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STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN HEADING FAMILIES IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

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DECLARATION

I, Makhado Princess Anne Sheilah, hereby declare that the proposal titled ***"Strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo Province, South Africa."*** submitted by me, has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other University, that it is my work in design and execution, and that all references material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Signature: *Date*: *2024/07/22*

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DEDICATION

My late parents, Dad Obed Tshepiso and Mother Rosinah Sebobochi are honoured in this work. My academic achievements are a direct consequence of the solid foundation they established and instilled in me from an early age. May they rest in eternal happiness. This thesis is the outcome of my late mother's encouraging comments, and it was her dream that I would one day earn a Ph.D. Even though you are no longer with us, your inspirational words, "Never take no for an answer, and never settle for less," have been echoing in my head. I will always be grateful that you helped shape the fearless woman I am today.

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ABSTRACT

Background: The nonexistence of parents or adult caregivers in children's lives is experienced by many children worldwide. Basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and protection from harm are among the many challenges faced by children heading families. Children heading families can be supported and live a quality life beyond the hardships they experience. A holistic approach can alleviate the hardships experienced by children heading families, through embarking on the identification of strategies to improve support for children heading families.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

Setting: The study was conducted at the homes of children heading families and chief's kraal of Vhembe and Mopani districts in Limpopo province, South Africa.

Phase 1: Research methodology: This study employed a qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive design. The population consisted of children heading families, children's relatives, and community members. A non-probability purposive convenience sampling was used to select children heading families and snowball technique was used to select children's relatives. Unstructured in-depth interview using an interview guide was used to collect data from children heading families and children's relatives. Central questions were used to collect data from children heading families and children's relatives. Focus group discussions were used to collect data from community members. The sample size of participants was determined by data saturation. Data was analyzed using Tech's eight-step method. Data was transcribed verbatim, translated into English, and kept safe. A clearance certificate was obtained from the University of Venda Research Ethics Committee. Permission to conduct the study was requested from the traditional leaders of the villages. Ethical considerations and measures to ensure trustworthiness were considered. Children who agreed to participate voluntarily signed an assent form, and children's relatives and community members signed consent forms.

Findings: The findings of the study revealed psychological, financial, social, and educational support challenges for children heading families, relatives, and community members. Children's relatives and community members inadequately support children heading families.

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Phase 2: Development of strategies

The researcher's 2020 study on the experiences of children heading families, revealed that children heading families were not receiving enough support from their relatives and community members. The findings prompted the researcher to conduct a study on the development of strategies to improve support for children heading families.

Phase 3: Validation of strategies

As stated in Chapter One, the study's objective guided the development of strategies. Validation of the strategy employed a qualitative approach using unstructured in-depth interviews. A group of expert panelists validated the results using the e=Delphi method. The expert panelists were retired registered nurses, retired educators, curriculum advisers, psychologists, social workers, pastors, self-employed, registered nurses, educators, traditional leaders, and ex-police. All experts had extensive experience and knowledge of taking care with children.

Findings: The study revealed that children heading families face numerous challenges without adequate support from their relatives and community members. The study focused on the development of strategies to improve support for children heading families.

Recommendations: Constant monitoring by children's relatives and community members on the safety of children heading families. Protecting the safety of children heading families should be the Government's top priority and responsibility, especially in villages. Social workers are to visit the homes of children's heading families regularly to constantly monitor the challenges faced by children. The traditional leaders play a crucial role in the communities and should be more involved in matters involving children heading families in their villages, and ought to have more authority over their roles and responsibilities. Educators should be provided with training on how to deal with children who come from families with no parent or caregiver.

Conclusion: The findings of this study revealed that children heading families experience ineffective psycho-social, educational, financial, religious and spiritual challenges.

Keywords: Child, improve, support, strategy, child-heading family.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BEAM	Basic Education Assistance Module
CHF's	Children Heading Families.
CBC	Community Based Care
COSs	Civil Organizations Societies
CSG	Child Support Grant
DSD	Department of Social Development
HFHSA	Habitat for Humanity South Africa
SA	South Africa
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPO	Non-Profit Organization
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OVC	Orphan Vulnerable Children
PHC	Primary Health Care
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and Background

The absence of adult members or caregivers in the lives of children heading families who may provide care and security exposes them to risks of living in poorer conditions, with poor access to services, less and less reliable income, with no access to child support grants. Hall and Sambu (2019) highlighted that when children heading families are assisted, they can live a quality of life beyond the hardships. S'lungile, Ugwuanyi, Okeke, and Ncamsile, (2021), accentuated that children who are taken care of by adults daily, function very well. Therefore, there is a need for the government of any nation to rethink the nature and extent to which children heading families can be supported. Collaboration of the multidisciplinary teams as well as community members, and relatives may provide a positive result. A holistic approach may alleviate the harsh life experienced by children heading families, by embarking on the identification of strategies to improve support for children heading families (Makuyana, Mbulayi and Kangethe, 2020).

Children heading families struggle for survival as they are deprived of basic children's rights as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996; section 28 (1) and (2). The constitution states evidently that "each child should be brought up in a safe, secure environment that is free from hazards." Every child has the right "to family care, parental care, or appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment." The basic needs such as nutrition, shelter, basic health care services, social services, and protection from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation are to be taken into consideration. No child should work underage or do work that would interfere with his or her educational development. A child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning such child (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).

The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund Report (2001) attests that many of the children heading families are helpless and unable to think of ways of fending for themselves or coping with the uncertainty of where the next meal will come from. Young siblings tend to look up to the eldest child "to make a plan," especially concerning providing the meals; as they experience hardships in meeting their daily needs such as food, shelter, clothing, safety, security, and support. A study conducted by Lydner (2022), in the USA, revealed that children heading families experience a great deal of pressure, with no ideal support strategies planned. When the hardships are not attended to, they may contribute to lower levels of self-esteem, high antisocial behavior such as crime, violence, prostitution, substance abuse, increased levels of stress, high levels of child trafficking,

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and more self-efficacy to deal with socio-economic problems. A study conducted by Chademana and Van Wyk (2021) in Zimbabwe, highlighted that children heading families also face economic hardships, which at times make them victims of child labour and force them into prostitution.

