasis on prevention, early intervention, statutory intervention, and reunification services. By encouraging family-centred kin fostering, the White Paperon Families promotes psychosocialsupport and other related services by professionally trained staff (social workers, auxiliary social workers, psychologists and others) to improve family capacity and community-based efforts to strengthen family support. Thisis in the form of expanding foster-care mechanisms and support to ensure rapid family placement of all children and to put preventive initiatives inplace with risks (White Paperon Families, 2013).

The researcher asserts that social workers need to understand the pivotal role of acceptance, nurturance, care and provision of support services to the foster child and foster parents as theseaspects may assist the child in transitioning out of foster care to become a self-reliant, autonomous, valuable citizen in their country of origin. The white paper on families 2013denotes that challenging situations arise within the foster-care placements and agencies rendering these services. They should have the resources andthe capacity to deal with these situations. It is most likely that foster parents would needto be adequately trained to understand and help or support the foster child in these situations.

2.9 A Child in Need of Care and Protection

It is necessary to explain the dictates of the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005 so that the researchercan situate the study. The foster-care service is directed and guided by the Children's Act no.38of 2005 and is delivered by a designated social worker. A child is said to need care and protection under the following circumstances:

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"▪ When the child has been abandoned and is without any visible means of support;

▪ When the child is addicted to a dependence-producing substance and is without any means of support to receive treatment for such dependency;

▪ Has been exploited or lives in circumstances that expose the child to exploitation;

▪ When the child lives in exposed circumstances which may significantly harm that child's physical, mental or social well-being;

▪ When the child is in a state of physical or mental neglect, and

▪ When there is reason to believe that the child is being maltreated, abused, deliberately neglected or degraded by a parent, caregiver or person with parental responsibilities and rights".

Based on these explanations, a child is placed in a safe environment for his/her protection andsocial well-being. Children need to be cared for beyond reasonable doubt,and following these explanations, it is critical to love and nurture these children. Section180-190 of the Children'sAct no.38 of 2005 provides the guiding principles for the deliveryof foster-care services.

Foster parents are expected to adjust to the new placement and foster a working relationship with the child. Therefore, education and training for foster parents are essential for them to provide quality care. Research conducted by Mokgalapa and Rapholo (2021) indicates that there is room for growth and development in the efforts of social workers to assist foster parents in accommodating and meeting the psychosocial needs of these children in need of care and protection who are placed with them. It is believed that these children can achieve this by having a sense of belonging. These youths need foster parents who will secure their future and accept them as they are.

Research as per Maslows hierarchy of needs has mainly focused on a single category of needs, such as belonging. Maslow's hierarchy of needs highlights the four psychosocialneeds which do not function in isolation. Engaging the youth in these needs is vital because they arebetter positioned to give directives regarding their most urgent needs (Mason, 2008; McGregor,2009). Section 181 of the Children's Act no.38 of 2005 states that foster care aims to protect and nurture children with positive support and provide a

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safe and healthy environment.

Research conducted in KwaZulu-Natal (2004) on social security for children led to theconclusion that most orphaned children are in foster care with their extended family members(Meintjes, Budlender, Giese and Johnson, 2004). Decisions to place children inalternative careare taken based on the concept of a vulnerable child being “in need of care and protection”. Children who do not have biological parents are inevitably considered to need care and protection in terms of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983. As such, they were found to be eligible for foster-care placement and grants. Mokgosi (1997)mentioned that in the past years, familieshave been applying for foster grants because their financial status does not allow them to takeon the full responsibility of an additional child. The author adds that before foster grants wereintroduced, families were expectedto care for one another at no cost to the state, but that has since changed. Research hasproven that following the correct protocols in getting placement for a child was less important than getting the foster grant to care for the child financially and support their poor households (Meintjes et al, 2004).

Foster parents must be guided through fostering a child as related or unrelated to fosterkinship. As the Act puts it, the main objective of foster care is to protect and love vulnerable children because it is their legal right to be loved and nurtured. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs highlightshaving a sense of belonging as one of the needs. In the context of this study, the Children’s Actno.38 of 2005 notes that every child has the rightto basic needs - shelter, food, clothing, a nameand others - which is further emphasizedby the systems theory. It is implied that when a childdoes not have all the necessities and stable access to a place called “home”, they do not care much about belonging andself-esteem. However, in this study, children are seen as needing to be loved and nurtured. Therefore, these children need to have a home. Children need to form part of an institution where they can belong and actualize themselves. When children feel that they are accepted and that they belong, they tend to hold themselves with great regard.They become independent beings outside the scope of being a child needing care and protection and have clear goals and achievements. In Maslow’s hierarchy and the systems theory, we see that people, not only children, act based not only on their needsbutalso on the context of their environment. When human needs are not maintained, thewell-beingof people is threatened, and as such, it becomes challenging for these people

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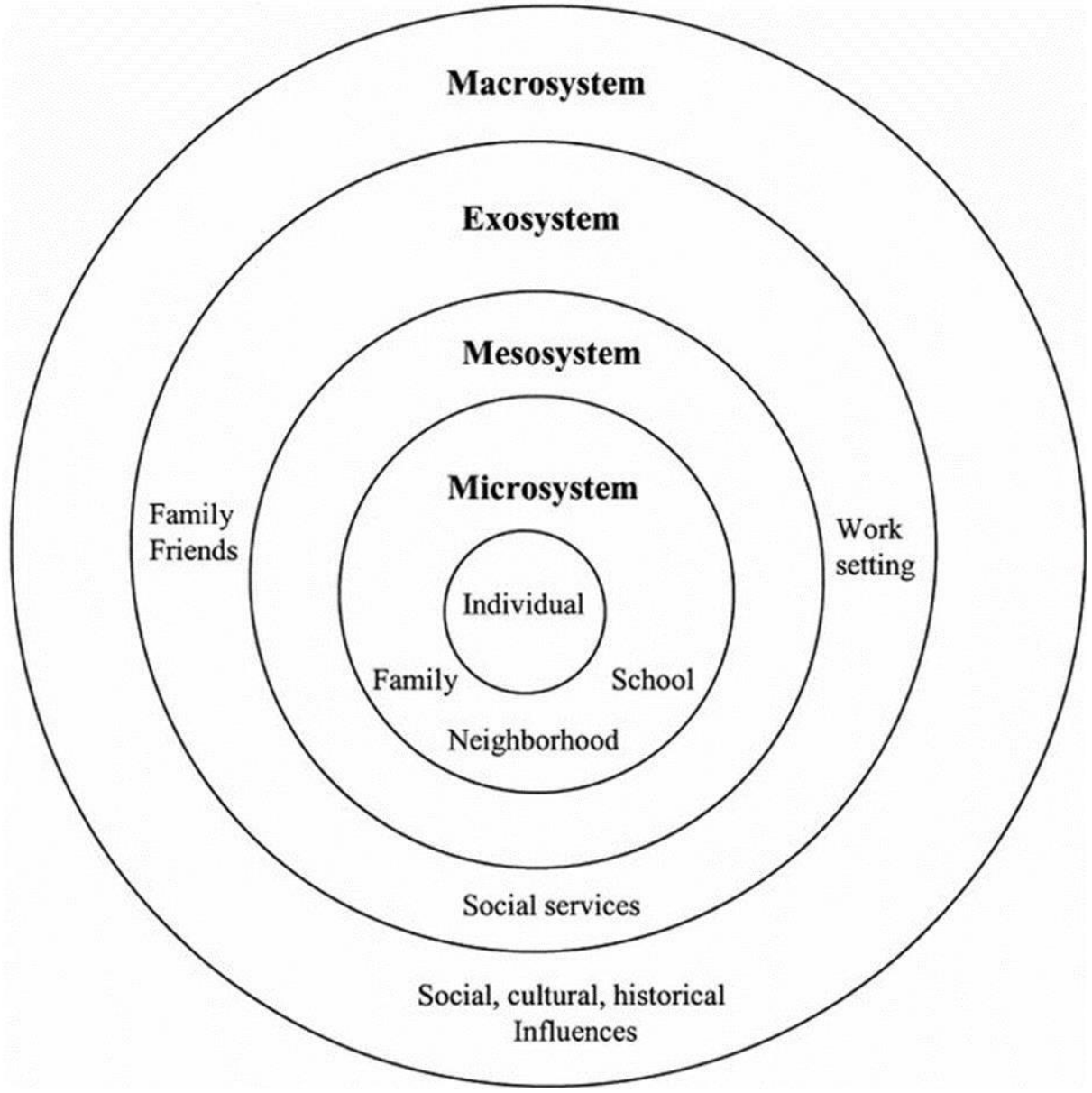
to function in totality. In this context, when children's needs are unmet, they aresusceptible to becoming troubled children in their homes, schools, and the community. They are most likely to be teenage delinquents, which disturbs the system's functioning.

Below is a diagram that explainsthe systems theory, focusing on all the systems that make up the social make-up of a child, as well as the flow of energies in and out of the system.



Picture adopted from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1993).

The above discussions find support in a report from the Vera Institute of Justice (2002) where it was mentioned that children who have had a history that includes abuse oftenactout aggressively or impulsively. Those who have been neglected find it difficult to cope

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physically and academically and are at risk of becoming juvenile delinquents. Researchconducted by the Vera Institute of Justice (2002) shows that children who have experienced abuse or neglect are more likely to fail in school and to be involvedin the juvenile justice system, however, when neglected or abused children succeed in school,they are less likely to become involved in deviant behaviour. In other words, success canbe seen as a great motivator for placed children in school setting, as it can help these children overcome even very disadvantaged beginnings.

There are many aspects of foster-care placement that can affect educational outcomes.Foster-care placement itself can have a traumatic effect on children, causing them to feela sense of loss, fear, abandonment, isolation, helplessness, andconfusion. Furthermore,the Vera institute of care (2002) outlines, all these effects give the feeling of great loss because it is evident from theabove argument that the children are not protected from any harm and are not cared for in the best way they should, a clear indication that the principle of "the best interestof the child", has been applied.

As discussed by Matinka (2018) the Canadian model specifies that the primary aim of foster care is to nurture the child and to provide opportunities and support to the foster child to grow and develop. This model is in line with this study that seeks to explore the effects of foster-care backlog and the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005 that emphasises safeguarding children. The researcher is of the opinion that some children would not necessarily be well taken care of, if they are not placed with the appropriateapplicants who will then assume the role of being their foster parents. in addition, theresearcher believes that if these children are given a fair chance to be part of the placement proceedings their needs are most likely to be met, as stipulated in the Act.With the appropriate guardian assigned to a child, nurturing, supporting and caring forthis child, financially, academically, socially and otherwise will not be a serious challenge and as such the principle of "the best interest of the child" will be met.

The diagram about depicts Maslow's hierarch of needs. Maslow (1943) in his writings believes that if children are not well taken care of an having their needs not met as illustrated in the hierarchical form above, thus, when a child's *"basic needs of thirst, warmth, food, security"* and others are not satisfied, it most likely that he/she will not passthe other stages successfully, hence, will not reach the self-actualisation stage.

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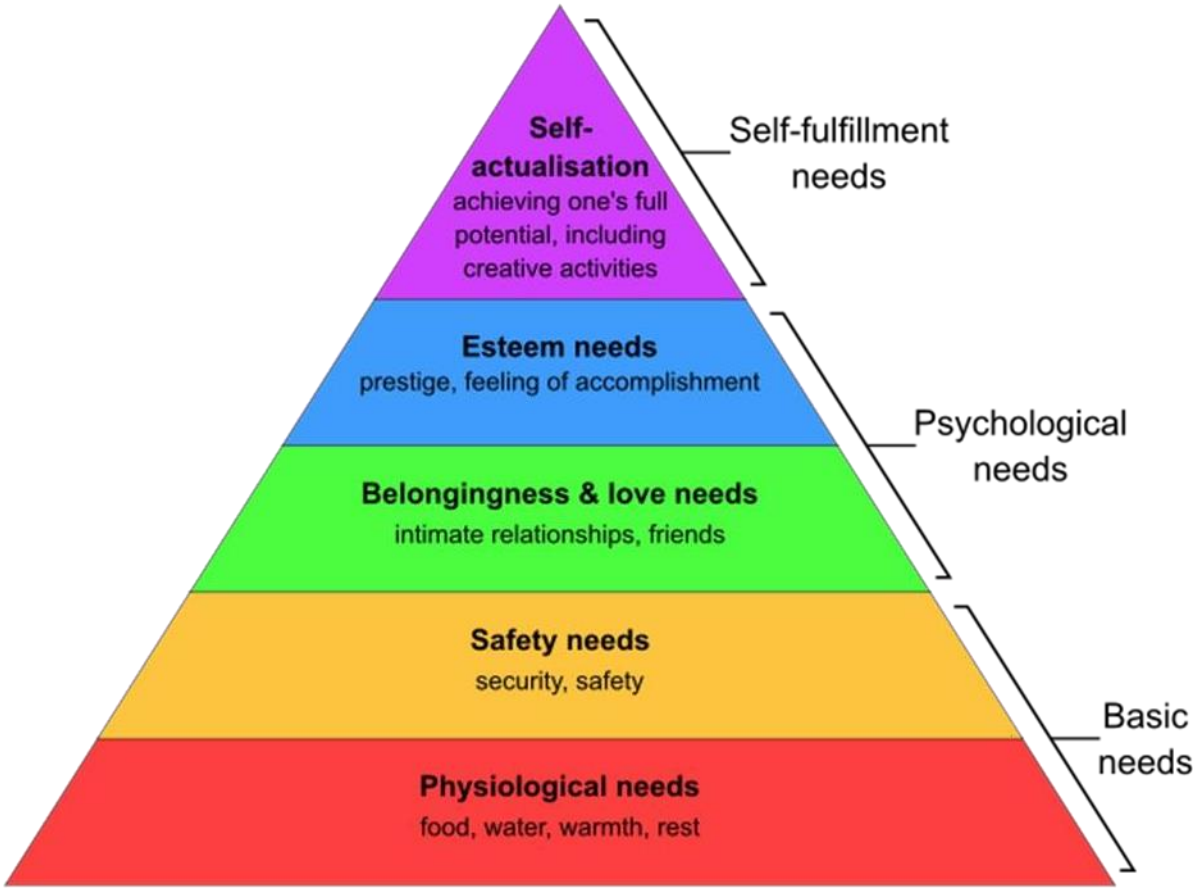

Picture adopted from Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation (1943)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) identified five levels of needs: "*physiological, safety/security, belonging/social affiliation, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Human's physiological necessities are directly linked to survival and satisfaction of hunger and thirst, sleep, and warmth"* (Maslow, 1943). Once these needs are satisfied, a person pursues the requirements of safety and security, which include being free from danger and threats. Following the gratification of the basic needs, comes the need for belongingand love, which one would normally find within families and friendships. Maslow postulated that it is only when humans are placed within a community or institution wherethey are able to fulfil the need for self-esteem and to find a belief in their worth as an individual that they will be able to successfully transition from one phase to the next.

The needs of physiology, safety, belongingness/ love, and self-esteem are considered deficiency needs, and an individual is only ready to seek growth towards self- actualization and transcendence needs when the deficiency needs are met. By makinguseof this organizational scheme, foster parents will be able to provide stabilization and meet

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the child's most immediate basic needs, such as - security needs, confidence and self- esteem, recognition of the child's right to education and socio- economic needs, establishand maintain collaborative contact with foster-child's school for continued support and guidance as well as advocate for the child's right to life.

2.10 Contributory Factors to the Backlog

Ngwenya and Botha (2012) mentioned that specific areas in which social workers have been incompetent because of overwhelming demands for services are statutory foster- care services. The backlog in foster care applications has been an issue in many offices,for example, in the Johannesburg office, (Ngwenya, 2012). Ngwenya notes that severalyears, foster-care placement applications have been accumulating; socialworkers are flooded with high caseloads and as a result they are unable to complete working on theirallocated cases, in a timeous manner. Drawing from the findings of astudy conducted byMokgalapa (2018), it was revealed that, under foster care applications could take up to ayear or two before they are processedby social workers and finalized at the Children's Court. Factors such as - high caseloads, a high turnover of social workers, lack of resources, lack of support and training from management - are seen as some of the factors contributing to the backlog. These authors argue that the main factor contributingto the foster-care backlog is the high turnover of socialworkers because of low earningsand migration; vacant positions are frequently not filled, allowing the backlog to grow. When a social worker is finally assigned, she is confronted with a massive backlog that leaves her feeling overwhelmed. If the government recognizes the impact of an overburdened system and views social workas a scarce skill, there will be better retentionof social workers. (Mokgalapa, 2020).

For the Department of Social Development to achieve its legal mandate and render quality service to its clients, it isof utmost necessity to secure a well-trained and stabilizedworkforce in the field of foster care. Backlogs are undoubtedly not the result of lack of effort; Ngwenya and Botha (2012) speak highly of numerous government and non- government agencies that have courageously tried to reduce their backlogs often in thewake of bad publicity,but the results are seldom long lasting. It is believed that efforts tosolve backlogs often confront just the most noticeable challenges, rather than the principal causes, and assuch, fail to produce long-lasting change which will become

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evident.