In the study conducted in China, on caring and support for orphan children, two welfare strands that operate separately were identified. The first strand is informal kinship care for children who have relatives and family networks on whom they can rely. The second strand is the state's monopolized system to support and care for orphaned children. The two strands are based on different principles of law. Registered orphans are covered by a living allowance, partly subsidized health care, compulsory education, and alternative care formally or informally arranged. Lin-Heng (2020) conducted a study in Singapore which revealed that children whose parents died and have no place to stay, public houses are offered.

A study conducted by Karuga, Steege, Njoroge, Liani, Wiltgen Georgi, Otiso, Muturi, Okoth, Theobald, and Tolhurst., (2022), further highlighted children heading families experience tremendous challenges and are vulnerable to exploitation. HIV/AIDS Alliance and Tata Institute of Social Science, (2017) claim that children heading families are forced to move to adult roles inadequately prepared while their physical and mental health needs are not taken care of by the existing programs. Lack of support from extended families and community members may result in a high rate of school absenteeism and discontinuity of education. Other reasons for the increased absenteeism rate for children heading families include fatigue from begging on the streets to support the family and inadequate provision of school support transport (Gamede, 2023).

Findings of the study conducted by Ruiz and Gentz (2019) in Namibia on adversity and agency to support child-headed families revealed that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), identified the needs and coping mechanisms for child-headed families, including effective support, social protection measures to strengthen community systems, and safety networks. A necessity for poverty reduction can be attained through youth-appropriate economic strengthening activities. In addition, cash transfers to children heading families may provide essential support for food, medicine, and access to school. The community volunteers may refer and link child-headed families to various institutions for critical social services, material support, and training in life skills and effective parenting (Ntuli, Sebola, and Madiba, 2020).
In Zambia, a development program approach for children-heading families has shown that child-headed families are not just a health crisis but a cultural crisis. Therefore, extended families and community members play a vital role in support for children heading families. Extended families in Africa traditionally have been the major structure responsible for caring for children heading families' well-being, and offering support (Molemane, 2021). Traditionally, culture reinforces the

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practice of caring for children as illustrated by the following well-known African proverb that says, “It takes a village to raise a child” (Glasgal, and Nestor, 2020). This is the proverb that encourages the principle of community involvement, and community safety network and reinforces the notion of providing care and support to children heading families. Communities' involvement and a stable environment are critical imperatives in support of children heading families (Muchenje and Goronga, 2020)

Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) explain that children heading families should be supported and protected by an adult mentor, who will act in the child's best interests. Adult support mostly does not contribute to children heading family's well-being due to financial constraints. Children heading families are often not consulted about care arrangements, and not taken seriously, resulting in many having a sense of powerlessness over their situation. Access to Child Support Grants increases the potential for abuse of children by their relatives. However, Buzaare (2021) noted that the lack of the necessary paperwork and access to child support funds are two important concerns influencing children living in head-of-household families. Furthermore, a Kenyan study on the socioeconomic family-based variables that influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools found that children heading families’ perform badly at school and are more likely to quit their education (Lekasi, 2020).

Gomba (2018) in Zimbabwe, initiated the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative which is a Non-Profit Organization (NPO) focuses on children’s psycho-social needs. The Psycho-social Support Initiative included 13 other countries such as Angola, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Uganda. In addition, the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative also focused on strengthening social, and cultural connections, and effective psychological support to enhance individual, family, and community well-being. Zimbabwe is ranked as one of the 10 worst-performing countries in terms of governance, safety, security, and protection for children heading families (World Bank, 2016).

In Swaziland, a study conducted pointed out that regardless of the challenges that children heading families experience, there has been a display of resilience despite their adversities. The attitude of resilience has been achieved through family unity, prayer, and church support as coping strategies. However, children heading families need community support interventions for mentorship, guidance, and someone ready to listen to their voices as they share and express their experiences (S’lungile, Ugwuanyi, Okeke and Ncamsile 2021).

The Habitat for Humanity South Africa, which operates under the values of a multinational non-non-profit organization is represented worldwide in over 70 countries. It is part of a global collaboration of activists and communities with a belief in a world where every child should have a decent place to live. The Habitat for Humanity South Africa offers relevant social support to orphans

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and children heading families through upgrading existing structures, offering social support, and housing needs which are included in the policy proposal (Manikuzwe, 2023).

A project promoting the continuation of child nutritional service was initiated in South Africa. Five areas were prioritized and identified to implement the nutrition recovery plan. The recovery plan aimed at improving the nutritional status of children heading families. Initiation of the construction of the community garden project was started in Cape Town, Soweto, Durban, Eastern Cape, and Free State, as an element of the response that provides nutritious food for children heading families. The garden project and maintenance activities make children feel free and safe as this helps them to clear their minds as activities keep them proactive and bring the communities closer. Garden projects form part of exercise which is considered as a psychological therapy that takes their minds off stressful situations (UNICEF, 2007).

The Isifundazwe KwaZulu-Natal study on children heading families who live in the communities highlighted that children preferred to stay in their own homes with adequate and effective support. Hence, they are against the idea of being separated from each other through placement in extended families, with foster parents, or in institutions. Children heading families in Kwazulu-Natal are affected psychologically, emotionally, and socially due to a lack of support services as they receive limited or no support from relatives and have irregular school attendance (Makuyana et al., 2020).

Agere, Munyaradzi, and Marilyn (2020) conducted a study in Soweto, South Africa, regarding the role of agency in mitigating the impact of extreme toxic stress and anxiety on child-headed families Depression and anxiety can have long-term effects on children's emotional development. Strategies were identified to help them build resilience and to cope with the challenges. This includes group support initiation, which is useful to children heading families to enhance their psychosocial functioning. Above and beyond, it has been noted that the support allows them to vent their struggles and frustrations with other children in similar situations.

A study conducted by Nyangarika and Ngasa (2020) on the academic performance of orphaned child-headed learners in Tanzania confirms that the absence of parents interferes with the development of a positive self-identity, which may lead to emotional, social, and psychological challenges. A study by Diago (2020) on the experiences of child-headed families, in the Greater Sekhukhune, Limpopo province, South Africa, displayed a great need for the urgent establishment of support strategies in the form of social security and social work interventions. Additionally, emphasizes the need for integrated services that address the economic, material, social, emotional, spiritual needs, and psychological well-being of child-headed individuals.

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1.2 Problem Statement

In 2020, the researcher conducted a study on the experiences of children heading families in Vhembe District, Makhado municipality of Limpopo province, South Africa. The study findings revealed that children heading families experience various challenges (Makhado, 2020). The findings further revealed that children heading families are unable to cope with the challenges. Maepa and Ntshalintshali (2020) identified poverty as the primary barrier to any progress in the life of child-headed families worldwide. According to the United Nations (2021), eliminating poverty is a primary concern for governments worldwide. The percentage of children heading families living in poverty remains high even after poverty was identified as one of the primary objectives for sustainable development decades ago. The experience of poverty among children heading families has significant consequences for both their personal lives and the nation's general progress, which makes it especially alarming (Mdluli-Maziya, Mncayi, and Sere, 2022). Without adequate support from relatives, community members, and the Government, children heading families will continuously experience psychological, financial, social, and educational challenges. Therefore, The researcher has decided to conduct a study on developing strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

The literature searched by the researcher in the previous studies focused on children heading families' experiences. According to Thwala and Tshabalala (2023), children heading families experience a lack of food security, poverty, and strained extended family relationships. They have also shown resilience despite their adversities which they indicated have been achieved through family unity, prayer, and church support as coping strategies. The study conducted by Makhado (2020) on the experiences of children heading families revealed that children heading families experience psychological, financial, social, and educational challenges. The researcher recommended that relatives, community members, and government departments should support children heading families as their challenges need collaboration. No study was conducted in Limpopo province, South Africa on strategies to improve support for children heading families. The literature reviewed indicated that there is still quite a significant gap in developing strategies to improve support for children heading families.

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1.4 Research Questions

- What are the challenges that you experienced when heading a family as a child in Limpopo province, South Africa?
- What kind of support do you as relatives provide to children heading families in Limpopo province, SA?
- What kind of support do you as community members provide to children heading families in Limpopo province, SA?
- How can the strategies to improve support for children heading families be developed?

1.5 Significance of the Study

- Implementation of the developed strategies may improve children heading families' support by the relatives and community members.
- The community members may become aware of the challenges experienced by children heading families and the support needed.
- The findings of the study may influence the policy reviewers to include the developed strategies for children heading families.
- The findings may add knowledge to the field of nursing research.

1.6 Study Purpose and Objectives

1.6.1 Purpose

The purpose of the study was to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

1.6.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were in three phases.

The objectives of the study were to:

Phase 1: **To explore and describe**

- the challenges experienced by children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.
- the support provided to children heading families by their relatives and community members in Limpopo province, South Africa.

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Phase 2: Strategy Development

- To develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

Phase 3: Validation of the strategies

- To validate strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

1.7 Definitions of Concepts

The researcher defined the concepts as follows:

1.7.1 Child

A child is a person who is less than 18 years of age and fully dependent on another for their survival (Children's Act No. 38 of 2005). In this study, a child refers to a human being between the ages of 13 and 18 years heading a family when there are no parents or adult caregivers to take responsibility.

1.7.2 Improve

Improve refers to the process of becoming better or creating something better (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). In this study, improve means to make the life of children heading families better.

1.7.3 Support

Support is defined as providing help, comfort, and encouragement to someone or to carry, hold up, or bear the weight of someone or something (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). In this study, support means providing any form of assistance to children heading families.

1.7.4 Strategy

A strategy is a roadmap, an overall plan for the systematic exploration of the phenomenon of interest (Dahlberg and McCaig 2020). In this study, the strategy is a plan of action geared towards improving the support for children heading families in Limpopo province, SA.

1.7.5 Child-Headed Family

Child-headed family is recognized when the parents or primary caregivers of the family have died, no adult family member is available to provide care and support, and when a child has assumed the role of primary caregiver in respect of a child or children in the household in terms of providing

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food, clothing, and psycho-social support (Vliet, 2018), In this study child-headed family is a family that is headed by a child due to both parental death and absence of adult caregivers.

1.8 Organization of the Thesis

1.8.1 Chapter 1 - Overview of the Study

In this chapter, the researcher focused on the background and introduction of the study, problem statement, rationale of the study, research questions, significance of the study, study purpose, study objectives, definition of concepts, and summary.

1.8.2 Chapter 2 - Literature Review and Contextualization of the Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides a literature review that covers studies that have been conducted by other researchers in the field of the support strategies needed for children heading families grounded on the theoretical framework, the purpose of the literature review, literature search strategies, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, challenges experienced by children heading families, theoretical framework, and summary.

1.8.3 Chapter 3- Research Methodology

The researcher outlined the qualitative research methodology of the study, research design, research approach, study setting, study population, target population, sample and sampling, sample size, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, data collection method, face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions, pre-test, plan for data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical consideration, delimitations and limitations of the study, plans for dissemination and summary.

1.8.4 Chapter 4- Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Discussions

Chapter four forms phase one of the study and discusses the demographic profile of participants which are children heading families, children's relatives, and community members. Themes and sub-themes emerged from the interviews. Demographic profile of focus group discussions where community members discussed the support, they provide for children heading families. Themes and sub-themes emerged from the three groups of participants and summary.

1.8.5 Chapter 5- Development of Strategies

The chapter forms phase two and addresses the second objective of the study. The chapter emphasized brainstorming the development of strategies, stages for brainstorming strategies, six steps in the development of strategies, developed strategies, objectives, and activities to be followed, and a summary.

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1.8.6 Chapter 6- Validation of Developed Strategies

This chapter forms phase three and addresses the third and fourth objectives of the study, Validation of developed strategies using the e-Delphi technique, characteristics of the e-Delphi technique, the use of the e-Delphi technique, study planning, recruitment of e-Delphi experts, selection of the panel of experts, sampling of the e-Delphi panelists, preparatory phase, exploratory phase, unstructured question, refinement of strategies, reaching consensus from e-Delphi technique, data analysis of e-Delphi technique, modified e-Delphi results, measures to ensure trustworthiness and ethical consideration in e-Delphi technique and the summary.