The researcher concurs that these contributory factors to the backlog have an effect onthe lives of foster children, who are yet to be placed; , Mokgalapa and Rapholo (2020) confirm that without the relevant resources to create productivity and acceleration of service delivery, there will be minimum outcome in the day-to-day business of a social worker. , their findings note that without a government car, home visits cannot be conducted; without a government cellphone or landline phone in the office,communication with potential guardians or parents will fail dismally; without stationery and equipment, reports will not be written nor printed, copies of relevant documents willnot be made. All these delay the processing and finalization of applications in the courts;in turn placement and getting a court order to enable approving of grants to bespecifically altered for children in foster care. These factors contribute heavily to the backlog of foster-care cases in South Africa and affect the lives of these children, tremendously.

The researcher relates to the personal experiences of Boning and Ferreira (2013) as they replicate the researcher's own personal experience as a student and intern social worker at the DSD, as there were limited resources necessary to execute foster-care services. Many factors contribute to the placement of children in foster care. According to Ngwenya (2012), the HIV/AIDS pandemic hasleft many children without parents and without visible means of support. As a result, these children are placed in the foster caresystem, which is already overburdened due to the large number of children in need of care and protection. Children are left orphaned after their parents die, sometimes in thecare of relatives, usually the maternal grandmother. The relatives or primary caregiversthen seek assistance fromsocial workers across the country in order to have the orphaned children legally placedin their care. As a result, Manukuza (2013) is of the view that ,thelikelihood of social workers ending with unmanageable caseloads is high, therefore, it ismost likely that these children who are deemed to need care and protection will not receive an adequate amount of attention that they deserve from social workers. Their applications will continue to pend until such time when the socialworkers will have the necessary resources to execute their duties and attend to the child's application. This unfortunate situation affects the lives of these children who doneed urgent support and care.

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Fortune (2017), argues that these factors existing within the system of foster care in South Africa endanger the lives of many children because the system fails to respond positively to the needs of these children. It is children's constitutional right to have family care and shelter which, unfortunately, is often disregarded. Nationwide, foster care is considered the best system of caring for children who need care and protectionoutside their family of origin. The Department of Social Development introduced ground-breakingways to eradicate problems that the foster-care system is faced with,but these challengesseem to be perpetual (Dhludhlu, 2015).

Dhludhlu (2015) in his findings identified strategies that the DSD had introduced in theirefforts to curb the backlog in foster care; these include, among others, *"the hiringof moresocial workers, coming up with project plan for foster care and having family finders by the South African Social Security Agency"* (Department of Social Development, 2017). The current researcher believes that hiring more social workers cannot completely deal with the backlog, if they will be without adequate resources toperform the foster-care services. Required resources include cars, telephones, and photocopying machines. Earle (2008), suggests that instead of making the rendering of all social services the responsibility of social workers, the Children's Act could substitute some references to social workers with the term "social service professionals". This would ensure that all services provided by social workers could also be executed by other social service practitioners, such as auxiliary social workersand child and youth-care workers. The practitioners mentioned above could handle the registration/ intake of potential foster-care applicants, registration, and attending to documentation required by both the social worker and the courts; having a variety of social service practitioners will aid inthe division of labour. This will increase accessto services in poor and rural communities where social workers do not visit as frequently as they should. These substitutes / assistants to social workers would not be able to execute all the latter's duties that are assigned to them as Earle (2008) mentions because the primary causes of the backlog as discussed would not have beenattended too, such as the shortage of resources and stationery; secondly theseassistants are not well-trained to carry out the duties of a social worker such as conducting home visits and assessing a child who has been identified as in need of care of and protection.

Since the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005 was put in place, problems about vulnerable children who need care and protection have since developed; one of these is the change-over to a court-based system for the determination of an extension of placements and grants which had motivated an over-reliance of applicants on the foster-care system to

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provide appropriate income support to families caring for orphaned and abandoned children (Fortune, 2016). It has been discussed by various scholars that the courts delaythe process as they require documents which might not be attached to the report because the social worker does not have the required documents or is awaiting documentation from the prospective applicants.

Loffell (2011) mentions that the courts require many documents to be attached to reports.This worsens the burden on the social workers and the backlog of cases thatthey need to process to ensure placement through the courts. Social workers, hence, find it very difficult to have all the necessary documents attached to the reports and get them readyby the court dates. It is, therefore, a lengthy procedure to getprospective applicants courtorders validating their placement and to receive their grants expeditiously; this graduallyworsens the backlog, although, this is just one of the factors contributing to the foster- care backlog.

Sibanda and Lombard (2015), Mosimege (2017) concur that highcase-loads, shortage ofsocial workers and unequal distribution of cases to local socialworkers contribute largelyto the backlog of these foster-care cases. There is considerable shortage of social workers at the Department of Social Development andit is vital that the State attend to these issues because a large proportion of the peopleare affected in offering statutory services, particularly, foster care services. The Public Service Commission (2002) reiterates that public servants and social work supervisorsneed to guard against the uneven distribution of work to their local social workers, however, previous research conducted by Sikhitha (2018) proves that social work supervisors are also overburdened such as supervising and monitoring, alone, 20 junior social workers; this ratio is untenable. One can extract from these findings that there is a serious problem in terms of capacity building and trainings and professionaldevelopment as many of these socialworkers are viewed as not being able to implement the work of a social worker, competently. This finding is an admission thatsupervision is not taking place, hence, thebacklog of foster care cases in the contextof this study. From the findings of the study –"*Supervision Expectations*" - by Sikhitha(2018) that supervision is not taking place at thelevel at which it could make long lasting impact on the profession. Social work supervisors should be driven by quality of services rendered and not the quantity of cases finalized, this is in line with the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) which

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advocates for quality services to the people.

Foster-care applications are accumulating in offices due to lack of resources, lack of support and supervision, unjust and uneven distribution of work, low salaries and shortage of social workers. Many of the abovementioned factors, the researcher observed whilst practicing as a student social worker at Vhembe District, Makwarela,asan intern social worker. Sibanda and Lombard (2015) contend that the level of payfor social workers in South Africa is relatively low, thus, social workers are faced witha highnumber of cases they need to be directly involved in. Many of these social workers are not only involved in statutory work but they are also confronted with othergeneric social work duties.

In line with the above, Fortune (2016) postulates that many of the orphaned and vulnerable children are falling within the cracks with their applications not attended tooina timely manner because the social workers are overwhelmed with the amount of work they are faced with. All these factors heavily contribute to the backlog which is affectingthe life progression of vulnerable child. Fortune (2016) advocates for the "best interest of the child'' principle, however, due to lack of governance and leadership in the DSD the pending foster care cases/applications keep accumulating,hence, children who the state needs to protect remain uncared for, leaving the principle of "the best interest of the child" meaningless and unattainable.

The foster care backlog issue it seems is rooted in multitasking and overloading of socialworkers. Chibba (2011) argues that there is an outflow of South African social workers to other countries in search of better working conditions and salary packages.These socialworkers move into the private sector and other professions such as psychology and criminology. The United Kingdom, Canada and Netherlands have become active recruiters of South African social workers. These countries recruitment drives have resulted in observable cracks in South African social work services, especially, in child welfare where statutory services have suffered the worst consequences, so much that the National Department of Social Development in SouthAfrica has declared social worka scarce skill (Mosimege, 2017). The South African Institute of Race Relations (2012) has put it on record that there is a lack of social workpractitioners in South Africa with special reference to the government sector and NGOs. In 2003, Zola Skweyiya, the

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former Minister of Public Service and Administration in South Africa declared social worka scarce skill, and that the countryis in dire need of almost 16 000 social workers to mitigate issues related to foster care. This shows that the country lost many social workers to other countries as they were in search of better working conditions and bettersalaries (Khumalo, 2016). In response to the Minister's declaration, the National Department of Social Development introduced a recruitment strategy in the form a scholarship that was meant to recruit and train individuals who were interested in becoming social workers.

This lack of social workers forced civil society to take the Department of Social Development to court in 2011 due to approximately 120 000 foster-child grants not beingpaid to children. The statutory process and placement of children into the foster-care system are conducted by a social worker as Indicated in the Children's Act. Socialworkersand the courts had not kept up with extension of the children's foster-care orders, withinthe court ordered time. The situation was twofold – first, thousands of children were deprived of legal protection and second, the foster parent/s lost accessto the social grantwhich impacted on domestic functioning. The Court ordered the Department of Social Development to design a comprehensive legal solution by December 2014.

This situation showed that social workers were unable to prevent the lapsing of court orders in respect of vulnerable children which then would also impact those children whoare yet to be placed due to their pending applications. Sikhitha (2018) in her study she noted that the backlog was undoubtedly not a result of lack of effort from the service providers, but it was the State that was failing its people and is still failing in delivering one of its major legislative mandate. When this happens, orphaned and vulnerable children will continue to live their lives unassisted and without a sense of self and belonging; this could lead to possible discrimination and stigmatisation from peers.

The rise of unattended foster care cases in south Africa has led to a significant growthincaseloads within social workers' offices (Fortune, 2016). Children's rights should reign supreme, and their best interests should be considered as priority, therefore, children needing care and protection are placed in foster care under the supervision of a designated social worker in terms of section 46(f) of Children Act no. 38 of 2005.A socialworker assigned to render supervision must ensure that potential applicants are taken

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through the processes of application into the foster-care register and this must be done timeously. Proudlock (2014) postulates that if child protection agencies fail to tighten uptheir foster-care systems when it comes to renewing foster-care courtorders, the best interests of children become compromised.

Sikhitha (2018) asserts that early interventions for vulnerable children have become minimal because social workers are not trained to perform statutory work, andsometimeseven when they do conduct the work, they fail dismally in producing the desired results due to lack of supervision. From the findings of Sikhitha (2018), supervision is not takingplace at the level at which it should; this could make long- lasting impact on the practiceof social work. The supervisees are not given any motivation, therefore, they are not driven as they see their seniors not taking the profession seriously. Participants remarked:

> "*The new graduates behave like they never went to university for four years". "The fact that the head of the DSD in Vhembe District is a teacher by profession does not help the situation either";*

The supervision framework for the social work profession in South Africa asserts that direct management of social workers by non-social workers has the likelihood to have detrimental effects on the practice of the profession. The Social Service Professions Actno.110 of 1978 expounds that a social worker may only be supervised on social- work matters by another competent and registered social worker.

This is strengthened by the South African Council for Social Service Professions(SACSSP) which expressed great concern about this matter. This finds support in Sikhitha (2018) that there would be a decline in the productivity and quality of servicesdueto lack of supervision; this situation also propels the backlog in the processing of applications in the context of this study.

Observations by Sikhitha (2018) can also be considered as some of the reasons for thefoster-care backlog. When social workers are not supervised, supported and guided by their superiors they are most likely to experience feelings of demotivation, helplessnessand being unable to work, due to uneven work distribution, fatigue and being overburdened with high caseloads. In this context, social workers will clearly nothave time

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to mitigate social issues for their clients, advocate for the rights of their clients and provide support for their clients where needs be because they are not guided through the process. They will keep their clients' application forms on their tables so they have something to report on, since clients are now seen as mere numbers. This practice of quantifying clients could exacerbate the backlog and put thesocial work practice into disrepute (Sikhitha, 2018).

Mokgalapa and Rapholo (2020) echo the same sentiments in a study they conducted,as they concluded that social workers do not get the suitable supervision they need, whichresults in poor quality of work and poor service delivery fuelling to the foster care backlog. Moaisi (2003)) emphasised that itis crucial for social workers to be supported in their mandate for rendering social services. Engelbrecht (2014)) advise that supervision of social workers in South Africa should be guided by the Social Services Professions Act,110 of 1978 as amended, and the Policy Guidelines for theCourse of Conduct, the Codeof Ethics and the Rules for Social Workers (SACSSP, 2007).

The social work bursary was introduced with the aim of having social workers who will assist the citizens of the country in all aspects of their life, since the declaration of socialwork as a scarce skill.. Sikhitha (2018) argues that the DSD bursary has played a vital role in the profession coming into shambles, which in turn negatively affects the orphaned and vulnerable children who are meant to receive services from social workers.

Proudlock (2014) maintains that should the DSD continue to fail these children, by not putting systems in place that are going to prevent burning-out, then unsupervised social workers, overwhelmed and over-burdened, would continue to offer sub- standard services; this would mean the State would have violated the principle of thebest interestof the child, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution of the Republic of SouthAfrica. It is a child's basic right to be taken care of and social workers cannot ensure this in isolation,without the State coming forward to mitigate any traits to prevent thisright from being fulfilled.

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2.11 Effects of Foster care Backlog on Prospective Beneficiaries

2.11.1 Essential Human Needs

Needs' are outlined as necessities for a nutritious development. Positive needs- fulfilment advances to promote wellbeing and growth, whereas failure to meet a single need can inhibit this (Deci and Ryan 2012;). Environmental factors playa significant role in moulding needs-satisfaction, or changes in individual or interpersonal actions, thoughts or feelings (Deci and Ryan 2012;). Maslow (1943) was among the first to develop a theory encircling both the biological and psychological needs of humans. Thetheory, emphasise that people have physiological needs, for example, the need for waterand food, the need for safety, theneed for love and belongingness, the need for self- esteem and the need for self- actualization. For any need, frustration results in amplifieddesire, while satisfaction results in decreased desire, with the first needs mentioned being the most desired when frustrated.

It is necessary to know how needs are presented in the foster-care literature. Maslow's needs-hierarchy is used as the theoretical framework in this study accompanied by the systems theory, because of the broad range of needs it encompasses. Nonetheless, recent studies have successfully usedMaslow's hierarchy as a framework to examine children's needs, such as for childrenin need of care and protection (Medcalf et al., 2013), children living in poverty (Noltemeyer, Bush, Patton & Bergen (2012) and childrenwith disabilities (Lygnegård et al., 2013). For this study, Maslow's hierarchy of needs andthe systems theory wereadopted. This theory is not limited to its applicability towards the needs of children of today, but also it considers children growing up in specific vulnerableconditions wherethe environment plays a considerable role in defining precise needs and how they canbe satisfied (Deci and Ryan 2012). Adverse experiences priorto care, as wellas out-of-home placement and living in foster care cause children to develop some typeof specific needs (Berrick and Skivenes, 2012). Children in foster care and those who are yet to be placed in foster care are seen to be at risk of developing medical, behavioural and emotional difficulties as Oswald and Wahl (2010) put it. Jacobsen et al.,(2013)) recognise thatchildren's cognitive abilities and school achievements often fall behind due to social injustices. In addition, because foster children are meant to be livingapart from their biological parents or their caregivers, this disturbs the development of

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attachment andsense of belonging to themselves, while they are also expected to form new relationships with their foster carers (Schofeld and Beek 2005). Traumas experienced in their childhood can cause post-traumatic stress symptoms and internalizing behavioural problems for displaced children (Greeson et al., 2011); despitethese circumstances, should these children be placed in foster care they could make a positive developmental turn when growing up in a safe, secure and nurturing environment (McLaughlin et al, 2012). “It is therefore profoundly important to satisfy children’s needs in an age-appropriate way, with their personal histories kept in mind” (Berrick and Skivenes, 2012)

The over-reliance of caregivers and their fostered children on the Child Support and OldAge Grant is overwhelming. Recipients of the Old Age Grant share their grants with extended members of their households. Estimates from the findings of a report compiledby SASSA (2012) indicate that one grant caters for up to six persons in a recipient’s household. Families as institutional structures in South Africa are fluid andoften multi- generational rather than nuclear, which is mainly due to segregation policies of the apartheid era and high HIV/AIDS prevalence. An HIV/AIDS prevalencerate of 18 per centamong the middle-age population often leads to many people in South Africa having chronic illnesses and disabilities, therefore, older persons often feel compelled to raise their grandchildren because of the challenges imposed on them.

2.11.2 Social and Economic Needs

The assumption in this study is that households may be impoverished if they do not receive grant payments in a timely fashion. They might not be able to buy food and otheressential needs as these families receiving grants typically do not have savings - to survive they spend whatever they receive. The foster-care money is not only usedto support beneficiaries, but also to provide broader support, therefore, the economiesof small towns and villages would be hit hard if the grants were withdrawn; these places are heavily reliant on grant payment that are used to buy goods and services in their local shops.

Zetlin (2012) contends that apart from the foster-care grant improving the lives of beneficiaries, it appears there is a great need for these fostered youths to establish

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healthy peer networks. This proves that the grant money does improve the lives of its recipients and those around them, therefore, should it be not paid when beneficiariesareeligible to getting it, chances of improving their lives are stalled (Zetlin, 2006 and Zetlin,2012). Drawing from the information above, one would argue that foster-care grant doesnot only assist and benefit the lives of beneficiaries, it also has a vital roleto play in improving the economy of small towns.

Zetlin (2012) emphasize that it is one of the basic needs for foster youth to havefriendsand to establish healthy peer networks for support and motivation and that notion cannot be underestimated. Morris (2014) in support of the above statement indicated that a youth's friendship with peers will shape and mould the emotional and cognitive developments of how a youth interacts with others. Morris (2014), maintain that foster youth are most likely to disconnectfrom relationships if they experience feelings of beingunwanted, loss and disruption of norms, loss of social networks, and significant relationships if characterised their placement. Feelings of being unwanted and placement disruptions have been the greatest hindrance to foster youth's success, particularly at the social level Morris (2014). These authors stress that foster youth musthave stability; this influences a strong sense of belonging and permanency whilethey arein the foster care system, otherwise it is believed that without stability their ability to relateto others and sustain relationships is negatively affected.