1.8.7 Chapter 7- Summary, Limitations, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The chapter focused on a summary of the study, evaluation of the study, the purpose of the study, objectives of the study, the strength of the study, uniqueness of the study, recommendations of the study, delimitations, and limitations, unique contribution of the study, plan for dissemination of the results and summary.

1.9 Summary

The focus of chapter one was to describe the introduction and background of the study, the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the objectives of the study, and the definition of concepts. The chapter provided the reader with an overview of the study detailing the strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. Chapter two focused on the literature review and contextual theoretical framework concerning the study topic.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In chapter one, the introduction and background, problem statement, rationale of the study, research questions, significance of the study, study purpose and objectives, organization of the thesis, and summary were outlined. Chapter two presents the literature review concerning the studies conducted by various researchers on the same topic, the purpose of the literature review, literature search strategy, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, challenges experienced by children heading families, support strategies, the theoretical framework as a model of support, and the summary. Chapter three will outline the research methodology.

The triumph of the study was influenced by the effectiveness and broad search for information or known factors about the topic identified as well as the gaps of the phenomenon under study. A literature review is the starting point for a research inquiry and is where the researcher has collected information to advance a greater and more thorough understanding of the area that is the focus of the research. A literature review in qualitative studies, according to Snyder (2019), is a review of the existing scholarship or available body of knowledge that helps researchers see how other scholars have investigated the research problem that they are interested in, namely: how they have theorized and conceptualized issues; what they have discovered empirically; the methodology they have used and to what effect. In other words, a literature review at the very beginning of the study enables researchers to familiarize themselves with the current state of knowledge regarding the research problem. A review of the literature is important because without it the researcher would not require an understanding of the topic, what has already been done on it, how it has been researched, and what the key issues are. The literature search methodology was used by the researcher to ascertain the existing body of knowledge and gaps in the field of study. The researcher searched databases, books, published dissertations, Journal articles, and websites like Google, Google Scholar, Science Direct, and EBSCOhost to find relevant material.

Fouche, Strydom, and Roestenburg (2022) define a literature review as a collection of credible material that anchors the topic of research into an existing body of knowledge it includes the process of identifying, selecting, and scrutinizing suitable literature for the study. It is an organized review of books, articles, and published research on a specific topic to discover themes, gaps, inconsistencies, and agreements. The literature reviewed included different strategies to improve support for children heading families. The support comes from various interested parties such as

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community members, children's relatives, different departments, and various stakeholders such as Non-Governmental Organizations, churches, traditional leaders, and Community-Based Organizations.

There will always be children who have had the misfortune to lose their parents. Orphans and children who head families are part of the communities. Traditionally, children belong to the community. Countless demographic changes and deteriorating economic states of many societies resulted in traditional safety networks being unable to cope with the socio-economic challenges and led to calls for support from external sources other than families and individuals. A study conducted by Girum. Zeleke, Heran Ejara, Haile, and Terefe, (2020) in Ethiopia revealed that community members and children's relatives are not always equipped to cope with the situation which has led to the phenomenon of children heading families are compelled to take care of themselves and their siblings without receiving help from relatives, neighbors, and community members.

2.2 Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to provide answers to questions about the existing knowledge on what is known about the support for children heading families. The literature review provided further explanation for the proposed study and introduced the researcher to the phenomenon context. Bhattacherjee, Yegeza, Kollecas, Duhrkop, Greene, and Hashemi (2022) stated that the purpose of the literature review is three-fold: (1) to survey the current state of knowledge around inquiry, (2) to identify key authors, articles, theories, and findings in that area, and (3) to identify gaps of knowledge in that area.

The researcher identified and reviewed the publications that were found to be relevant to the topic of study. The literature search was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the support provided to children heading families. Like any other child, children who are the head of a household require support. These necessities include safety and security, stability, consistency, love, emotions, positive role models, education, and structure, all of which can be given by relatives and community members.

2.3 Literature Search Strategy

To find the most recent, appropriate strategies to improve support for children heading families, a thorough literature search was reviewed. Research books, journals, articles, theses, dissertations, and electronic/website material were examined to identify current information that will enhance the study and advance scholarly understanding. The literature review methodology was also guided by the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed below.

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2.3.1 Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria for the literature review were as follows:

- Studies focused on the experiences of children heading families.
- Studies focused on the support for children heading families.
- Research studies published in English.
- Literature from accredited and verified academic sources and databases.

2.3.2 Exclusion criteria

The studies listed below were not included:

- Studies that do not include the experiences of children heading families.
- Studies that do not include the support provided to children heading families.
- Studies that were not published in English.

The challenges experienced by children heading families and the support they need were the main topics of the literature search strategies. The challenges experienced by children heading families are listed below, along with the support that could improve their quality of life.

2.4 Challenges Experienced by Children-Heading Families.

Children heading families are faced with a diversity of challenges that include among others, educational challenges, lack of adult care and support, negative emotional impact, poverty and hunger, negative psycho-social impact, and medical problems including poor access to health care. Figure 2.1. shows the challenges experienced by children heading families.