Without stability and a sense of belonging, fostered adolescents will continue to experience great difficulties in terms of transitioning into adulthood. A study conductedby Gonzalez (2015) confirms that in this negative context, they will become victims of personal insecurity and will possibly not be able to survive in a hostile world which suddenly offers them little or no support and no comfort. Foster youths' experiences canbe fruitful when transitioning into adulthood (meaning growing out of the foster care system) if a solid foundation has been laid down with regard to different levels like education, employment, supportive friends and families.

Stone (2007) suggests that the increase of socio-demographic risks, such as poverty, large family sizes, high mobility, inconsistent parenting practices, and neighbourhood crime, increase the risk of maltreatment and non-foster care placement. The same socio-demographic risks are also associated with increased risks of school failure (Smithgall,

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Gladden, Howard, Goerge & Courtney, 2004). Some percentage of children in foster careas well as those who are yet to be placed are said to come fromthe poorest communities,encounter racial factions in rural areas, attend rural-based community schools which areoften overcrowded and underfunded (Conger & Finklestein, 2003). Given the historical existence of concentrated areas of poverty in rural minority communities, the under- representation of minority children in foster care,especially those who are yet to make itinto the foster care register, raises serious questions about racial bias and discriminatoryaccess to social supports. Key factors that contribute to the under-representation of poor children in foster care include, housing instability, difficulty accessing support services, bias, discrimination and cultural distrust between child-welfare officials and their clientele(U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2008). Vulnerable Children are still likely to stayin unstable households due to the lack of social services provided for them andcaregivers to successfully benefit from the social security system.

2.11.3 Academic needs and educational progress

The Vera Institute of Care (2002) reports of many studies that validate the need of helping foster children succeed in school, but they tell us relatively little about how to implement this. To guide effective modification, we need to know more about the educational experiences of these children. Unfortunately, little or none is known about how these children experience this or any aspect of foster care. A researcher recently noted:

According to foster youth and education statistics, high school dropout rates are three times higher for foster youth than other low-income non-foster youth. One of the commonreasons cited is the frequency at which these children change homes, the lifestyle that they succumbed too and many other social ills.

It is therefore affirmed by Stein-Steele (2015) that for the dropout rate to improve, thesechildren yet to be fostered will need better guidelines and more intensive supportto meet academic requirements and progression that will help them better their lives and attempt to land better opportunities in life. Academic performance prior and duringentry into fostercare suggests that part of the academic problems foster youths experience is entering main stream schools extremely late for the current grade; this means they are behind

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their peers (Prewitt, 2014 & Stevens, 2012). This finding advocates for early interventions and intensive academic support that may assist to lessen the prevalent achievement inconsistencies for students in foster care. Students in foster care are more likely to frequently change schools, further disrupting their educational progress, and causing severe socio-emotional anguish. Stevens (2012) argues that these experiences are priorto the child's referral into the child welfare system. The academic challenges are furthercompounded by these students' relatively low attendance to school. Children yet to enterin foster care are said to havea special education classification, with specific reference to emotional and behaviouralissues. "Academic and behavioural challenges follow studentsthroughout their schoolcareers, and among high school students, those in foster care areat least twice as likely to drop out of school."

Children who have suffered neglect due to unprocessed grant payments and placementsinto a stable home appear to be particularly vulnerable to academic deficits among others; this is because their educational right has not been taken into consideration (Stone, 2007). In general, children raised in disorganized homes have been found to score significantly below their peers raised in normal homes, with researchers reportinga deficit of between 15 and 20 percentile points (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003). In additionto facing academic challenges, children and youth in foster care also struggle with behaviour issues. Scherr (2007) found that 24% of youth who need to make it to the fosterregister had experienced either a suspension or expulsion from school because of academic needs that are adequately not met.

Foster children's education is usually severely affected and their career prospects are affected as well. Foster children often get suspended and expelled from school three times more often than other children (Dozier and Rutter, 2016). According to foster youtheducation statistics, children in foster care have different needs and backgrounds to their peers. Foster children are seen as vulnerable and as such they need to be considered as children in need of care and protection. Many of these children come from abusive households, making them susceptible to erratic behaviourthat in due course leads to suspension or more severe disciplinary measures within the parameters of their schooling; at least 40% of foster children have learning difficulties (Partners for Our Children, 2007). This is in line with Scherr (2007) who asserts that experiencing foster care is often accompanied with underperformance inschool, dropping out, engaging in

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inappropriate intimate relationships and not pursuinghigher education. Based on foster care education facts, Scherr (2007) and Chipungu (2004), disclose that 40% of these kids have difficulties studying, such that one out ofevery four foster children show signsof post-traumatic stress disorder that threatens their livelihood. PTSD, also known as post-traumatic stress disorder, is a significant issue with specific reference to orphans and vulnerable children. Research has shownthat at least 25% of the overall number offoster youth suffer from this mental health condition. Research conducted by Dozier, M,& Rutter, M. (2016) also show that six out of ten boys who are susceptible to social ills andare awaiting foster care placementhave been convicted of a crime. As dire as these statistics are, they are indeed true. Dozier et al, (2016) mention that "60% of the total number of young male individuals are convicted of at least one crime before and after exiting foster care because of their age, according to aging out of foster care and education statistics". It is said that a child going in and out of foster care increases the frequency of their mid-year school changes and decreases the total number of days children spend in school (Partners For Our Children, 2021). Foster children change schools more often than other students; moving to a new school is never easy on a child,let alone if it happens mid-year. These transitions affect children in more ways than one.

From research conducted by Scherr (2007), youths who are supposed to be placed in foster homes are falling within the cracks because they have no sense of belonging andall their needs are not satisfied by any significant other. Zetlin (2004) explains that24% ofyouth awaiting the courts to finalise their placements and grants in foster careare 3 timesmore likely to experience corrective actions than their non-foster peers. Zetlin & Weinberg (2004) state that youth awaiting to be serviced by social workers and the courtsin terms of foster care, are most likely to bring emotional and behavioural challenges intoa classroom and that the education system may not be adequately prepared to meet these unique needs. These issues that are seen to be affecting children in the foster caresystem and those who are yet to be placed are increasing at an alarming rate as revealedby research conducted by Scherr (2007) which deliberated on issues that children in foster care face. The question at this juncture is - *If children in foster care are exposed toharsh conditions of living, succumbto Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, what about thosewho are yet to be placed?* This is a serious concern for both foster caregivers and fosteryouth, hence, there is the need for proper guidance and support from social work officialsand the wider social work network.

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According to Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2004) children who are yet to be placed are found to be educationally challenged and disadvantaged, although sometimes those whoare already in the system are not an exception. This is because foster youthare not immediately put in school Foster children sometimes are forced to change schools, andin these new schools they are most likely to have trouble in forming peernetworks and support networks, due to not having feelings of belonging and sense ofself, as well as feeling stigmatised because of lack of recognition as sometimes, theydo not want their foster-care status to be known (Chipungu et al., 2004). Foster children who have experienced poor, inadequate, or inconsistent attachment relationships are at increasedrisk of problematic social, emotional, cognitive, and physical functioning (Centers for Disease Control, 2021). Foster children are said to be at risk for such impairment. Educators are often blamed for inadequate teaching methods while long-time educators know that today's students come to school more challenged than in previous generations.

Unrau, Seita and Putney (2008) indicate that the educational progression of children placed in foster care is affected due to the experiences they have encountered - the traumatic experiences of being a foster child, having learning difficulties and having to depend on the government for their overall well-being. These children also seem to be confronted with stigmatisation for foster children attend school at an increased disadvantage compared to peers from households where adequate and sustained attachment is unwaveringly provided. Anxiety management, capacity to focus andcomprehend new concepts, and resilience in the face of daily challenges to these youths' sense of cognitive, social, and emotional intelligence can easily be weakened.A trauma-informed response necessitates the educator to view the child's functioningthrough a trauma attachment-biological lens (Kinniburgh et al., 2005).

In support of the above, Unrau et al., (2008) report that these children describe themselves as not being normal, and stigmatised, due to for example, not having appropriate clothing for school as other children; this could be seen as an admission thatthe foster care grant is essential in their lives to cater for items, such as clothing (Delap & Fulford, 2009). An American study conducted by Luke and Coyne (2008) resonates with the above studies as according to their findings foster youth are very concerned with

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being compared to biological children of their prospective carers.

Children who have been placed reported that they lacked educational material, moneyforschool and clothing, were often asked to do home chores instead of playing, werehit, insulted, and whipped by their caregivers on a regular basis (Luke and Coyne, 2008). They mentioned that there are high levels of physical and emotional abuse, and they areintimidated; this maltreatment made them lose concentration in class andthus they wouldend up repeating grades, ultimately leaving school. In most cases, notgetting the much-needed support and living in financially challenging circumstances ismeans they lack theirmost immediate needs such as school material and clothing. They also have feelings ofnot getting the same treatment as the biological children and a fear of asking for things (Kuyini, 2009). The findings of a South African study conducted by Tissiman (2008) showed that children who are yet to be placed in fostercare always consider this processas a traumatic, and that their lives have been disorganised even before they are legally placed. These feelings, however, could be curbed if social workers dealing with statutorycare train and recruit potential caregivers.

2.12 Consequences of the Foster care Backlog for Prospective Foster Children and Parents

There are consequences for foster parents and children from the foster-care applications' backlogs; Ngwenya (2011) found that these backlogs have a negative impact on service delivery; in that respect, both foster parents and children suffer. Socialworkers no longer have the time to do justice by all applications, thus, there hasbeen a significant decline in the quality of services rendered to people. Social workersare no longer interested in quality in their work but rather choose to quantify their clients to reach"targets".

This indicates that, due to the high number of foster-care cases, social workers are unable to give their clients the full attention required by section 46(f) of the Children'sActNo.38 of 2005. In accordance with regulation 66 of the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005 requires social workers to empower their clients and clarify the roles of all stakeholders in foster care. (Guidelines for the Effective Management of Foster Care in South Africa,2010). Clients will be less confused if social workers clarify the roles and expectations offoster parents and children. According to Kok (2012), Social workers should recruit,

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empower, and train foster parents in their role as foster parents. De Jager (2011) mentioned the two main needs of foster parents that have been identified internationally,which are training and support. Foster parents are expected to be trained to deal with medical, emotional, developmental, academic, andbehavioural issues that may arise while caring for their foster children, but due to the large number of cases that come into social workers' offices, training foster parents isimpossible. In the same breath, a good working relationship between social workers, foster children, and foster parents is required. (De Jager, 2011).

The client-worker relationship is likely to be strained if a social worker fails to completeafoster care case. Such an environment could have a negative impact on service delivery,worsening the backlog. In support of the statement above, Boning and Ferreira (2013) argue that foster children are emotionally and socially disturbed as a result of backlogs,and social workers have less time to intervene due to high caseloads. The researcher, as a social worker, has observed that foster parents are constantly in the offices of social workers to consult about the challenges they face asfoster parents, but they are not given the necessary attention due to social workers' high caseloads. Socialwork services include not only statutory services such as fostercare, but also intensive psychosocial intervention and support for both foster parents and the children involved.

Youth transitioning out of foster care, according to the Children's Act (Act no. 38) of 2005section 180, must be discharged from care at the age of 18 years unless an applicationfor extension of care is submitted and granted. For the purposes of this study, social workers can consider an application to place a child in foster care beforethe child reachesthe age of 18, and only then can an extension be granted, for example, to allow the childto complete his education or training; this is permissible under the Children's Act (Act No. 38) of 2005, (see section 176 of 2010). In terms of the act, a child who reaches the age of 18 in foster care and has completed his/her high school education is required to exit foster care, and no extension of foster care placement will be granted; however, even if the system removes the child from the foster care register, the child's most immediate basic needs, such as the right to life, education, and security, would have been met. The child will now go out in the world and become an upright citizen of the country because socialization would have takenplace, satisfactorily, however, a child who has not entered the foster care system yet, his or her wellbeing will remain

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challenged. Morris (2014) argues that these foster children are left without a safety net when they leave the security and protection of theenvironment which foster care has provided them, therefore, it is the social worker's responsibility to make sure that the children leave foster care with something they willbe able to fall back on.

2.12.1 Providing Mental and Behavioural Health Care and Support

Studies conducted by Hill (2017), Zima (2000), and Zetlin (2010) suggest that amongthe40% of youth in foster care, up to about 80% display a serious behavioural or mental health problem demanding full intervention. The problem is that many mental health issues go unaddressed and untreated, thus children are blamed for their behaviour ratherthan offered the necessary support and care. "Children need to have structure, boundaries, consistency, affection, and attention," Dr Ebony White, concurred with by Conger and Rebeck (2001) states, "We have to try to support children in foster care accompanied by those who still remain in extreme mediocrity, with some sense of stability and consistency in order to support their mental health, emotional, and social well-being." Living in foster care for any length of time puts a child at risk of developing, behavioural, and emotional issues. Children in foster care are not always provided with their basic human needs. A child may face housing insecurity, food insecurity, financial hardship, maltreatment, or neglect, which preventsthem from meeting other basic needs such as connectedness, intimacy, love, independence, and reaching the stage of self- actualization.

This study is therefore centred on youth who have not been placed; the circumstancesthatthese children come across are an indication that those who are still to be placedare notexcepted, therefore, they cannot be shielded from having difficulties with their circumstances. It is important that children along with foster parents know what is expected of them. Foster parents need to ensure that the child in care and within their home is provided with the much-needed security, safety, consistency, and feelings of being loved, unconditionally. It is essential that foster parents be patient,understanding,compassionate, non-judgmental and promote purposeful expression of feelings to ensurethat the child thrives. Childhood unpleasant experiences can have long-term consequences on the child, the more reason it is important to address themin a timely fashion (Matinka, 2018).

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Many of the children who have yet to be placed have experienced trauma before cominginto care, and many have special medical, emotional, and social needs. All the complications and challenges that foster children face result in poor academic performance, which may have serious consequences for their future. (Segermark, 2017). Nationwide, the organisation, Advocates for Children (2021) suggests that foster childrenfare poorly in educational settings, often getting low rankings in their schoolwork and ultimately not progressing to their full academic potential.

Drawing from the information above, it could be that these foster youths may not makeitup to their matric year. Even when these children are placed in poor urban schoolswhere student performance and grade progression is already below average, they still tend to perform relatively lower than their peers. Studies conducted by Chipungu (2004), Scherr(2007) and Stone (2007) comparing prospective foster children with other children showthat the former are more likely to have behavioural and discipline problems. Foster parents are then expected to be well-skilled and equipped to deal with teenagers displaying these types of behaviours. These children are more likely toexperience gapsin their education because of school transfers. Children's future prospects are determined by their performance in school; therefore, it is important forthem to get the necessary and much-needed support from their parents.

Any child is driven to independence by having a strong support system that responds positively to the most immediate basic needs, hence, it is crucial to have continued support from social workers to provide proper guidance to the child. A child who growsupwithin a strong support system is most likely to be driven to independence; the child's behaviour and conduct will then be a manifestation of his/her upbringing. As the Children's Act puts it, these children will transition out of the system once they reach a certain age, it is the social workers' duty to see to it that these children do notonly benefitfrom the grant and get to be placed in a well-secured family but also to ensure that they do not end up making irrational decisions driven by social circumstances. For this socialissue not to perpetuate, social workers, foster children and parents need to have a goodworking relationship; parents must be supported andguided on how to give the best careto these children. Social workers must conduct home visits and monitor the placement, however, these home visitations and monitoring may not be possible if there are no

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resources, such as government vehicleto move from point A to B or an office mobile or telephone to call the parents. This substantiates what scholars are arguing that youths will outgrow the system and go back to the streets with no sense of self, and all that hasbeen achieved will be in vain.

In support of the above Kadungure (2014) argues that, adolescents who are raised in foster care and become dependent on the government through the foster care grant mayfind the transition to adulthood difficult when they reach the age of 18, because they maybe left on their own, forced to adjust to sudden independence and loss of support. Fosterchildren who are aging out of care on their own, may lack long-term relationships with parents or mentors who may be able to guide them when they assume adult responsibilities. Gillen (2005, cited in Gonzalez, 2015) commenting on the trauma of being moved from one home or family to the next can says: "Loss of a loved person andfamily relations that would have been established is one of the mostintensely painful experiences any human can suffer". This implies that when these youths are moved fromone family to the next due to lack of legal placement and financial constraints, creates severe emotional scars and they become susceptible toemotional imbalances, lack of positive self-esteem and confidence.

These youths are disadvantaged from the injustices imposed on them because of the foster care application backlog. They would need to move from one home to the next after having established positive interpersonal relations with the previous people of thatfamily because the latter would not be able to take care for this child without benefitting from the foster care grant. The backlog, hence, creates turmoil in the life ofthese youths
- tampering with their emotions, interpersonal relations and their sense of belonging. Okpych (2012) cited in Morris (2014) stated that the youth who are yet to be fostered aremost likely to experience multiple placement disruptions and will find it difficult to establish daily-living skills such as, conflict resolution, assertiveness, positive self- esteem, self-confidence and organising abilities that are generally developed and sustained through relationships with supportive families.

Thomas (2005) summarises the role and responsibilities of social workers rendering foster care services as follows: “The worker to whom the child is assigned serves as thenucleus, the medium for surveillance and for assessment of the on-going life situation

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and is responsible for working with each of these individuals involved also responsible for arranging supplementary services, and integrating them". A good working relationshipbetween social worker, foster child and foster parents is crucial to ensure successful fostering.