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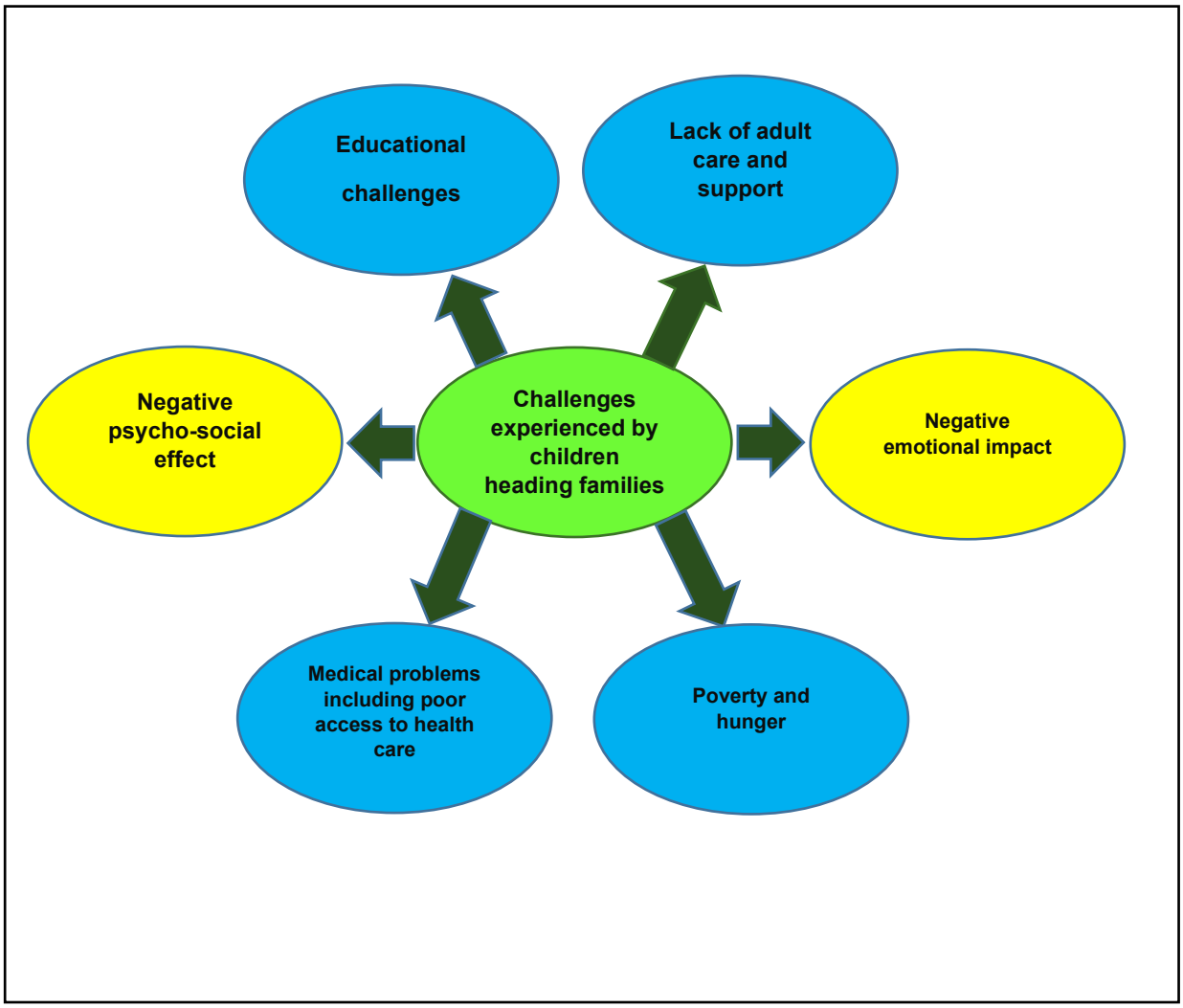

Figure 2.1: Challenges Experienced by Children Heading Families.

A study conducted by Buzaare (2021) revealed that children heading families are deprived of their childhood and opportunities for schooling and that heavy household duties are the main cause of non-school attendance. Buzaare (2021) further, discovered that the funeral costs of their parents deplete generational wealth. Lack of support by schools adds to what children heading families are confronted with in their daily struggle for survival (Maila, 2023).

2.3.1 Educational Challenges

According to a report given by Mulenga (2022), in Kabwe public schools in Zimbabwe, children heading families had to abandon a promising academic career because school fees became unaffordable and the responsibility of working for the family became a huge challenge. A study by Arsani, Ario, and Ramadhan (2020) in Indonesia argued that low school enrolment is more strongly correlated with poverty than with orphanhood. Children heading families have a much higher school dropout rate than non-orphaned children, which contributes to the cycle of poverty.

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Mkhwanazi, Makusha, Blackie, Manderson, Hall, and Huijbregts (2018) highlighted that some of the children heading families do not have birth registration and national identity documents which thwarts children's access to education. A study conducted by Mugumba (2019) in Zimbabwe indicated that the inability to produce birth certificates or identification documents results in schools refusing to register children. A study by Beko (2021) supports a study by Mugumba (2019) in Zimbabwe by confirming that children who are unable to produce birth certificates encounter problems in school registration.

In South Africa, a study conducted by Bhengu (2021) revealed that children heading families must take care of their younger siblings and other household responsibilities, which leads to a rise in school dropout rates and absenteeism in educational institutions. Nthoroane (2020) also pointed out that children heading families carry a burden of family roles much greater than children in adult-headed households and this results in schooling challenges. Education should come first because going to school creates opportunities for resources related to children heading families that would not otherwise be available. Furthermore, a special emphasis was given to the role of school psychologists as change agents within the context of schools.

A study conducted by Kwatubana and Ebrahim (2020) in South Africa, argued that schools must pay particular attention to pastoral care roles meant for all learners who experience the situations of not being cared for. The literature reviewed noted that there is a gap in targetable interventions to support children heading families in schools. In Zimbabwe, a study conducted by Mathuthu (2019) Indicated that the policy on learner attendance is silent about who should be held accountable for the school attendance of children heading family learners who have no responsible adult caregiver's direction on how or who to approach cases where child-headed children have no adult care. The literature review indicated that there seems to be a gap concerning the accountability of regular school attendance of children heading families.to support the learners to attend school by providing for their needs.

The cost of schooling was not restricted to school fees but also to learning materials such as textbooks, stationery, and school uniforms (S'lungile et al., 2021). Goronga and Mampane (2021) observed that child-headed children were often extremely vulnerable and impoverished and were forced to leave school early for a variety of reasons. However, leaving school early becomes a major stressor and contributes to their negative psychosocial well-being.

A study by Mukuri (2023) found that children heading families often seek out school as a place of belonging. Shoo and Lekule (2021) found that children who head families, especially girls, leave school early to care for younger siblings rather than to continue with their education. Islam

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and Hoque (2022) also confirmed that girls who are responsible for heading families are more likely to leave school early to take on parenting responsibilities after a parent passes away.

2.3.2 Lack of Adult Care and Support

Since children heading family's relatives or extended families don't assist them, children who lose their parents suddenly transition from being children to becoming parents not being ready. They find it difficult to acclimate to the responsibility of making decisions regarding their siblings' emotional, psychological, and physical needs. They are more likely than those whose parents are still alive to suffer abuse at the hands of extended family members.