Youth who are yet to be placed in foster care need to be connected to a family for physical, emotional and social assistance, therefore, social workers ought to assumea pivotal role in ensuring that foster children do receive this sense of belonging with their foster parents (Morris, 2014). In support of the above, Kadungure (2014) recommends that social workers place children with their prospective families taking into considerationthe educational, cultural, developmental, and socio-economic needs of the child to guarantee appropriate emancipation of the foster child.

Emancipation of the child, however, could encounter some difficulties considering the factors mentioned in a study conducted by (Ngwenya, 2012). The author in the study mentioned that social workers do not have sufficient resources to carry out their dutiesasa statutory social worker; they are not supported nor trained in statutory work; supervision is not conducted as and when it must be and there is a dire shortage of socialworkers. These factors, indicate that there would be uneven distribution of work,as suchsocial workers will be overwhelmed as they would be faced with a load of cases that need their attention.

This context affects the wellbeing of potential children to be placed, as explained by Fortune, (2016) it negates the notion of 'the best interest of the child' and questions the level of competence of the social workers. It could, however, not be a question of competence or incompetence of the statutory worker but could be a question of the stateof governance within the DSD as to how the state mitigates the circumstances that are leading to the backlog of foster care. Social workers may, probably, not be able to deliverservices to vulnerable children who are yet to be placed in their foster homes due to factors listed above, as such the principles of acceleration of service delivery and observing the best interest of the child may not be implemented.

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2.13 Conclusion

The chapter deliberated on literature that was considered relevant to the study to buildan understanding of statutory social work as well as the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. The selected theoretical frameworks were used to contextualisethe study. Literature covered included - foster care as a statutory service, foster-care backlog in South Africa as well as the contributory factors leading to the backlog. The discussions explored a variety of policies and legislature on the notion that vulnerable children are in need of care and protection in order to protect their bestinterest. In Chapter 3 the researcher will deliberate on the research methodology andapproach which will beemployed to ensure successful implementation of the research.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the study's operational framework detailing - the research approach, population and sampling, research design, data collection, data analysis andethical protocol. The methodology can be defined as the research procedures and techniques employed in effecting the research design (Myers, 2009). Gray (2009) postulates that a research methodology answers the research questions through a process to solve the research problem. Similarly, Kumar (2011) regards the research design as a strategy or a plan which interchanges from the basic philosophical assumptions in specifying the selection of participants and the data collection techniquesapplicable.

Fouché and Schurink (2011) explain research methodology as seeking knowledge usingstandardised methods and techniques. In addition Cresswell (2017) indicate that the crux of a research methodology is embedded in the feasibility of the study. In socialresearch, the most used methodologies include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

Contextually, the researcher employed a qualitative method to understand the experiences of prospective beneficiaries in the foster-care backlog.: This chapter entailsthe following: research approach, research design, the population considered during thestudy and sampling techniques used, data collection and analysis methods. Ethical issues underlying this research project are explicated in detail to demonstrate that participants in the study were handled following research principles.

3.2 Research Approach

Faulkner & Faulkner (2013) assert that there are two well-known and recognized research paradigms: quantitative and qualitative paradigms. The quantitative paradigm is founded on positivism, which regards scientific explanation as nomothetic. Fouche andDelport (2002) argued that its primary goals are to objectively measure the social world,test hypotheses, and control human behaviour; this idea is supported by Hammerberg,

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Kirkman, and Delacey (2016). It investigates a social and human problem based on testing a theory of variables measured with numbers and analysed statistically to determine whether the theory's predictivegeneralisation holds.

As explicated by Kielman, Cataldo & Seeley (2012), qualitativeresearch stems from an anti-positivistic, interpretative approach idiographic, thus holistic. It aims to understand social life and the meaning people place in daily life. This paradigm implies the identification of the participants' beliefs and values that underpin a phenomenon and producing descriptive data in the participants' own written or spoken words (Hammerberget al., 2016).

A qualitative approach was used in this study. A *qualitative approach* is a method used by researchers to understand better the meaning that individuals or groups attach to a social or human phenomenon. (Creswell, 2014). Silverman (2011) indicates that the approach focuses on how people see things, their behaviour towards them, and how they interact in a particular social environment. While work operates from a qualitative perspective, the researcher attempts to gain a first-hand, holistic understanding of the phenomenon, and data collection isshaped as the investigation progresses (Silverman, 2011).

Makhubele (2008) asserts that qualitative research deals with meanings and processesthat need to be thoroughly assessed and quantified regarding intensity, quantity and frequency. It utilises techniques to capture insight into the research problem's fundamental issues by collecting opinions and feedback based on people's variables (‘’feelings, attitudes, motivations, values, and perceptions’’). Jane (2014) concurs when she argues that “qualitative research explores how individual or group members give meaning to and express their understanding of themselves, their experiences as well asthe world around them”. This approach helped the researcher gain valuable knowledge on the effects of the foster care applications’ backlog on its intended beneficiaries. Qualitative research is therefore based on the discussions and engagements that provide people with opportunities to utilise their verbal and non-verbal communication skills during the research processes (De Vos et al, 2011).

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3.3 Research Design

A *research design* is defined as a strategy or organized framework that describes how the researcher intends to conduct the research process to solve the research problem (Creswell, 2016), while Babbie & Mouton (2011) note that a research design is a blueprintof how one intends to conduct a study. Similarly to Kumar (2011), Jane (2014), Cresswell, (2017) and Creswell (2018), a research design is the method by which data isto be collected, analyzed, and disseminated. The design can be interpreted as planningany scientific research from the beginning to the end or as a program to guide the researcher in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting observed facts. (McCombes, 2019).The research design specifies how a study will be executed to answer the research questions, thereby reaching sound conclusions (Creswell, 2018). Research design, therefore, describes how data will be collected and examined. Babbie and Mouton (2016)note that a research designs are primarily understood as the researcher's summary for solving research problems or challenging the research theory.

The different types of sampling procedures and the method of collecting data must be included in a research design, therefore McCombes (2019) explains a research design as details that include the conceptualization of the research problem and the presentation of the data. The researcher adopted a phenomenological research design.Lester (2014) and Neubauer, Witkop & Vario (2019) state that a phenomenological studyis conducted from people's experiences that translate into perceptions through inductiveinterviews and discussions, representing them fromthe participants' perspective.

The way in which research has been crafted informs the above-mentioned methodological approaches. The researcher adopted a phenomenological research design. Lester (2014) and Neubauer, Witkop & Vario (2019) alludes that, a phenomenological study is conducted from people's experiences that translate into perceptions through inductive interviews, discussions and representing them from the participant's perspective.

This type of research design is relevant to the study due to its explorative nature and assuch, it enabled the researcher to acquire more knowledge and in-depth understandingof the ripple effect that the foster care backlog has on prospective beneficiaries at Thohoyandou, Vhembe District Thulamela Municipality. The above mentioned design

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was suitable in this study because it enabled the researcher to gain an understanding directly from the prospective beneficiaries themselves of the different effects that the backlog imposes on their day to day lives within their homes, school, and communities at large.

This study was exploratory in nature, therefore, Wild and Diggenis (2013) postulate thatthe main aim of an exploratory study is not solely to gain pertinent data, but rather to gain through knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study. Van Wyk (2012) further argue that explorative research design is more concerned with the how and why part of the situation. It does not only describe, but also looks at the causes of the event.

In the context of the study, the researcher was intrigued by exploring the effects of the backlog in terms of foster care thereby using the exploratory phenomenological researchdesign because the researcher came to a realization that there is little scientific researchconducted on the subject matter. The researcher captured the participants understanding on the issue from their own viewpoints. The researcher was able to probefor more information and explore other areas of interest hence the nature of the study and research designs utilized.

3.4 Population

Babbie and Mouton (2016) note a study population as the aggregate of elements from which asample is selected, and Creswell (2018) puts it as the people from whom the study is focused and the sample is drawn. In the same breath, Strydom (2011) refers tothe population as individuals with specific characteristics necessary for the study. For this study, the targeted population consisted of caregivers and prospective beneficiaries.The inclusion criteria were youth who are school-going, between fifteen and eighteen years old, and prospective recipientsof the foster-care grant. The inclusion criteria for caregivers was based on participants who were minors; therefore, not all caregivers of the participants were interviewed. The youth andcaregivers were accessed Tshisaulu Village (Thavhani) in Thulamela Municipality, Vhembe District, with the assistance of Vha-Musanda and the civic members. The exclusion criteria was based on youth who are benefitting from the grant but their orders have lapsed and those who are not school-going.

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3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval to conduct the study was requested and obtained from the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee (HSSREC) at University of Venda. Upon receiving ethics approval form the HSSREC (see Appendix E), the researcher requestedpermission from Vha Musanda Makumbane at Tshisaulu (Thavhani) Village, Thulamelamunicipality, Vhembe District, Limpopo which was granted (see Appendix B). Vha Musanda was provided with information pertaining the study explaining the main aim aswell as rationale of the study. The researcher explained to the participants as well the main aim of the study, the primary goal and purpose of the study. The researcher also emphasized that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality regarding the participants' personal information was ensured. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, the researcher conducted interviews in a sensitive manner and was conscious of potential emotional risk to the participant. Participants were asked to sign a consent letter (see Appendix D), On record, participants were asked if they would want to be recorded or not. All audio recordings and transcribed data was filed under pseudonyms on the researcher's computer, whichis password protected, and were stored in the researcher's office. Only the researcher and the research supervisor's have access to the transcripts. All the research files will be stored for a period of five years and will then be deleted. All hardcopy data will be destroyed after five years. Any publications emanating from the study will not make useof the personal identifying details of the participants.

3.6 Participant's Selection and Recruitment Procedures

Research population as alluded to by Cunningham, Weathington and Pittenger (2013) state that a population in is "a collection of people or of non-human entities that share one or more characteristics". moreover, Sagaard (2010) specifies that for the populationto be recognizable a sampling frame is to be acknowledged, in this regard, permission was sought from Vha Musanda in the selected Village, Thulamela Municipality inLimpopo to select households who met the sampling criteria. The researcher did not approach the prospective beneficiaries and their caregivers directly, but Vha Musanda requested two members of his cabinet who are members of SANCO in the village to inform these households who met the inclusion criteria to be told about the research andthose who had interest will be visited by the researcher and the members selected by

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Vha Musanda in their respective homes. Upon receiving positive responses, One-on- one unstructured, in-depth, interviews were conducted with the selected prospective foster parents and beneficiaries.

3.7 Sampling

Sukhutame (2014) notes that sampling is a statistical method of acquiring representativedata from a study population. Neuman (2014) and De Vos et al. (2014) elucidate that a sample is a small set of cases that the researcher selects from a large pool, hence, cangeneralize the resultsfrom the sample to the population. For this study, non-probability sampling techniques were utilized. Neuman (2011) avows that non-probability samplingis defined as the unknown probability of including each population element as a sample.Furthermore, Shuttleworth (2017) asserts that non-probability sampling does not fully represent the target population. Non-probability sampling is defined as a sampling technique in which the researcher chooses samples based on his or her subjective judgment. Purposive, convenience, snowball, and quotasamplings are examples of non-probability samplings.

For this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling. In this sampling procedure, researchers depend primarily on their experience, resources, or previous research findings; therefore, the observed units were selected based on the researcher's judgement (Hattori and Lance, 2016). These authors continue that purposive sampling techniques are used mainly by experts who rely solely on their judgement and expertise.The researcher opted for this sampling procedure because she has been exposed to thesocial work environment and has interacted with social workers and children whose foster care applications are pending.
In the context of the current study the researcher conversed with the intended beneficiaries as well as their caregivers.

The researcher was a student social worker at the Department of Social Development and an intern at the office in the Vhembe District, Department of Social Development and was well- versed with the foster-care reporting system whilst still practising as an intern social worker. The researcher's observations and informal discussions with prospective children and their caregivers sparked the researcher's interest in exploring issues involving foster children. Engeland Schutt (2013) recommend that participants be

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chosen because they are in a prime position to provide rich data about the matter under investigation. The sampling criteria was as follows:

- Youth who are staying with their non-biological parents/caregivers but related by kinship within Tshisaulu Village, Thulamela municipality.
- Youth and caregivers who have at least visited a social workers office for fostercare related issues (Intake) at Tshisaulu Thulamela municipality.
- Youth who are school going between the ages 15-18 meeting the requirementsfor a foster care grant but are yet to receive at Tshisaulu Thulamela municipality.

The researcher applied this type of sampling because the primary purpose was to understand issues highlighted by the participantsand then generalize the findings to theentire population. In addition, budget constraints and limited time pushed the researcherto employ this sampling type. Moreover, the researcher seeks to understand how theseyouth are affected by the backlog meanwhile they do meet the requirements to benefit from the foster care system.

3.8 Data collection method

De Vos et al. (2011) stipulate that data collection is an organized process of assemblinginformation for specific phenomena and finding answers to research problems. Scholarssuch as Bryman and Neuman (2011) refer to data collection as a systematic process ofgathering andseparating relevant information on variables of interest to answer researchquestions. Data wascollected after the researcher was granted ethical clearance by theUniversity of Venda Human and social sciences Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix E). The researcher further requested permission from Vha Musanda Makumbane at Tshisaulu (Thavhani) Village, Thulamela municipality, Vhembe District, Limpopo which was granted (see Appendix B).

The researcher utilized interviews as the method by which data was collected. Whisker (2018)views interviews as a specialized mode of communication between people for a specific purpose. Interviews assisted the researcher in obtaining as much information from participantsbased on their feelings and experiences. The researcher noted that face- to-face interviews allowfor explaining questions that participants may not understand in telephonic interviews (Monette, 2014). In addition, the researcher was interested in

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observing the participants' emotions, body gestures and facial expressions as they explained the ripple effect of the foster care backlog on their social and academic lives.

An unstructured interview schedule (see Appendix A) assisted the researcher in identifying critical variables and formulating and probing essential questions, whichallowed a flow of essential discussions regarding the subject matter. Unstructured interviews do not necessarily use an interview schedule as in structured interviews. Withthis format, the researcher could probe for more information from participants; they couldanswer questions in any fashion and any order, allowing for probing of answers given toget clarity. Unstructured interviews are supposed to be time-consuming and do not followorders during the process; nevertheless, the researcher employed them in this study because it allowed extensive probing to enrich the data.

Given the present circumstances of Covid-19, the researcher was cognizant of all the protocols;the researcher and participants observed all the protocols by putting on a mask,often sanitizing,keeping social distancing, and arranging to meet with 2 participants eachday, in an open areato allow for ventilation. The interview proceedings took place outsideat the children'srespective homes. The researcher first explained ethical issues to the participants' and some caregivers. Explaining issues to the participants and their caregivers was deemed necessary because they ought to know the legal and social implications, benefits and risks of participating in the study.

During the interview proceedings, the researcher ensured that the participants understood the question(s) posed; participants requested permission to use a transcriptsduring interviews to ensure that all data was accurately captured .. Descombe (2010) cautions that when collecting data, researchers should rely onsomething other than theirmemory; it may be unreliable because interviewers may need to remember whatparticipants said.

Descombe (2010) supports the simultaneous use of two methods to collect data, statingthat field notes involve taking notes during the interview about the location, atmosphere,and otheraspects, such as nonverbal cues, and audio recordings help the researcher to have precisely what participants had said (verbatim). This increases the reliability of thedata because the researcher can refer to the recordings for accuracy; prior to using these

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two approaches, the researcher obtained permission from participants and guardians toparticipate in the study by having them sign written consent forms (See Appendix B).

In this study data was anticipated to be collected from 20 participants however, upon collecting data with participant A010 and A011 the researcher noticed that there is a pattern that is occurring their responses and in research this could suggest that the researcher could be reinventing the wheel thus reaching data saturation. Nonetheless, the researcher continued with the interviews until the pattern resurfaced again with participant A012. At this stage the researcher was sure that indeed she has reached datasaturation. Most participants were giving similar responses as per different themes however, the last three participants gave similar responses also considering that one ofthe participants is a male with the remaining two being females. Males are not really seen as articulative compared to females, (see discussion in chapter 2 and 4).

3.9 Pilot Study

Vogel and Droper (2017) regard pilot studies as an introductory process that examines the mainstudy's crucial components. This activity is done to determine the feasibility of the study.

Executing a pilot test is valuable to make a determination of whether there are weaknesses, limitations loopholes or any significant discomforts in the design of the interview schedule before the interviews commence (Turner, 2010). A pilot test cannot be conducted with participants who have varying interests from those who will take partin the study. It is therefore recommended that one or two of the participants be part of the pilot test but will not form part of the overall study. Piloting the interview schedule liesin assisting the researcher in refining and aligning the research question(s) which the participants (in the pilot) felt uncomfortable with (Turner, 2010). A pilot test with two participants meeting the sampling criteria was conducted. However, it is noted that the researcher did not change the main research question which was: “What are the effectsof the foster care backlog”. The researcher did, however, make extensive field notes after the interview about the types of probing themes and questions (see Appendix A) that would be more aligned to systems theory as well as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (discussed in Chapter 2).

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The researcher tested the methods outlined in the chapter to ensure the study'sfeasibility withthe target population. The study was piloted with two female learners agedsixteen and seventeen years. However, these two did not form part of the study's participants. The researcher approached the participants through Vha Musanda of Tshisaulu village in Thulamela municipality, Vhembe district. Their primary caregivers permitted the researcher to access the children and ask questions about the subject matter.. A major highlight was that one of the participants in the pilot meet the minimumrequirements to qualify for a foster care grant yet they have not received any feedback from their area social worker. The researcher confirmed this by engaging with Vha- Musanda about this ordeal and also trying to get an understanding of the steps he took to ensure that the participants are assisted.

3.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of collating the data mass collected by the researcher to categorise and make sense of the findings into themes De Vos 2011. Qualitative data analysis dissects the mass collection and identifies essential data to achieve the study's objectives. Hence, it wasunnecessary to categorize the entire collected information, as some information was reduced (Schurink, Fouche and De Vos (2011).. . Themes emerged from the questions posed to participants during the interviews with research participants. The findings were used to categorize the raw data.

Data was transcribed by the researcher using Creswell's (2009) method of data analysis cited inBothma, Greeff, Mulaudzi and Wright (2010). Steps for analysing data according to Creswell (2009, cited in Botma et al. (2010), are:

- ✓ The researcher transcribed audiotape interviews as well as the word-by-word – verbatimnotes taken down by the researcher and transcribed the interviews.
- ✓ Interviews with richest information were selected for cleansing.
- ✓ The procedure was done in respect of the entire transcripts. Themes were identified, andother significant information was also identified as sub-themes.
- ✓ Based on the list, the researcher reverted to the transcribed data and the identified themeswere abbreviated as codes.
- ✓ Intimately related themes remained together.
- ✓ The researcher then arrived at a final decision about the abbreviations for each theme andits related code.

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- ✓ The researcher assembled material fitting to each category in one place and carried a pilotanalysis.
- ✓ The researcher commenced with the process of reporting the research findings, which arepresented in Chapter 4.

3.11 Measures to Ensure Trustworthiness

3.11.1 Quality Criteria

The researcher ensured trustworthiness by following the points outlined by Schwandt,Lincoln, & Guba (2007). These authors define *trustworthiness* as the ability of an inquirer to persuade readers that the study's findings are significant and that the research is of high quality. Trustworthiness in research refers to the degree to which research can be authenticated, qualified, and relied upon. It ensures that the researchfindings reflect the reality that participants presented about the phenomenon (Lodico,Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010). Included in this discussion are the following aspects:

3.11.2 Transferability

According to Mertens (2010), transferability is a concept that ensures that the findings ofspecific research apply to similar situations or other contexts. The reader is responsiblefor determining the degree of similarity between the research site and the reader's site (Lodico et al., 2010). Triangulation of various data sources was used to ensure the transferability of findings. This is consistent with Maree (2010) and Moser and Korstjens(2017), who argue thatreaders should be able to apply the findings of this study to othercontexts because detailed descriptions of the participant's behaviour and experiences were provided. The researcher thoroughly described the study's context and methods, and information about the study's topicwas clearly outlined to improve transferability.

The researcher met this criterion of transferability by providing a detailed description of the participants and all the processes used to collect and analyse data, as outlined in this chapter under - population, sampling, data collection, and techniques used. The interview questions were designed to allow participants to provide descriptions of their perceptions or experiences with the foster-care backlog, support needed by these children as well as the challenges encountered by their non-placement and not receivingthe grant.

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3.11.3 Credibility

According to Mertler and Charles (2011), credibility refers to the truth and accuracy of researchfindings and whether findings can be trusted from the perspective of research participants. According to Lodico et al. (2010), credibility refers to whether or not participants' perceptions of the setting or events correspond to the researcher's interpretation of those perceptions in theresearch report. Similarly, Norris and Moules (2017) note that credibility is the assurance that the researcher's conclusions stem fromthe collected data and not from any preconceived notions of the researcher.

The study's credibility was achieved through extensive engagement with all parties because thestudy was qualitative. The scheduled time for all sessions with participants was flexible because it depended on how participants expressed themselves. The researcher accomplished this by producing credible and convincing findings and verifying with participants whether theresearcher's interpretation of data accurately reflects the experiences expressed during the interviews.

The adopted qualitative method was followed carefully to avoid loopholes during the process;this ensured that the research findings were consistent with the reality of the subject matter. Bryman (2012) asserts that establishing credible findings necessitates returning to the people the researcher had interviewed and confirming if the researcher had understood and captured what they had said correctly; this is also called 'respondentvalidation'. Bryman (2012) contends that respondent validation, also known 'member validation,' is a process of investigating the credibility of the study findings to ensure theaccuracy of the participant's responses.

3.11.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which other researchers can confirm a study's findings. Confirmability is thus concerned with demonstrating that data and interpretations of findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but are derived from the data collected (Korstjens & Albine Moser, 2018) for this member and data checking was performed. Shenton (2004) defines *confirmability* as the extent to which research findings can be confirmed and corroborated by other researchers; thus, the process attempts to ensure that findings reflect participants' perceptions and experiences rather than the researcher's.

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During data collection, the researcher used a notepad to record her assumptions, ideas,and feelings that could have influenced and jeopardized the research findings. The promoter questioned the study's methods and ensured that the researcher's values did not interfere with the data. The researcher acted in "good faith" by ascertaining that participants did not feel coerced and that their participation was voluntary. The researcher did not capitalize on the power disparity between herself and the participants.Participants/guardians completed consent forms willingly, guided by the ethical principlesof voluntary participation and availability sampling.

3.11.5 Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which the research processes and methods can be replicated by another researcher using the same methods, participants, and findings (Shenton, 2004). Creswell (2017) further denotes that dependability refers to thedegree to which the reader is convinced that the findings occurred, as the researcher stated. Identified themes werediscussed with participants to ensure that they were awareof what happened during the interview and that they were accurate and reliable Cresswell, 2017). In order to meet the study'sdependability, the researcher ensured thatthe data collection methods used were repeated in the same context and with all participants to obtain comparable results. In addition, the promoters of the study were engaged throughout the process to give guidance and support. Theresearcher believesthat the consistency of findings promoted the concept of reliability. In this study, the researcher used notetaking and audio recording with the consent of the participants.

3.11.6 Reflexivity

It is one of the strategies used by qualitative researchers that ensure rigour and quality in their work. Reflexivity is also perceived as the gold standard for determining trustworthiness (Teh & Lek, 2018). The researcher was part of the research proceedings,fully engaged with the participants and provided the necessary support for the data collection process to progress smoothly. The experience throughout the analysis helpedto bring awareness of any biases andfixed ideas of the researcher. The researcher usedbracketing data to ensure that the study findings were organised.

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3.11.7 Triangulation

Noble & Heal (2019) refer to triangulation as a method researchers use to enrich variousdata sets to explain different aspects of a phenomenon. The researcher, on several occasions, triangulated the responses from the caregivers. The caregivers gave the researcher a richer perspective of the phenomenon researched. The researcher utilisedthe triangulation method toconfirm the responses given by the prospective beneficiaries.

3.12 Ethical Consideration

Ethics refers to the fundamental principles that must be followed in social research (Ramcharan& Cutcliffe, 2001). It is critical in research to consider the worth and dignity of those who are participating in the study (Gilbert, 2008). Ethics has become a cornerstone for conducting effective and meaningful research. Neuman (2014) isolates autonomy, including the ethical aspects of informed consent, privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality, as essential in research. Therefore, reference was made to the above- mentioned ethical considerations. Best and Kahn(2006), reiterated by Strydom (2011), contend that the ethical behaviour of both the researcher and the respondents is under unprecedented scrutiny in current studies.

The following ethical principles were observed:

Informed consent

The concept refers to informing the respondents about the study. Informed consent is limited to obtaining consent from respondents/guardians and providing sufficient information about the study, assuring them of their rights and allowing them to withdrawfrom the study should they wish (De Vos, 2011). Resonating with this, Christians (2005)recommends that for prospective participants to consent to participate in a study, they need complete and open information about the study and its implications. Given the above assertions, potential participants need not be taken for granted. Hence, they wereinformed of the details of the study enabling them to arrive at well-informed decisions while knowing any risks involved. The researcher ensured that the participants are aware that with their permission, the information will only be shared with the research supervisors. Pre – contact issues was also communicated to the participants.

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The study had targeted the youth; therefore, the researcher obtained written and verbalpermission from the children's primary caregivers to conduct interviews with them. The researcher thoroughly explained the study's purpose and procedures, eliciting willingness to participate. The researcher also requested permission to record the interview proceedings digitally. Furthermore, participants were informed about who wouldaccess the recordings and transcripts of the recorded interview proceedings - the researcher, the person who would write the transcripts, and the study promoters,. Participants/guardians were asked to sign the consent form once they had decided to participatevoluntarily in the research.

Voluntary participation

The researcher ensured that participants understood that their participation in the studywas subject to their consent. Participants were also informed that their participation wasvoluntaryand that no payment would be made as a form of gratitude. In the events beforethe interviews,phone calls were communicated (De Vos et al., 2011). Christians (2005) states that participantsmust agree voluntarily to participate. Some researchers may exert physical or emotional blackmail on participants to force them to participate in a study. Given the above, Leedy & Ormrod (2014:107) suggests that,

> *"When people are being recruited for a research study, they should be told the nature of the study and given the choice of either participating or not participating. Furthermore, they should be told that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they agree to participate. Under no circumstances should people feel pressure to participate from employers or other more authoritative individuals. Any participation in a study should be strictly voluntary".*

The ethical principle of 'free will' is essential to any scientific investigation. Before each interview, the researcher held a briefing session. Participants were well-versed in the study's aims and objectives. The researcher explicitly stated to the participants that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that there would be no negative consequences if they chose to withdraw; thus, participants were informed that they couldwithdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, participants were not provided with incentives or payment for the study.

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Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to the rights and interests of the participant in ensuring that informationabout the study and the respondents' responses are shared in confidence with the relevant stakeholders (Strydom, 2011). Confidentiality is one of the highly valuedprinciples of the social work profession. In research, Mertens and Wilson (2012) contend,"confidentiality means collecting, analysing, storing and reporting data in such a way thatthe data cannot be traced back to the individual who provides them". The researcher emphasized the ethical principle of confidentiality to the participants, so they were fully aware that the information they had given would not be divulged to any other person without their permission.

Privacy

De Vos (2011 notes that every individual has the right to privacy. It is the respondents' right todecide when, where, to whom and to what extent their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour will be revealed. It is irrefutable that participants will be comfortable participating in a study where there is no chance of their names or identity being revealed. The researcher used pseudonyms to protect the participants' biographical information and identities. The researcher adhered to the ethical principle of privacy by avoiding usingparticipants' real names during the interviews, audio transcripts, and dataanalysis. Pseudo- names were used in the transcripts for confidentiality reasons. The ethical principles of anonymity and confidentiality are directly linked to the ethical principle of informationmanagement.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter presented a detailed account of the methodology utilized for the study; theresearch approach used was qualitative with an experimental research design. The chapter hasalso discussed the research method employed to select the population for the study who were prospective beneficiaries of the foster care grant. The studyemployed a non-probability, purposive sampling method for selecting participants for thestudy and unstructured interviews to collect data. The final sections of the chapter focused on a detailed discussion of ethical principles employed for the study.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter is presented the analysis and interpretation of the empirical qualitative findings of this study. The study aimed to explore the effects of the foster-care applications' backlog on prospective beneficiaries in Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality, Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province. The researcher conductedunstructured face-to-face interviews with a sample of twelve (12) prospective beneficiaries in Thohoyandou. The participants were selected in accordance with their experiences with delayed foster care applications and placement. The study adopteda qualitative approach wherein data was collected using unstructured interviews as well as open-ended questions. Participants were selected purposefully considering their availability and all participants signed informed consent forms prior to the processof datacollection.

The research findings supported by the literature review are discussed according to themes and subthemes and to the study objectives.

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4.2 Biographical Details of the Prospective Beneficiaries

PARTICIPANT	AGE	GENDER	GRADE
A01	18	Female	12
A02	18	Female	11
A03	17	Female	11
A04	17	Female	11
A05	17	Male	10
A06	16	Male	10
A07	17	Male	12
A08	15	Female	09
A09	18	Female	12
A010	15	Female	09
A011	18	Male	12
A012	17	Female	10

Table 4.2 1: Biographical Details of the Prospective Beneficiaries

To comprehensively understand the participants, the table above presents the demographics of the participants. The table illustrates participants ages, gender, and current school grade. Most of the participants were female ranging from seventeen

(17) to eighteen (18) years of age, followed by males ranging from seventeen (17) years of age to eighteen (18) years. The youngest participants were a female participant who was 15 years old and a male participant of 16 years old.

4.2.2 Biographical details of the caregivers

Caregiver participant	Relationship	Gender
A09	**Grandmother**	**Female**
A02	**Grandmother**	**Female**
A08	**Uncle**	**Male**
A06	**Grandmother**	**Female**
A07	**Grandmother and Aunt**	**Female**

The table above depicts the details of the intended beneficiaries' caregivers. Majority ofthese beneficiaries are cared for by their grandmothers, with only one participant who

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remains under the care and supervision of his uncle. Meanwhile one other participant iscared for by both her grandmother and her aunt. It was paramount to have the caregiversinsights on this study particularly for participants who have not reached an age of consent.

4.3 Presentation of Findings and Literature Control

This section presents the themes and sub-themes that emanated from the qualitative data gathered from the prospective beneficiaries. The study employed the use of unstructured interview schedules aided by open-ended questions to collect data from twelve participants and five caregivers. The table below presents a synopsis of the themes and sub- themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected to provide an overview of the findings of the effects of the foster-care backlog on prospective beneficiaries. Literature is an important aspect in presentation of findings, so the diverseliterature discussed in Chapter 2 is infused in the presentation and analysis of findings. The literature influenced the presentation, analysis, and discussion of thestudy findings;the process gauged the findings against relevant existing literature – either by way of endorsement or dispute.

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4.4 Framework for the analysis

QUALITATIVE DATA FROM PROSPECTIVE BENEFICIARIES
THEME 1: Contributory factors to the foster care backlog **Sub-theme A: Lack of Supervision** **B: Lack of resources/ tools of trade** **C: Advertisement to trace biological parent(s)**
THEME 2: Effects of the foster care backlog on prospective beneficiaries **Sub-theme A: Peer group pressure** **B: Poor school attendance and low academic performance** **C: Poor satisfaction of overall needs** **D: High Levels of Stress**
THEME 3: Possible financial constraints and coping mechanisms **Sub-theme A: Casual jobs** **B: Old age grant** **C: Covid relief grant** **D: Intimate relationships**
THEME 4: Possible suggestions and recommendations on enhanced service delivery **Sub-theme A: Employment of new trained social workers** **B: Purchase of tools of trade** **C: Collaboration of community leaders and area social workers**

4.4.1 Theme 1: Contributory factors to the foster care backlog

In this study the researcher sought to establish the motivating factors for prospective beneficiaries not benefitting from the foster-care grant which is their constitutional rightas stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and further supported by the Children's Act no.38 of 2005.

Findings revealed that one factor contributing heavily to the backlog in respect of prospective beneficiaries is the lack of supervision between social workers and their supervisors. Supervision is depicted a process whereby an authorised supervisor looks after another employee's performance and provides direction on work activities. Supervisors are seen to provide guidance and oversee the practice of social work (Kirst-Ashman, 2017). The other factors are the lack of resources and/or tools of the trade,

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not directing clients relevantly, and social workers' reluctance to complete the necessaryforms for the advertisement process (Form 30) in cases of unknown biological parents.

4.4.1.1 Sub-Theme A: Lack of supervision

Drawing from participants' responses it was evident that social workers are poorly or not supervised at all. Participants mentioned that when they enquire about their applications,the social workers dismiss them and tell them that the supervisor has notsigned the documents. Participants responded that social workers tell them that they do not know how to help them because the supervisor has not told them what to do. This is a clear indication that supervision is lacking, and social workers are not supervised as also stated by Sikhitha (2017). Participants gave the responses of the social workers they have been in contact with as follows:

> *"The social worker told me that since I came the first time, the papers they wrote for me have not been worked on. we must wait for the supervisor to come. She will be the one to give directive and say what must happen. Even when they talk, they do not care like they are not bothered", (Participant A01).*

> *"When we go to social workers, they tell us that the supervisor has not been to the office. We must go back and they will contact us when the supervisor comes". (Participant A10)*

> *"All they say is that they are waiting for the supervisor; the supervisor must tell them what to do". (Participant, A06)*

> "Your situation is difficult, hectic. I do not know what to do". (Participant, A04) "Me and the supervisor are the same, wait for the right person to come".(Participant A01).

The above finding is in line with Sikhitha (2018) where she mentions that social workersare not trained to perform statutory work, so they fail to produce the desired outcomes due to lack of supervision. From this study, lack of supervision indeed contributes to thefoster-care applications' backlog such that the much-needed services to the affected population seem almost impossible. Sikhitha (2018) posits thatthat there is a decline in

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the norms and standards of the profession as well as service delivery to the most vulnerable groups in Vhembe Department of Social development.

It is apparent from the participants' responses that some social workers in statutory careservices lack the basic attributes to be social workers - they lack passion, and they simplydo not care. From the study, there is also a certain level of prospective beneficiaries' feelings of helplessness that the situation could not be resolved as wellas lack of basic trust between social workers and their clientele.