Legally, in terms of the Childcare and Protection Act, the Minister in Namibia officially recognizes a household as a child-headed family if no parent or adult caregiver is available or able to care for the children, and a child in the family is acting as the caregiver for one or more children. The best interests of the children in the family are the key guideline for the recognition of child-headed families. Official recognition is designed to open the door to support for the household and to enable the designation of an adult supervisor for the household.

Ntuli, Mokgathe, and Madiba (2020) in South Africa, stated that orphans have always relied on the extended family as a traditional support system for their care, but this has changed because of household structures that have been drastically altered by epidemics and pandemics. And has resulted in children heading families without the help of adult caregivers. The clan network has collapsed, and the kin support system has gradually diminished. Consequently, communities and families find themselves ill-equipped to cope with the ever-increasing number of orphans in countries. On the 09th of September, (2020) in Mpumalanga the Minister of Social Development initiated a community support program to support vulnerable children who are without parents including those who are heading families.

2.3.3 Negative Emotional Impact

Maruyama, Rhee, Utsunomiya, and Goodman (2020) conducted a study in Zimbabwe and noted that children heading families experienced tremendous, emotional challenges and lived in constant memories of their deceased parents. Most of them suffer feelings of loneliness, trauma, desperation, and sadness because of the combined effects of bereavement and stress associated with shouldering an adult role at a young age, low self-esteem, fear, and a sense of alienation. Children heading families often face the emotional burden of losing a parent for whom they receive little emotional support which could increase their absenteeism from school Kwatubana and Ebrahim, (2020). Additionally, it indicated that persistent emotional distress could become an academic barrier resulting in children from CHF facing an uncertain future.

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There is evidence that children heading families are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in several ways and generally have no one to turn to for protection when at risk. Specifically, housing quality is the most important aspect for children heading family's safety. When children live in poor-quality housing, they experience more emotional stress, and show elevated levels of emotional problems, including symptoms of depression and anxiety; as well as elevated behavioral issues, like aggression, lying, and deceitfulness. Conversely, they may also show lower school success in core academic subjects. Addressing housing quality may be the most critical for promoting children's health and well-being.

2.3.4 Poverty and Hunger

In Nigeria, a study conducted by Abiodun, Onafowora, and Ayo-Adeyekun (2019) indicated that children heading families face challenges daily and are much more economically vulnerable, more to food insecurity, which has an impact on educational disruption. Children heading families found it difficult to provide adequate food to feed their siblings and frequently went to bed hungry and to school on an empty stomach. A study conducted by Ntuli et al., (2020) in South Africa, supports a study by Abiodun, Onafowora, and Ayo-Adeyekun (2019) in Nigeria, confirming that not being able to provide food resulted in constant hunger among children heading families and their siblings. Drennen, Coleman, Ettinger, and de Cuba (2019) indicated that food security is essential for children because proper diet and nourishment have an impact on children's health and well-being both now and in the future.

A study conducted by Ngobese and Mayombe (2021) in South Africa found that hunger is linked to food insecurity in households and is regarded as a serious public health issue that could have long-term negative effects on children's health. It was further added that the degree of household food insecurity status appeared to be the strongest predictor of child hunger.

In South Africa, a study conducted by Ntuli et al., (2020) on the psycho-social well-being of children heading families, revealed that children live in a socially depressed environment and are subjected to extreme poverty characterized by frequent hunger. Many children heading families become exhausted by caring for their siblings and often do not have enough food to eat, usually eating only one meal per day. A survey conducted by Hall (2022) in South Africa, revealed that child poverty had risen significantly, with 37% of children (over 7 million) living in food poverty and 62% below the upper-bound poverty line.

Generally, children heading families struggle to access government grants, as some of them may not have the necessary documentation. The reason for this may be whilst their parents were still alive, might not have had the necessary registration documentation or found it unnecessary to

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provide their children with documents as they never foresee death coming as a result children remain searching for the documents and never know where to find them (South African Government, South Social Security Agency, 2014). Failure to produce the necessary documents results in children heading families living in poverty and hunger as they are unable to access child support grants that will help them buy the necessary basic needs.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF (2013) stated that birth registration is a fundamental human right that can safeguard children from harm and exploitation. It is also the first step in the realization of other rights – throughout a person's lifetime. Birth registration establishes a child's official identity, which can later open doors to entering school, finding employment, and traveling abroad, and enable the child to apply for child support grants. However, in this study, it has been revealed that some children heading families have trouble receiving child support grants because they do not have the documents needed at the social development office.

There are many challenges highlighted by UNICEF (2013) that result in a child not having their birth certificate and this brings about the following: Besides inadequate shelter, these children are often denied the basic human right to an identity as birth certificates and identification documents have either been lost or not made available to them. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has focused extensively on poverty, using the right to an adequate standard of living under Article 27 as a particular focus for its work in this area (Nolan and Pells, 2020).

2.3.5 Negative Psycho-Social Effect

Children heading families experience various psycho-social challenges and have nowhere to turn to for support. They don't have ways and means of resolving their challenges. They are more vulnerable to toxic stress, according to Betty Neuman's theory, this occurs when the body's stress response system is activated over a prolonged period without adequate interventions.

Owing to various reasons children heading families are being left to fend for themselves from a very early age in life and without a proper functioning welfare system, some end up in the streets in urban cities, with no education, early marriages, poor nutrition and poor health (Ngqushwa and Mkhomi, 2023). According to a study by Ntshuntshe and Taukeni (2020) children heading families expressed their pain of losing parents and how they missed their love and guidance as they occasionally felt alone and experienced loneliness. Elder siblings have stated that they are unable to discuss their sentiments with their younger siblings because they do not want to put them through more hardship. Furthermore, because it is taboo in their culture to exhibit emotions in public, they also find it difficult to talk about their sentiments with friends or neighbors. Children heading families in this study indicated that one of the most challenging aspects of their caring responsibilities was controlling their emotions.

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Ntuli, et.al., (2020) stated that children heading families do not enjoy family support, and when they live with their extended families, they experience ill-treatment and unsympathetic gestures. It was further highlighted that the death of their parents has made a negative psychological impact and their wellbeing, resulting in the development of prolonged bereavement characterized by internalizing depressive symptoms. On the other hand, children heading families suffer from emotional distress and continuous yearning for their mothers and, they resort to silence as a coping strategy. According to Kurt (2023), in the United States, children heading families benefit much from the social support of friends and family. A study by Diago (2020) conducted in South Africa and the findings revealed that children heading families face a difficult life because they are left to fend for themselves.