The above is confirmed by Mokgalapa (2020) that social workers do not receive the sufficient correct supervision they need to deal with challenges that come with foster care. This exacerbates the foster care backlog, thereby, encouraging poor quality of workand service delivery. Sikitha (2018) echoes the same sentiments that social workers arenot supervised effectively at Vhembe DSD.

It is essential for social workers to receive support from their supervisors to ensure qualityservice delivery to beneficiaries (Moaisi, 2003). Engelbrecht (2014) mentions that the Social Services Professions Act, 110 of 1978 and the code of ethics guide thesupervisionof social work and outline how social workers should be supervised. Garthwait (2011) and Budeli (2021) assert that the supportive function of supervision is characterised by sustaining staff morale and encouraging workers; support and supervision are crucial forhuman service organisations where stress and burnout arecommon risks. Supervisors need to create and set a positive atmosphere for the workenvironment that is favourableand effective in rendering of services.

4.4.1.2 Sub-Theme B: Lack of resources/tools of trade

Most of the participants, expressed feelings of frustrations and anger towards the lackofresources and insufficient tools of trade. Participants reported experiencing problems with social workers turning them back because they did not have certified copies of original documents. The lack of resources and insufficient equipment have a negative impact on service delivery, and these contribute to the foster-care applications' backlog.The participants mentioned that social workers would tell them that they lack resources, which include government vehicles, stationery, computers/laptops, and telephones.

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An overwhelming number of participants feel frustrated and angry over the lack of resources and equipment in social workers' offices. These resources and tools of tradeare essential for the delivery of quality services therefore, of utmost important in the execution of foster-care grant and placement services, as participants remarked:

> *"They only tell us that they will come, but by who's car, it never happens". (Participant, A01)*
>
> *"Social workers complain about not having any vehicles provided by the government. Even when the cars are here, they say the roads are bad." (Participant A04)*
>
> *"They have not been coming; they told me that the Department does not have cars and they will not use their own cars for the DSD". (Participant, A011)*

From the above quotations, lack of government vehicles to conduct home visitations forthe betterment of the vulnerable population seems to be a dire need. A backlog of unsettled cases results when social workers are without the needed resources to executetheir statutory duties as more of the participants complained:

> *"Social workers will always want certified copies; they will never say you can do copies here. In those offices nothing works". (Participant A04,)*
>
> *"They told me that when they do not call I should not be surprised as phones in the office are not working". (Participant, A06)*
>
> *"They told us that they do not have airtime to call us; it has been a while since they have been using their own." (Participant A07)*

The findings above confirm that resources are an essential component in the executionof foster-care issues. Participants reported intense feelings of sadness, anger, and frustrations when they are sent back home for not being able to produce copies of originaldocuments needed for their files. The lack of resources serve as a challenge preventingthese beneficiaries gaining access to social services they need and contributing immensely to the foster-care backlog. Another participant mirrored the above when he reported that:

> "Social workers gave me the copies back and told me that they have expired, Imust come back with other ones. Social workers do not even help with makingcopies". (Participant, A07)

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> "They told me that all needed documents for my application have expired, andI should come with new ones". (Participant A011)

Similar findings were outlined by Ngwenya (2011) and Mokgalapa (2018), that withouttheneeded relevant resources to improve productivity and acceleration of service delivery there will be minimum positive outcomes in the day-to-day business of the social workers.Without a government car to conduct home visits, reports will be poorly written, with inappropriate recommendations; without a government cellphone or landline phone in the offices, possible communication with clients will be negatively affected. Drawing fromthe researchers own personal experience as an intern social worker at Vhembe DSD, thestudy findings complement the researcher's observations confirming that lack of resources and tools of trade are challenges in the Department.A lack of these equipmentand other resources strain social workers and inhibit them from performing their statutoryduties. Sibanda and Lombard (2015), Dhludhlu (2017)confirm this notion as their studies confirmed that challenges within the Department ofSocial Development in relation to foster-care cases include shortage of resources.

4.4.1.3 Sub-Theme C: Non-completion of Advertisements to trace unknown biological parent(s) (Form30)

The Children Act no. 38 of 2005 makes provisions for beneficiaries who qualify or meettheminimum requirements to receive a grant and be granted a court order for placement. Beneficiaries who are considered eligible for these are - orphaned, abandoned, at risk, abused and/or neglected children. A considerable number of participants were well versed with the advertisement process. They reported that social workers would inform them about this advertisement process, to enable social workers to trace the whereabouts of unknown fathers or mothers. This, however, wasnot taking place as theparticipants reported:

> *"The social worker told granny that she will advertise in the newspaper. My grandmother went back so many times to the social worker to check whether the advertisement found my father". (Participant A09)*

"Livhuwani my daughter, this child is in her matric year now but nothing has been donetofind her father and the social worker is still not giving us answers about that

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advertisement. I don't think she did it, if she did she should be able to tell me something. I don't think I'm getting foster grant for my granddaughter because the advertwas not done, God will provide, I am no longer going back". Ma Social worker *avha kolizwoneee uyu muduhulu wanga ukho fela uvha tsiwana naa, fhedzi ahuna tsho dinaho rikhou di tshila nga yenei yanga ya mundende "(caregiver participantA09).*

> This quotation translates into:
> "Social workers are rude, they do not sympathise with anyone. Is it because my grand-daughter is an orphan? Nonetheless all is well we will persevere and depend on my old age grant for survival."
>
> Furthermore, another participant shared the same sentiments with the participant above:
> *"Khotsia nwana ndi vha wane ngafhi ngauri na mme awe olovha asongo ri vhudza kana uto ri sumbedza vho uri ri vha todele gai. Ma Social worker are SASSA o mbudza uri mundende wa hoyu nwana a unga bvi ngauri ndo fara death nthihi futhi khotsi a nwana avha divhei".*

The above translates into: "where am, I supposed to find the father of this child becauseher mother passed away, she did not tell us who the father is or where we can find him.Social workers at SASSA Thohoyandou told me that they will not be ableto process theapplication because I have only 1 death certificate and the whereaboutsof the father areunknown". (Caregiver of Participant A02)

During the interviews the researcher observed an upsurge of emotions and feelings of helplessness, sadness and hopelessness and the participant felt defeated and failed bythe social system. When clients visit social workers' offices, it is their last resort andtheywish for their hope to be restored, but the opposite is the case. It was evident from the findings that the foster-care client systems are not organised, therefore participants in the study have given up and lost all hope in the profession. This statement finds supportin Mag (2016) and Sikhitha, (2018); the latter states "social workers need to be inductedinto the body of knowledge of the profession, and into the policy framework and various theoretical basics for the profession". Moriarty et al.,(2015) comments that, without somebreakthrough, social workers will continue to fail in their day-to-day duties in the helping

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profession; furthermore, they will not learn to appreciate their various roles and principleswithin social work.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Effects of the foster care backlog on prospective beneficiaries

This theme emanates from the likelihood of prospective beneficiaries suffering dire consequences from the non-payment of the foster care grant. The researcher had reasonto believe that without the foster care grant it would be extremely difficult for prospectivebeneficiaries to lead a healthy, stress-free life like their peers. From this background, these subsequent themes and sub-themes emerged.

Findings of this study revealed that prospective beneficiaries succumb easily to peer group pressure; they are often absent from school which has led to some dropping outofschool and their high rates of absenteeism leave room for poor academic performance.Beneficiaries are stressed as their needs are not met.

4.4.2.1 Sub-Theme A: Peer group pressure

An overwhelming number of participants reported that they feel less of a girl/boy if theydonot have the same items as those of their peers. Participants explicitly explained that they want to feel that they belong and are accepted by their peers. This statementis supported by Stott and Gustavsson (2010) as cited in Morris (2014), who postulatethat feeling unwanted has been the greatest hindrance to foster youth's success particularly,at the social level. Participants said:

> *"Honestly, there is someone I am seeing and he is older than me. I know what I am doing is wrong but this man takes care of me and I just want to be like other children/kids. He buys me things I know grandma will not be able to afford, even my aunt". (Participant A01)*
>
> *"I am dating an older guy. This man buys me what I want, he even bought me a cellphone. My aunty is unable to buy me the type of clothes that I want. Food like snacks for lunch at school he buys all that and my lunchbox looks like other children's". (Participant A02)*

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Manzoni, Rihtaric and Ricijas (2011) explain peer group pressure, as a feeling of wantingto do the same or similar things of another person in their own age cohort and social groupto be accepted, respected and loved. In view of the findings above, participants desire to be loved, respected, and accepted by their peers. They feel compelled to do things and behave in a certain way because of the social pressures, injustices and influence they are subjected too on a day-to-day basis.

Zetlin (2006; 2012) acknowledges that there is a great need for these foster youths to establish healthy peer networks, however, there seems to be a serious disconnect looking at the negative peer network that participants are part of. This goes a long wayinproving that indeed the grant money could improve the lives of participants, however should it not be paid when they are eligible to getting it, chances of improving their livesare stalled while encouraging participants into negative peer association.

On the same point, another participant said:

> *"I asked father to buy me a Puma back pack but he refused and said that he does not have money for the type of school bag I want. Other kids will laugh at me. My friends all have these nice back packs and I am the only one who does not have." (Participant A08)*

Societal pressures and influences posed such a negative impact on the above participantthat she missed a full week of school. From the comments, it was clear thatthe participantfeared rejection, has self-esteem issues, and seeks approval and validation from her peers. Peer and societal pressures that the youth succumb to arean indicator of internalconflicts they have with themselves. In this context, the likelihood of the youth eventuallydropping out of school due to these pressures are high, however, these are issues that can be mitigated with the correct type ofintervention.

4.4.2.2 Sub-Theme B: Poor school attendance and low performance

Stone (2007) asserts that children who have suffered neglect due to unprocessed grantpayments and placements into a stable home, appear to be particularly vulnerable to academic deficits among others; this is because their educational rightshave not been taken into consideration. Participants reported poor attendance at school, which for some of the participants led to low performance in their schoolwork.Participants revealed

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being interested more in taking care of themselves and siblings thus, participants have been missing school. Following as some of the comments theymade:

> *"Sometimes I get to school late coming from my boyfriend's place and by the time I get to school it is already late so they refuse to open for me without my guardian. I just decide to go back home or chill at the market until when school is over". (Participant A01)*
>
> *"My boyfriend buys me everything I want; I am just glad that he bought me a cell phone. But on weekends, I work, I wash laundry for people in the village" (Participant A02*)

Participants engage in intimate relationships with older men just to make a living. These participants are most likely lured by these older men through all the materialisticitems thatthe former are provided with. These youth need to be readily available for their partnersso that they do not forfeit the benefits of dating older men. It seems theseyouths have reached a point where they are comfortable with the life, they are living so they do not see a need to be in school, hence, they are performing badly. In theserelationships, thefemale youth become emotionally attached to these men; this practice affects them mentally and has a negative effect on their educational progression.

> *"At school it is very difficult. I am unable to concentrate like other kids. I don't see any reason for me to continue with school because I won't make it further." (Participant A011)*
>
> *"At school I am only going because I have no choice. I wake up early and clean before going to school". (Participant A05)*

Poor school attendance and low performance cannot be seen or viewed as separate entities. These two have been linked to many factors in the study, such as losing interest in school-related activities, exhaustion, and fatigue due to house chores and social pressures. In support of the above statement, another participant highlighted the following:

> *"At school I am trying to push, I am already tired when I arrive at school. I wake up in the morning and clean the house." (ParticipantA07)*

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Fatigue and exhaustion due to completing house chores tire the participants to an extentthat they cannot concentrate in the classroom. This leaves room for poor performance intheir schoolwork. In the same context, other participants said:

> *"I am always tired, after school. I help my grandmother in the fields or I help her sell her harvest. I don't have the energy to come back home and study." (Participant A010)*
>
> *"I sometimes think of quitting school, actually I want too. I know that I will never get a chance to enrol in a university; my aunt will not afford the expenses that come with going to university." (Participant A01)*
>
> *"There are days when I feel like I should just quit, there are times when I don't even know what I am going to do there". (Participant A011)*
>
> *"Sometimes before and after I go to school, I wash cars for people and I get paid for that. Even in cold weathers I wash cars. When I am sick I stay at home and sometimes for a whole week; by the time I get to school It is difficult for me to catch up. I feel useless sometimes and just want to drop out because I am not even a smart learner; the money I make from washing cars I use it to pay for extra lessons and sometimes I give my mother to buy us food." (Participant 07)*

Poor school attendance and low performance are some of the reasons the youth end updropping out of school. Participants have a strong urge to simply drop out of school because of losing interest due to financial constraints. The researcher believes that theseparticipants would have a different perspective on life if social workers could assist them by fast-tracking their foster-care applications. A portion of the money, theywould receiveas grant payment could be saved for future endeavours; this would be for the benefit of the participants as it would see them through tertiary education.

The findings above resonate with literature that foster children perform far worse in their academics than non-foster care children (Advocates for Children of New York, 2000). The federal government in the United States of America offers financialassistance to foster-care youth for the continuation of post-secondary education, learners from foster-care programs are a smaller group in higher education (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020). It would be a great opportunity for identifiedfoster youth in South Africa to benefit from the government like it is done in the United.

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States of America, although, the South African government has introduced a financialaid scheme for deserving tertiary students. Accessing financial aid for tertiary studies,however, has been established as also a tedious journey for youth as like the social grant, the process requires extensive documentation. This would mean that these youth would still not be able to apply for post-secondary education when the time comes. This point is also directly linked to the findings where participants are losing interest and opting to drop out of school and go look for work.

4.4.2.3 Sub-Theme C: Non-satisfaction of needs

Needs are seen as necessities for a healthy development. Satisfying needs is a continuous process and successful needs-satisfaction leads to improved growth and well-being, therefore, Maslow (1943) asserts that a failure to meet and satisfy these needs can inhibit growth and development. Non-satisfaction of these needs may be due to environmental factors, or changes in individual or interpersonal actions, thoughts or feelings as outlined by Maslow (1943) and Deci and Ryan (2012). In this study, participants complained that many of their needs were left unmet due to non- placement and not benefitting from the grant. In support of the above, some participants made the following statements:

> *"Ahuna na thodea na nthihi ine nda nga tou uri ri khou kona uyi swikelela hafha hayani ngauri hu avha na maduvha ane huna phepho khamusi jersey isongo oma, nda kombetshedzea uya tshikoloni ngauri thi riya phakha zwiliwa tshikoloni." (Participant A010).*

This translates into:

> "Not even a single of my needs are met, for instance during cold weathers I amcompelled to go to school without a jersey because I know that I will get a mealat school."

> "*Habe muthu uya di touya sgele o baulukana" (Participant A05)*

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This translates into:

> *"It is possible, actually I do go to school without having smeared any lotion".*
> *"Nne ndi vhona u nga zwithu hayani a zwi khou tshimbila u tou thoma kha kutshilele, munwe na munwe u ita zwawe. Arali mundende ndo van di tshi uwana ndi vhona u nga thodea dza fhano hayani vho vha vha tshi do ita uri zwithu zwothe zwivhe hone. Mundende wo vha u tshi do renga zwiliwa zwine zwazwino zwia shorta hafha hayani. U sa vha na mubebi zwi a vhavha." (Participant A06).*

This translates into:

> *"Things are not okay at home, we are not fine starting from our own state of living, here at home it is everyone for themselves God for us all. If I was benefitting from the grant things would be much better. We would be able to buy food and other essentials because right now we actually run short of food. Being an orphan is not nice."*

"It was going to make a huge difference if we got the grant for this child. There is not even a single need that we are able to fully get". (participant A04)

The findings above find support in Luke and Coyne's study (2008) where they mentionthat prospective beneficiaries are in dire need of financial and emotional support for their most immediate needs to be met. Living in financially challenging circumstancesresults in these youth lacking their most immediate needs such as school materials, food and clothing. When these needs are not met, particularly, the physiological needs as mentioned above, it is very difficult for these youths to attain their psychological and self-fulfilment needs; they will not feel loved, protected and as such they turn to have a distorted sense of belonging. This discussion is strengthened by Unrau et al, (2008) whostate that these children do not see themselves as normal, but stigmatized due to not having appropriate clothing for school as other children. This could be an admission thatthe foster care grant is essential in these youth's lives to cater for itemssuch as clothingas participants reported:

> *"I do not even have clothes to wear, when my grandmother gets money all she thinks about is the small ones. What about me? This thing is so painful, especially when you know that there is money somewhere that was supposed*

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to be helping you but it is not there. It is stressful and I can see that my grandmother is saddened by all of this situation." (Participant A08)

"Ndi uri ngoho haya maSocial worker avha khou kona u zwi vhona uri vha khou ri tungufhadzela vhana, zwino ndi ita hani zwo tou rali?" (Caregiver, participant A08) Theabove translates into: these social workers cannot even see that their actionsinflict pain on our children, what am I to do in this situation.

The well-being and everyday functioning of children in care depends also on them developing self-esteem (Coholic et al., 2009; Fernandez 2008). Drawing from thefindings in the study, the well-being and everyday functioning of these youth have beenstalled as their physiological needs are not being met, therefore they will find it extremelydifficult to reach self-actualization stage and have all their established needsmet. This finds support in a study conducted by Gonzalez (2015) where he writes that,such youthwill continue to face great difficulties with the transition from adolescence to adulthood. It is confirmed in this study that these youth's most immediate needs arenot met such thatthey find it difficult to find their place as children in the society. Gonzalez (2015) adds that they could become victims of personal insecurity and of survival will be difficult for them, particularly, in a world that offers no support at all.

4.4.2.4 Sub-theme D: High levels of Stress

Stress is an intense feeling of being put under too much mental or emotional pressure (NHS, 2017). and when stress is prolonged, it has the potential to cause serious damageto physical, emotional, and mental health. Stressors have been seen to havemajor influence on mood, sense of well-being, belonging and behaviour (Schneiderman,Ironson and Siegel, 2005). In this study some participants said:

"The way I am so stressed, I don't know what to do anymore. There are days when we will sit with my siblings not knowing where our next meal will come from."

Ndizwone zwine zwa ita uri ndi humbule na u litsha tshikolo ngauri zwiafana musi".

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This translates into:

> *"This is what makes me think of just quitting because it's all the same; we are suffering. (Participant A07).*

The same participant continued:

> *"There is not much I can do other than to continue washing cars for people so that I can make money. We are so poor, I sometimes wash cars, maybe 2-3 in the morning before I go to school."*

Participant A010 shared the same sentiments:

> *"There is no one to help my grandmother at the orchard except me. See, at times I need to also help her sell her crop so that at least we get money to buy the basics. I think it is better to just quit school because I am always tired. I cannot get my schoolwork done, I am fatigued and again at school there is a punishment for that".*

Extreme fatigue does not only pose a disadvantage on academic grounds and progression but impacts negatively on the mental well-being of these young people. Their stress levels in conjunction with their upbringing context could make them prone to depression at an early age. These youth appear exhausted and cannot even begin focusing on their schoolwork considering the amount of responsibility they are faced with.

Literature highlights how stress and exhaustion can affect academic achievement by increasing the risk for school dropout (Walburg, 2014). Hess & Copeland (2001) notethat children who experience severe stressful life events, and those who do not have accessto support from their parents, caregivers and/or significant others are more likely to prematurely drop out of school. It is evident that these children are on the verge of dropping out of school. They are more concerned with their domestic responsibilities andassuming parental roles within their own families rather than focusing on their schooling.These findings demonstrate that indeed their state of well-being is violated, and their mental health is questionable. They find it very stressful tobe engaged in other pleasantactivities within the parameters of their own home, as they have to be engaged in activities to provide for themselves and their siblings, however, there is not much they can do to salvage or change the situation. The natureof their house chores and other

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duties make it difficult for them to continue studying or doing other school-relatedactivities.

> *"My aunt always reprimands me; she says that the things she hears about me and all the rumours are disgusting, so she is not talking to me." (Participant A01)*

This female child js also feeling stressed because of the strained relationship that existswithin the home. The idea of leaving the man whilst benefitting and living a luxurious lifestyle sponsored by him, as well as listening to her aunt's harsh words stresses the participant:

> *"I think my aunty wants me to focus on school, but I cannot leave this man because he gives me all that I want, he buys me school uniform. Maybe I am the cause for the delay with the processing of the grant payments because the social workers mentioned that I am always neat and beautiful so I do not look like I need the grant. This is just messy and complicated for me, serious ngoho"*

This is a clear indication that there is a serious disconnect between social workers andthenorms and standards of the profession. Social workers are meant to support and guide clients, understand the nature of their problems, and empower clients to be thebest thatthey can be. Every client must be seen as having inherent dignity; they havethe right to purposeful expression of feelings; unfortunately, social workers are not helping the situation but rather giving the participants more leverage to continue with dubious lifestyles. This is a cry for help and if social workers would listen to their clientsbefore theyconclude and make assumptions based on physical appearance they would get to the root of the problem. The participants are living a life that is stressful and everything seems to be a stressor.

Other participants stated:

> "*U sa vha na mubebi zi a vhavha."* (sobbing) (Participant A06)

This translates into:

> "The thought of not having a parent is so painful."
>
> *"Hoyu muthu u tou vhonala uri una mutsiko, naho asa mbudzi nne, zwi tou vha khagala. Ndi a ita ndi tshi humbulela na uri uvho ita zwa dzi thama, vhenevha vhasa divhelekani"*

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This translates into: this child really looks stressed, I sometimes think of the worst. Heisvery reserved although he does not tell me but I can just see. I sometimes think thathe has attracted bad company.

The loss of a parent is a common stressor; during the interviews, the participant confidedthat he was stressed due to the untimely death of his father. It is most likely that the participant feels that if his father was still alive many of his needs would be attended to.During this interview, judging from the participant's emotions and facial expressions, theresearcher deduced that the participant was still in intense pain; he has not found comfortyet. Boelen, Van de Schoot & Van de Hout (2010) made a similar point with Revet, Bui,Benvegnu & Raynaud (2020) where the former authors assert that twelve-to-eighteen- year-olds have a clear perception of death and its complexities as they are able to comprehend the full implications of death. The manifestations from death include - stress, grief and loss which are characterized by sadness, anxiety, loneliness in the midstof people and possible withdrawal symptomsas well as difficulties within the school environment and the household as an institution. Studies conducted by Boelen et al., (2010) and Revet (2020) concluded that children who present with stress-related factors,due to the loss of a loved one areprone to engage in risky behaviours. From the findingsof this study and the presentedliterature, it is clear that without careful consideration of theParticipants A06's feelings,he will eventually find solace in the hands of bad company.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Financial constraints and coping mechanisms

Casual jobs were seen as means to curb financial and economic challenges. In this study, participants reported surviving through taking up any job offers that come their way. Participants narrated that they would wash cars, do laundry, old age grant, child support grant and on the covid relief grant as means of getting financial resources. Engaging in inappropriate intimate relationship with older men was another way to mitigate the youth's financial, economic and social difficulties.

4.4.3.1 Sub-Theme A: Casual Jobs

Participants in the study mentioned that there was no other source of income in the familyexcept for the money that is made through casual jobs like, washing cars and other piece

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jobs:

> *"I wash cars for people, that is how I make money. Sometimes my mother is called for some domestic work but we cannot really focus on that money because she can go for days without being called.*" (Participant A07)
>
> *"I wash laundry for people in the village. Besides from my partner giving me money or buying me things I work for people and get paid for the laundry I washed." (Participant A02)*

Participants reported on their full dependency on the money that they make through casual jobs; the youth showed the urgent need for help because the money that they make from their jobs was not sufficient to meet their day-to-day needs. From this interview the exact amount of how much they make was not disclosed, it appeared that it was low. Generally, the cost of washing a car is R50.00, but one would not evenbe ableto buy mielie meal with a R50.00 note. In the townships, the common trend amongst those who require services from casual workers is that one basket of laundryis equal toR100.00. The need for casual jobs is shown in the comments below:

> *" tshinwe tshifhinga ndi a kona u kuvha mi mangi miraru nga duvha. Vha khou zwi vhona ndi tshi vha vhudza uri ndi a shuma. Tshelede ine nda ishuma ndi yone ine ndia kona u thusa mmane wanga u ita zwinwe zwithu hafha nnduni, tshinwe tshifhinga ndi soko renga ndo fhumula ngaurali khamusi ra vha ri sa khou tou amba zwavhudi hafha nnduni." (Participant A02)*

This translates into:

> *"At times, I can wash almost three baskets of laundry. You see when I said I am a hard worker I meant it. The money I make from washing is used to help with necessities that we are running short off in the house. Sometimes I buy without asking because I might not be on good speaking terms with my aunty."*

From these findings, the researcher believes that this participant despite getting financialassistance from her intimate partner, she really is a hard worker and possibly the idea ofinvolving herself with older men might not necessarily only be because sheis in dire needof money and other monetary items, but to a large extent it could be a cry for help. The participant might be looking for a father figure out of this relationship.

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4.4.3.2 Sub-Theme B: Utilization of Old Age Grant and Child Support Grant to mitigate financial constraints.

South Africa is known as a welfare state and as such post-apartheid era brought withit aprotection system that played a crucial role in combating poverty and many other socialills (Oosthuizen, 2012). A great number of participants reported that their grandparents fend for the family by using their own old age grant and the child supportgrant. Participantshighlighted the following;

> "Rine fhano ri khou tou tshila ngauri hu na yenei tshelede ya mundende wanga.Ahuna zwinwe zwine ra nga ita mundende wothe u fhelela kha u thogomela vhana havha. Ndasa ralo a hunga liwi mudini. Zwi tou vhavha musi gugu vhasitshena tshelede hu sina na zwiliwa kana hu tshi khou todea zwinwe zwa ndemezwanga. Ndiyone tshelede ino ri kundela fhano hayani. (Caregiver, participant A09)"

The above finding translates into: "We are only able to sustain our lives throughmy ownOld Age grant. There is not much I can do all this money goes into taking care of the children, should I not provide for them nothing will go well in this household."

> "It is just Painful when granny does not have enough or has no money at all tobuy food and other things. Her grant is the only income that keeps thehousehold together." Participant A09

> "Zwazwino vha tshi khou mbona ndo rali ndo lindela SASSA ya hoyu nwana mutuku, tshikoloni u tuwa nga transport ndi tshi tou hola tshelede yawe ndi khouya u badela transport ngayo ino sala nda renga marotho uswika zwenezwohu tshi wanala inwe." (Caregiver, participant A07)

"Right now as I am sitting here with you, I am waiting for the CSG for the youngest child.She uses transport to go to school so I need to use all her CSG pay-out to pay her transport fare and the remaining amount will be used to buyloaves of bread until such that I get money to buy more things."

Deducing from the findings, participants and caregivers commonly depend on the oldageand child support grant to meet just a few of their needs. Without these forms of grants,

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participants, will fail to have the basics that they need for survival, although, these grantsare not sufficient to meet all their needs. At times the grant pay-out is used to cater for the children's school-going needs and the rest is then used to cater for household needs. The reliance of participants and their caregivers on the old age grant cannot beexaggerated. Participants also mentioned that this over-dependencyon both the Child Support and Old Age grant increased during the COVID 19pandemic. The inconsistencyin the dates at which they received their pay-outs also affected their survival, because the beneficiaries cannot plan around the pay-outs hence the uncertainties. The household expenditure in these families is a lot higher than the Covid-19 pay-out they receive, hence, participants mentioned that although they do receive these cash pay-outs they do not equate to the daily expenses of the household.

There is a great need for these impoverished households to benefit from the foster- caregrant as it would make a long-lasting impact on the life of its recipients and their households in totality. These households, thus, would be doing a lot better if their applications for foster care had been processed. The total expenditure within these households would then be paid for from both the foster-care grant and the old-age grant.This would make a significant difference in their lives; these participants wouldeven havemore reasons to stay focused and motivated to complete their high school studies because money from their foster-care grant would be saved for their future endeavours,such as tertiary/college studies. It is apparent that social workers are failing to deliver their ethical and legal mandate to the vulnerable population.

4.4.3.3 Sub-Theme C: Social Relief Distress Grant

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the nation facing unprecedented social and economic challenges. These unforeseen circumstances weakened the survival strategies of low-income individuals and households who during this time had to endure financial destitution and constraints. In response to this the government of SouthAfrica introduced a special COVID-19 Social Relief Distress (SRD) grant of R350.00.

Some participants highlighted that their caregivers largely depended on the Covid-19 SRD grant to make ends meet. This grant was insufficient to cover all necessities of theaffected household, although, it supported them in their times of need. Participantssaid:

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"The covid-19 grant helped because my brother used it to buy food. There was a time when we did not have food and we were not allowed to go to school or to go out. It was a difficult time because if we were allowed to go out, I know my brother would have made a plan for us." (Participant A012)

"The R350.00 is used here at home to buy food but sometimes it takes time" (Participant A012)

The recurring inconsistencies of dates at which the grant pay-out was received, however,had a negative impact on these households. These findings are in line with The Rapid Assessment conducted by the Department of Social Development (July, 2021) which found that the grant was mostly used to purchase food, as reported by 93.3% of surveyedapplicants. Participants in this study maintained that the Covid-19SRD grant made a positive difference in their lives and their households. Participantsnoted that the cost of living is too high, but if social workers were able to assist, someof ills will be short-lived.Participants A03 and A011 had these to say:

"My R350.00 SASSA helped a lot because no one was allowed to go out. I could not even go out and look for some garden work to do or help people in their homes. When the R350.00 came in I used it to buy food even though goingto town was a problem because of transport. Sometimes I would not receive it for about two months but when it comes, it comes double the amount."(Participant A011)

Participant A03 said:

"The Covid-19 SRD grant helped with buying things like food and bread".

These findings are an admission that the Covid-19 pandemic left many South Africans destitute and the participants to this study were not an exception. This shows that they heavily depend on the grant for survival, although, the fact that the dates for collection were inconsistent was very inconvenient. Participants also mentioned the fact that they also depended on casual jobs for survival which during the Covid-19 pandemic and its restrictions prevented them from going out to seek for casual jobs; this threatened their economic, social and financial status.

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4.4.4 Theme 4: Possible Suggestions and recommendations for enhanced service delivery

During the interviews for this study on the effects of the foster-care applications' backlogon intended beneficiaries, an overwhelming number of the participants shared similar sentiments - that there is a need for improvement, trainings and adjustments to improvefoster-care related services. These suggestions and recommendations have been summed up in the themes to be explored below.

4.4.4.1 Sub-Theme A: Training and development of social workers

Previous research studies have noted that there is a need for social workers to be inducted and be well-versed with the norms, standards and ethical conduct of the profession. Professional training and capacitation of social workers are of paramount importance, particularly, due to the nature of the study where the best interest of the childneeds to be accounted for. On that note Participant A010 maintained:

> *"Nne ndo vha ndi sa zwidivhi uri huna mundende une ndi a tea u wana saizwi vho talutshedza nda pfesesa. Nne kha maSocial ndo ya hanefho kilinki nda di vha talutshedza nyimele fhedzi zwe vha mbudza ndi uri vha do nwalela lunwalo lwa uya SASSA nda phakha zwiliwa. Zwinwe zwothe zwo no nga yeneyo Foster ine vha khou I amba athi ngo talutshedziwa, khamusi na kha nne zwo tou vha zwa u shaya ndivho. Arali ho vha hu munwe muSocial work hanengei ane a vha na ndivho nazwo kana hunwe khamusi ndo vha ndi tshi do vha ndo thusalea khwine. Hezwi zwi touvha khagala uri havha vhathu avha khou kona uto ri thusa lwo edanaho"*

This translates into:

> *"I was not aware that I qualify for the foster care grant. I went to the social workers at the clinic, social workers know of our situation all they did was to give me a form. I then received food parcels. Nothing about the foster care grant was explained to me."*

Drawing from the findings above, social workers need to be trained on how to carry out their duties; there was some sort of negligence on the social workers part, the foodparcelshould have been a temporary solution to the clients' problem. Social workers need to

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be capacitated and supported through the terrain of doing statutory work. These findingsecho those from a study conducted by Sikhitha (2018) who in her research work established the need for supervision, capacitation, and induction of social workers into the practices of social work. Lack of supervision contributed heavilyto these social workerscutting corners and not practising the correct form of social work, thus, participants are disadvantaged.

Some participants echoed this:

> "Social workers are rude, other social workers must be employed." (ParticipantA02)
>
> "Social workers cannot even help us; they are not working". (Participant A02)

Participants complained that the behaviour of social workers towards them was very unprofessional; they were unkind, showed disinterest in their clients and showed no compassion at all. This statement finds support in the findings of a study conducted Sikhitha (2018) "Some people who are perhaps not suited for the profession of social work have now entered the profession because there was financial assistance. They arestuck in a profession that they do not like, and they have no compassion for clients"

Dhludhlu (2015) in his findings identified strategies that the DSD can introduce in its efforts to curb the backlog in foster care applications, these include, "the hiring of more social workers".

The primary responsibility of social workers is to promote the well-being and general interest of participants. They must provide appropriate services and present themselves as competent within the scope of their education, training, license, and certification. Sikhitha (2018) asserts that social work administrators and supervisors should take reasonable steps to arrange and deliver continuing education and staff development for all staff under their supervision. Continuing education and staff development will address current knowledge gaps and acquaint them with new developments in social work practice and ethics.

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4.4.4.2 Sub-Theme B: Purchase of Tools of Trade

The availability of necessary resources was deemed very urgent. Participants all complained that the DSD needs to purchase new equipment. The lack of operational resources in the social workers' offices worsens and hinders the process of service delivery to the people. Participants seem frustrated by social workers not being able to assist them due to missing documents, while social workers expect to be understood within the restrictions imposed on their operations by lack of resources. Participants echoed the following:

> "*kha hu waniwe all tools of trade and competent social workers"* (Participant A02)

This translates into:

> *"Tools of trade must be bought and competent social workers employed."*
>
> "Kha hu tholiwe vhono kona mushumo vhane vha do kona uri thusa sa tshitshavha ngauri zwazwino ari khou thusalea." (Participant A011)

This translates into:

> *"They must employ those who can do the work, who will be able to help us as a community because we are not receiving any help" (Participant A02)*

From the findings, service delivery was negatively affected by insufficient resources; themuch-needed services for the people cannot be provided if purchasing of equipment is not prioritized. The above finds support in a study conducted by Mokgalapa (2020) and Sikhitha (2018) where they noted that the Department of SocialDevelopment has no plansput in place to make transport available.