A study conducted by Pote (2019) in South Africa on the experiences of vulnerable learners from child-headed families through an ecological systems model revealed a vivid description of their living conditions, changing roles, community fears, and school experiences which inevitably affect their psycho-social well-being, and spread the need for effective school psychological services. In this study, against all odds, the schools with child-headed children reflected how psychologists can make a positive difference in the lives of the learners who are heading families simply through the display of love, attention, and care.

2.3.6 Health Related Challenges

Besides losing their parents, children in child-headed families may also lose the support of their relatives, which could jeopardize their rights as children, including the ability to get healthcare. Like any other home, headed by a child has health issues that call for medical attention. It is common knowledge that a household's capacity to obtain healthcare services is impacted by an array of variables, such as income, level of education, and health-seeking behavior, among others (Mustafa and Shekhar, 2021).

Primary Health Care (PHC) has much potential to enhance child health outcomes, particularly those of orphans and children heading families (Aladegboye and Olowookere, 2023). On the other hand, little research has been done on how it affects sub-Saharan Africa's efforts to increase universal access to child health services. Additionally, it is not well known that the region's school health services are among the most successful strategies for enhancing the delivery of PHC.

Despite South Africa's 1996 acceptance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which committed the country to prioritize children, the country's execution of school health services has gotten worse to the point where these rights are violated. The study identified a vacuum in the provision of health care services in schools. If the services were carried out, it would also help children from child-headed families, who would have to pay for transportation expenses to the clinic

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to receive medical care. It is also imperative that the government should prioritize the health of learners from child-headed homes on the national agenda, as this requirement cannot be overlooked.

Karuga et al, (2022) children heading families in Nairobi frequently suffer from poor health because medical care is inaccessible to them. He further added that access to medical care in Uganda is extremely limited since children heading families lack the means to buy medication or pay for transport to healthcare facilities. Some children in child-headed families might not go to a doctor to seek medical attention because some doctors may not attend to them if they do not have any adult accompanying them. It is a challenge when it comes to health in children heading families as they are faced with limited financial resources when it may not be necessary or making the journey to the clinic at the cost of other more pressing duties like finding food or completing homework.

Children heading families have profound implications for their well-being as children, but families with ailing parents have high medical care costs and other expenses that usually leave the children with very few resources after the parents' death. Children heading families experience health problems and struggle to pay for medical costs and transport to the hospital when not well or their siblings are sick. They often live in poor-quality environments, and overcrowded houses and are exposed to the cold as they do not have enough warm clothes and bedding. During rainy periods mosquitoes become a challenge to them. The situation is an aggravating situation as children heading families may not have the understanding of seeking prompt treatment and this may result in disastrous situations of seeking medication very late where their lives might be in danger (Teo, Singh, Prem, Hsu and Yi, 2020).

A study conducted by Ramalepa (2023) in Northwest Province, South Africa, revealed that the health-promoting schools initiative is a new concept in South Africa. A lack of clear understanding of this initiative and its interrelatedness to school health services led to implementation problems, which in turn resulted in reduced quality standards and a total collapse of school health services in most areas. School health services, if well initiated and monitored, will have a great in learners from child-headed families concerning their health. Therefore, children heading families must be supported in all areas such as educational support; adult care support, poverty and hunger support; psycho-social support; and health and well-being support.

2.4 Support Strategies

Children heading families are suffering all by themselves and experiencing various challenges without knowing who to call for help when they desperately need it. Extended families were "the best to provide any kind of support to children heading families," according to Martin, Hall, and Lake (2018). Unfortunately, some families don't provide their children with enough attention and

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support because they're under financial pressure. The findings of this study revealed that there should be support strategies that are specifically focused on children heading families, either from the government, extended families, or community members. Educational support, adult care support, poverty and hunger support, psychosocial support, and health and wellbeing support are listed below. Figure 2.2. shows the support needed by children heading families.

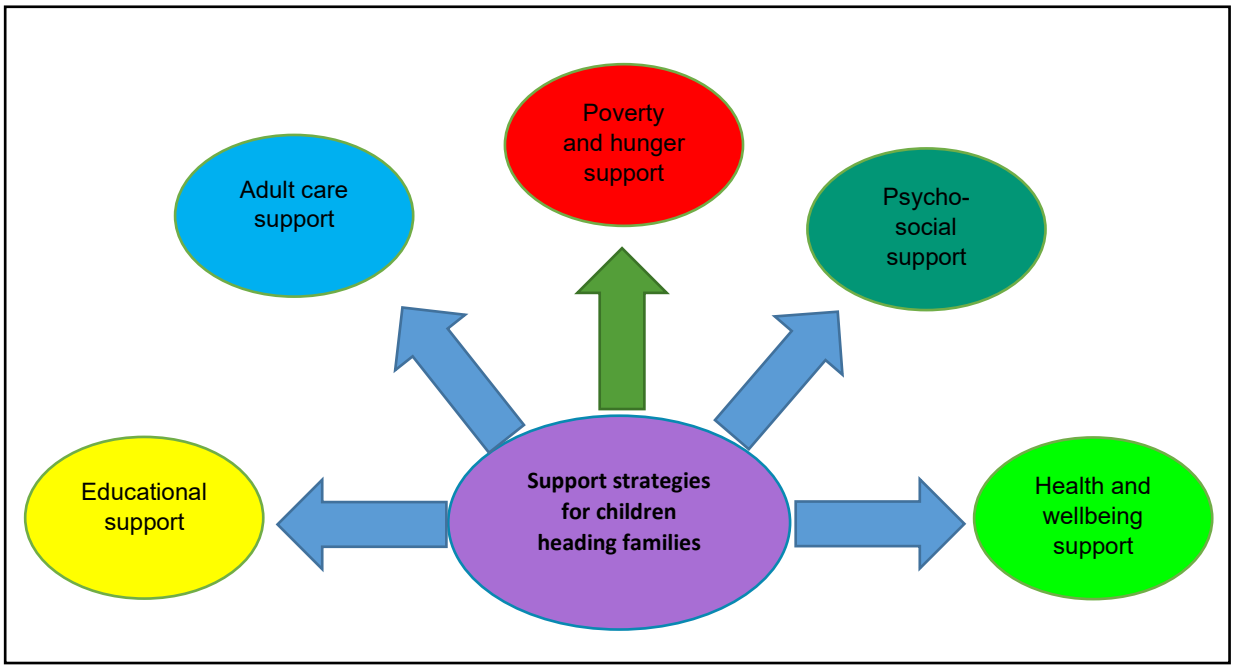

Figure 2.2: Support needed by children heading families

2.4.1 Educational Support Strategies

Children heading families need support either from their relatives or community members so that they live a quality life. A study conducted by Lethoko (2019) in Lesotho has shown the institutional structures in promoting care for children heading families and ensured that the rights of children are not violated. These include children's homes that render a wide range of services including monitoring, advocacy, and enforcement of the rights of the child, educational assistance, and food security initiatives, psychosocial and material support.