> Participant A011 said: *"social workers say that the Department does not have cars".*

The researcher believes that access to transport is crucial for the day-to-day businessofa social worker to conduct home visits, travel to meet goals, attend meetings and children's court sessions, among others. The impact of lack of government vehicles couldbe lessened with a scheme or offering of subsidies for cars for social workers. The Department, however, seems to be failing to put in motion such schemes for all social workers in the field. The DSD is seen to have failed to make proper provisions for furniture and other work apparatuses, such as paper, printers, scanners, desktops/laptop

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and telephones/cell phones; these are needed to deliver services to the people. One participant said:

> *"Social workers will always want certified copies, they will never say you can do copies here, in those offices nothing works". (ParticipantA04,)*

4.5 Summary of Findings and Conclusion

This chapter forms the cornerstone of the study. Chapter 4 focused on the presentationof the qualitative findings and four themes were generated from the data. In the presentations, the research findings and literature support were discussed; thisfocused on the effects of the foster-care applications' backlog on prospective beneficiaries. The details indicated - the service-users' point of view, their opinions onthe reasons for the backlog, the different coping strategies employed to mitigate financial challenges and possible suggestions to address the backlog. The participantshad almost similar opinionsabout the state of their foster care applications and factors causing the situation.Participants expressed how this dereliction of duty by the socialworkers was affecting them and their significant others.

The study findings demonstrated that the professional standards to successfully practicesocial work seemed minimal and limited in scope. Sikhitha (2018) in her workmaintainedthat supervision in Vhembe DSD is not executed in line with the policy frameworks, thus,the main reason for the state of affairs was that the practice of socialwork was not beingpractised in line with its prescribed norms and standards. The study further revealed thatDSD's focus had shifted to reducing clients to manageablenumbers rather than focusingtheir efforts on the core business of the practice. This isarticulated by Ngwenya (2011) who avows that the social work profession has been reduced to counting the number of files opened and processed. The researcher complains that this is not the correct type of social work. This would explain why the national DSD is not investing in the appointment of social workers (Sikhitha, 2018).

Social workers at the DSD are seen as using their own personal resources to help the employer, which is very inconvenient, thus, the work environment and dynamics potentially demotivate them. Social workers are coming across as rude to clientsbecause they have decided to stop using their own resources to perform official duties.

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Ngwenya (2011) assert that South African social workers needed to cope withcaseloads ranging from 600-3000 in extreme case loads, as compared with the manageable load of 13-20 cases per social worker. This is a clear indication that the horrendous foster-care backlog issues confronting Limpopo is untenable. Prospectivebeneficiaries are negatively affected by these backlogs and as such their well-being and livelihood is threatened. From the findings, these participants are affected negatively at different levels. Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the systems theory clearly highlight how these children's lives are disrupted and how difficult it is going tobe for them to reach actualisation stage; growing up surrounded by love and affection is something they yearn for, hence, their involvement with older men. The social work profession is failing in one of its primary mandates - to provide care and support to orphaned and vulnerable children.

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CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of empirical findings, conclusions,and recommendations. The study sought to explore the effects of the foster-care applications'backlog on Prospective Beneficiaries in Thulamela Municipality, Vhembe District. The study findings have shown that prospective beneficiaries do not get the much-needed care and attention from social workers. This results shows a lack of adequate support from social workers; lack of education, supervision, a shortage of resources. This situation is preventing social workers and the profession from fulfillingone of its primary service areas: statutory care.

It is public knowledge but also supported by a number of authors, that the foster-care system in the Department of Social Development has been affected detrimentally by itsinability to offer services timeously to the extent that the rights of children are being violated. These backlogs within the Department of Social Development are by-productsof supervision not taking place when it is meant to and the main employer, the government not procuring the necessary equipment which would aid the delivery of services to its target market. When such factors are not taken into consideration the foster care applications in respect of affected children are not attended to in a timely fashion, it results in applications accumulating and families' quality of life being affected and compromised as shown by the findings of this study.

The study was guided by the critical research question - What are the effects of the foster-care applications' backlog on prospective beneficiaries in Thulamela Municipality,Vhembe District?

5.2 Findings of the Study

The findings of the study address the following objectives of the study:

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5.3 Objectives of the Study

To accomplish the aim of this study, the following objectives were articulated:

To explore the contributory factors for the non-placement of prospective beneficiaries on the foster-care grant system.

This objective has been achieved. The first theme revealed a high rate or lack of supervision that flows from junior social workers to social work supervisors. Literature, indicate that regularly providing comprehensive, supportive supervision through a skilled, trained, competent, and committed supervisor is the best support and corrective measure for practitioners carrying out professional activities (Munson, 2012;Truter and Fouche, 2015). Supervision is a critical aspect of the helping profession. Ithas been shown to bean indispensable key to accountability and is therefore instrumental to the future development of practitioners in the helping professions. Supervision is necessary to improve the clients' care being provided by social workers.

Participants' responded that they would frequent the social workers' offices to enquire about their pending applications, but they would not be assisted. Social workers do not seem to be trained or mentored by their supervisors in the execution of statutory work such that they end up neglecting their duties. A major contributory factor that aidsthe non-placement of prospective beneficiaries into the foster care system was revealed as insufficient resources. The study showed that this lack of resources compounded their frustrations concerning the increasing workload of applications. Participants reported that social workers would generally complain about using their own resources to executethe duties of the Department. In some instances, participants revealed that social workers would have to do away with conducting homevisits because they lack the vehicles to getthem from one household to the next. Thenon-completion of advertisements searching for unknown mothers and fathers contributes to the non-placement because social workers seem not versed with the relevant knowledge regarding tracing people. Social workers do not know how to fullyexpatiate on the processes and procedures that must be adhered to when tracing these unknown parents and the implications thereof.

To describe the views of and effects of the foster-care backlog on prospective beneficiaries.

One of the effects of non-placement of beneficiaries was that participants suffer from

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peer pressure. Literature explains peer group pressure as a feeling of wanting to do thesame or similar things as another person in the same age cohort and social groupso asto be accepted, respected and loved (Manzoni, Rihtaric and Ricijas, 2011).

The study findings revealed that participants feel uneasy, have low self-esteem issues,andportray delinquent and rebellious mannerisms. Some female participants engage in intimate relationships with a much older man to fill the void of a father figure, and togainfinancially from their male partners who would provide all the material necessitiesthey desired. The study also revealed a tendency for poor school attendance and low performance from the necessity of the youth to do casual work to bring in some financialresources and from succumbing to societal pressures. Participants in the study alluded to the fact that they no longer see a reason to fully engage in their schoolactivities becausethey are laughed at and mocked by their peers for not having certainthings that their peershave or dressed in a specific manner that does not look appealing to their peers. The idea of quitting school, exacerbated by low performanceand attendance, was further strengthened by the severity and longevity of household chores that require their attention. One of the participants mentioned that they are already tired by the time they get to school, so they no longer have the zeal to continuewith school.

They reported on non-satisfaction of their basic needs; literature explainsthat needs- satisfaction is a continuous process which often leads to improved growthand mental well-being. The study confirms that these youth's most immediate needs are not met such that they find it difficult to find their place as children in the society. Gonzalez (2015)adds that they could become victims of personal insecurity and of survival will be difficultfor them, particularly, in a world that offers no support at all. This is alluded to by one ofthe participants who mentioned that one can go to school without having smeared lotion.This is a clear indication that their needs are not adequately met.

In his hierarchy of needs, Abraham Maslow (1948) noted that failure to meet and satisfythese needs could inhibit growth, self-development, and mental health. The aftermath ofnot benefiting from the foster-care grant would leave these children in a quagmire, thereby subjecting them to a destitute position. Participants' most basic needs are not met due to non-placement and non-payment ofthe grant, resulting in these children becoming even more susceptible to losing a senseof identity and belonging. This

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objective of the study was thus achieved.

To provide recommendations on how to address the foster care backlog

This objective was achieved through feedback from participants. The researcher believes that most suggested solutions could serve as the basis for the delivery of statutory services to beneficiaries yet to receive the grant and for the Department of Social Development in appointing social workers. The literature revealed that atripartite relationship exists between social workers, social work supervisors and administrators in the need for continuing education and capacity development trainingfor social workers.This training should address contemporary knowledge, trends and emergent developments related to social work practice and ethics (Sikhitha, 2018). Without a doubt, training and capacity development will aid social workers' knowledgeconcerning statutory work and provide practice guidelines. Many participants have highlighted the tendency of social workers to complain about the lack of vehicles to conduct home visits and other tools of trade that aid the execution of their work. Participants have also highlighted that the DSD should consider hiring more competent social workers. Dhludlhu (2015) shares the same sentiments when he asserts that, amongst others, theDSD should focus on hiring new social workers for statutory services.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has illuminated the conclusions drawn from the study in general. The researcher can report that most participants feel that the system under which social workers operate has failed them dismally. The backlogs with the foster-care grant and court orders cannot be viewed as separate entities; for this reason, the researcher believes that the backlogs, as well as the non-placement of beneficiaries into the system,are not due to the social workers' negligence or failure to do their work but rather the employer's disinterest in the day-to-day business of social work. The DSD and relevant stakeholders must come together and ensure that the statutory work is conducted diligently in the offices. The meticulousness of such work can be made possible through procuring low-hanging resources and tools. Social workers seem frustrated and no longer have the enthusiasm to do what they are employed for. Thisfrustration is a by- product of all challenges that they are faced with; as a result, they become very rude to clients, thereby involving themselves in unethical practices. A supervision model adopted

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by the principal employer of social workers, the DSD, is essential as supervision and procurement of essential equipment have been reportedas the main contributors to the backlogs.

5.5 Recommendations of the Study

Based on the empirical study findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The researcher recommends that Vhembe DSD adopt the proposed supervision model developed by Sikhitha (2018) in her research at Vhembe DSD. The goal ofthe model is to resuscitate the profession structurally and organisationally. Normsand standards of the profession must be brought back through the model to guidepractice effectively.
2. There is a need for the development of a programme for a multi-disciplinary team aimed at supporting social workers of Vhembe DSD in dealing with statutory cases.
3. Insufficient resources have been reported as the trademark in Vhembe DSD, therefore, the researcher recommends that procurement of the necessary tools be prioritised for the execution of statutory work. The researcher believes that when this equipment have been procured, social workers will fulfil their duties and carry out their mandate, enabling them to work with clients with less frustration but ratherharmoniously.
4. The South African Council for Social Service Professions must reinforce its responsibility with particular reference to the performance of social work professionals. The SACSSP must consider the services users' ethical care and treatment, entail.
5. Social work professionals working with foster-care cases and other related mattersmust be declared 'social workers in a specialised field' therefore, they must focus on foster cases only to speed up the backlog.
6. Social workers must be trained and re-trained on all aspects of the social work profession. This training must also include norms and standards of the profession and policy frameworks that are relevant and applicable to the DSD. Recurrent training must be scheduled to remind them of the "the best interest of the child" principle.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Research Instrument

The effects of foster care backlog on prospective beneficiaries in Thulamela Municipality, Vhembe district, Limpopo province.

SECTION A: Confirmation questions

Have you applied for a foster care grant? Yes/No Have

you ever received a foster care grant? Yes/No**SECTION**

B: Biographical information

Name:

Surname:

Age:

Highest grade passed:

SECTION C: Establishing contributory factors to the backlog from the service users viewpoint

1. Do you have a court order that states your legal placement? If no, explain. (probe)

---

2. What could be the reason you are not benefiting from the Foster care grant? (probe)

---

3. Share with me the state of your foster care application? (probe)

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SECTION D: Effects of the foster care backlog on prospective beneficiaries

1. How does the non-placement affect you financially?(probe)

---

2. How do you meet your priority needs while you are not benefitting the grant? (probe)

---

3. How does this predicament affect you academically? (probe)

SECTION E: Coping strategies/mechanisms employed by prospective beneficiaries

1. Socially and emotionally, what coping strategies do you adopt? (probe)

---

2. How do you make ends meet for yourself and the household? Food, transport,cosmetic and etc.

SECTION F: Possible solutions and recommendations from the service user's viewpoint

1. Share with me what do you think can be done by social workers to speed up your application process? (probe)

---

2. What do you think can be done to ensure that new applications are attended too intime?

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Appendix B

Title of research project: ***THE EFFECTS OF FOSTER-CARE BACKLOG ON PROSPECTIVE BENEFICIARIES IN THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY VHEMBE DISTRICT: LIMPOPO PROVINCE***

I am a Social Work Master's student from the University of Venda, I have intentions to researchon the effects of foster care backlog on prospective beneficiaries in Thulamela municipality Vhembe district, Limpopo province. Throughout my study, Dr G.M. Lekganyane will be my supervisor. The information below will serve as an aid to make an informed decision.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To explore the effects of foster care backlog in respect of prospective beneficiaries

2. PROCEDURE

Should you agree to participate in this study the following measures will be followed:

• A suitable place and time for interviews will be discussed with you. It is most likely to be inYour respective homes where confidentiality will be possible.

• Consent will be sought orally on record from you after the study has been explained toyou to be part of this research.

• The interview will be recorded. Permission to record the interview willbe asked from participants.

• The interview will last for approximately one hour to one hour thirty minutes.

3. CONFIDENTIALITY

Interviews will be held with each participant in their respective homes to avoid interruptions. Each participant will be given a number or a name, such as participant 1, John in place Peteretc, to maintain confidentiality. The researcher will maintain anonymity during the research process. Participants will be informed of the extent of confidentiality that would apply regardingtheir identity. Information provided will remain confidential such that the identity of participantswill be reported anonymously for security reasons.

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4. INFORMED CONSENT

For this study, relevant information will be provided by the researcher by means of an interviewwith you as the interviewee regarding anticipated period of involvement, procedures to be followed, confidentiality, voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study. An adequate opportunity will be provided for clarity seeking questions before the study commences.

5. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Orally, on record, permission will be obtained from the participants where it will be made clearthat participation in the study is voluntary. The researcher will ensure that all participants are aware that no one has an obligation to participate, more so declining to partake in the study will not disadvantage anyone in anyway.

6. PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY

You are at liberty to decline to be part this study, or to withdraw at any point even after you have given sociological consent to partake, without any negative consequences.

Should you be eager to participate you are requested to sign below:

I ,_____hereby voluntarily consent to

participate in the above-mentioned study. I am not compelled in any way to be part of the study. I fully understand that I can withdraw from the activities of the study at any given time should I feel uncomfortable throughout the study. I also understand that my name will not be disclosed to anybody, Information will be kept confidential and none of it will be linked to my name in any event. I am fully aware of the possible risks and benefits. Should I need further interventions someone will be available to assist me.

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

_____ _____

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Appendix C

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Conflict of interest is when an individual's private or personal interests and professional obligations are divergent to such an extent that an independent observer may have doubt as to whether or not the individual's professional actions are influenced by personal considerations, financial or otherwise.

I***, Livhuwani Mafela of Student number 14007273*** would like to disclose the following conflict of interests:

Indicate YES or NO and state the nature of the conflict and explain how it will affect the integrity of the research.

There is a conflict of interest due to either myself or a close family member benefiting in terms of:	**YES**	**NO**
Funds or research sponsorship Explain:		X
Use of UNIVEN facilities Explain:		X
Purchasing of major equipment by the University for this project		X
Delay of dissemination of the results resulting in benefit Explain:		X
Discounts or concessions Explain:		X
Employment Explain:		X
Other Explain:		X

Mafela L — 03/12/2021

Principal Investigator/Researcher — Date

HOD — Date

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Appendix D

MAKUMBANE TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

Enq:Makumbane Duncan
Cell: 076 063 1498
Makumbane Fulufhelo
Cel:073 398 1193

P.O.Box 474
SHAYANDIMA
0945
Limpopo

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that Ms Mafela Lidzhawani I.D.No 940713 0528 084 has been granted permission to collect data related to foster care from our village, Tshisahulu. She has done that in the year 2022 around February and March.

Trusting that you'll find the above to be in order.

Yours faithfully
Khosi T.N. Makumbane
Mobile : 076 7575 235

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Appendix E

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Creating Future Leaders

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR.•

Ms L Mafela

STUDENT NO: 14007273

PROJECT TITLE: The Effects of Foster-Care Backloq on Prospective Beneficiaries in Thulamela MunicipalityVhembe District, Limpopo Province.

ETHICAL CLEREANCE NO: FHSSE1211SW10212402

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr MG Lekganyane	University of Venda	Supervisor
Mrs V Nemutandani	University of Venda	Co -Supervisor
Ms L Mafela	University of Venda	Investigator — Student

Type: Masters Research

Risk: Minimal risk to humans, animals or environment

(Category 2)Approval Period: February 2022 — February 2024

The Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporatedand signed in the application form, please note the following.

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the
- REC:Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project. and uponcompletion of the project
- Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical

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principles) during the course of the project. Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.

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- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project. the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval ofsuch changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited. • The date of approval indicatesthe first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after theexpiry date; a new application must be made to theREC and new approval received beforeor on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
- Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completionof the project,
- To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.

withdraw or postpone approval if:

- Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
- It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented. The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
- New institutional rules, national legislation or intemational conventions deem it necessary

---

ISSUED BY:

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Date Considered: February 2022

Name of the RESSC

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
2022 -02- 24

Private Bag X5050
Thohoyandou 0950

Chairperson of the Committee: Prof TS Mashau

Signature

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THE EFFECTS KF THE FOSTER CARE BACKLOG ON PROSPECTIVE BENEFICIARIES IN THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY

ORIGINALITY REPORT

9%	3%	0%	9%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of Venda Student Paper	9%

Exclude quotes	On	Exclude matches	< 3 words
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