The Regional School Counselors (RSCs) took responsibility for training teachers in counseling skills and encouraged the establishment of circles of support. They hold meetings at least once a month between the head of the Counseling Support Group and the teachers in the schools who provide counseling services, life skills instruction, or other emotional support to learners and oversee the administrative duties related to counseling services. The Namibian Vision (2030) includes an objective to "provide opportunities to disadvantaged children, including children heading families, which aim at assisting them and help them live meaningful and happy lives."

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The Government of the Republic of Namibia (2004) highlighted the second goal of the Education for All (EFA) National Plan of Action 2001-2015, which states: "Making sure that by 2015 all children, especially girls, children in difficult circumstances, including children heading families and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality." The Ministry of Education in Namibia acknowledges the importance of strengthening the capacity of children heading families and other orphans/vulnerable to meet their own needs by encouraging them to stay in schools so that they can gain skills and qualifications and become self-reliant and self-confident. It also aims to identify the barriers to education and devise strategies to attract and keep all children from different backgrounds in school. Its objective is to ensure that all school-going aged orphans/child-headed children attend school and are not deterred from full participation through lack of financial means, material or psycho-social need, stigma, discrimination, or any other constraints. Moreover, the out-of-school orphans and children heading families are encouraged to return to schools or be provided with appropriate educational opportunities.

All education sector employees should be sensitized about the special needs of children heading families and should facilitate their access to supportive and counseling services and, where necessary, to school feeding schemes. This policy also stresses the need for effective inter-school referral systems to minimize disruption and to provide support to learners when they must be transferred after a parent or caregiver dies. Furthermore, Orphaned Vulnerable Children and children heading families are to be favored for hostel accommodation or community-boarding alternatives. Schools are also encouraged to develop networks of support for (OVC) including children heading families at each educational institution.

Every teacher monitored the progress and psychological well-being of learners including those children from child-headed backgrounds continuously. Teachers were expected to identify children who seemed to be vulnerable and bring them to the attention of the head of counseling services in the schools. The head of counseling services facilitated the appropriate interventions, including referrals as necessary (Ministry of Education, 2008).

According to a study conducted by Ringson (2020) an extension of the social protection services of Zimbabwe, the government introduced the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) using pro-poor funds that were meant for marginalized communities in Zimbabwe. The Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) is essentially a school fee, examination fees, levies, and building assistance program that was introduced by the government in (2001) with some initial financial assistance from the World Bank as an educational funding component of the program for poverty alleviation. It targets vulnerable children including children heading families aged between 6 and

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19 years who are in school but unable to pay school fees, as well as vulnerable children who have dropped out of school or who have never attended school.

In Swaziland, a study conducted by Mlambo, (2021) on socio-economic support of children-heading families confirms that adolescent girls from children-heading families receive nothing of their socio-economic support from the communities and non-governmental organizations, while the government does not do much for them in terms of their educational needs. Hence, children heading families expect the government's full support in terms of their educational needs. Educational evaluators in conjunction with the appropriate government authority need to come up with workable policy documents for children heading families. It was recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training should make desperate efforts to ensure that the educational needs of children heading families are met.

A study conducted in South African schools, on psycho-social support for children heading families indicated that the program of informal adoption of children heading family learners by teachers seemed to be working well, better than other programs that were implemented by government departments. In addition, the study underlined the importance of implementing a trauma-informed approach in schools to support learners from children heading families. It has been further revealed that teachers daily are faced with challenges from children heading family learners, therefore, initiation of trauma centres in schools may alleviate the psychological challenges experienced by learners from CHF backgrounds and other orphaned vulnerable children (Kwatubana and Ebrahim, 2019).

The South African Constitution, Section 29 (1) (a) of the Bill of Rights, provides everyone with basic education. Section 29 (1)(b) adds that everyone also has the ‘right to further education. Education is essential for children to develop into their full potential. It is considered important that human rights treaties prescribe that governments must provide free compulsory primary education for children. This is a minimum core obligation of governments in terms of international law. Children from child-headed families can also be considered special children as their both parents passed on.

The National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children, revised in 2018, identified concrete actions in support of the goals of the National Policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children. The Plan of Action provided targets and activities in five strategic areas: Rights and Protection; Education; Care and Support; Health and Nutrition, Management and Networking. Namibian Students’ Financial Assistance Fund (NSFAS) prioritizes orphans and Vulnerable Children by giving loans and grants to students to further their studies.

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For students who lack the financial resources to finance their education and are unable to access bank loans, study loans, or bursaries—including children heading families—the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa administers the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) bursary program. TVET colleges, universities, and universities of technology offer different aid packages and each package has its own set of requirements that benefit children heading families also. The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund (2001) highlighted that children belonging to child-headed families may be excluded from the education system, and frequently compelled to leave school, because of poverty or to comply with the responsibilities of heading the household.

Martin and Collie (2019) highlighted the importance of students having a trusting relationship with their educators as it creates a welcoming relationship and promotes a feeling of self-belonging. Establishing good relationships between learners and educators is a key aspect when it comes to creating a positive learning environment. It also helps foster mutual respect and trust between the students and their educators.

2.4.2 Adult Care Support Strategies

In Kenya Chege and Ucembe (2020) confirmed that the pilot project which catered for vulnerable children including those heading families had been approved by the Government. Additionally, the Kenyan government announced a moratorium on the registration of new live-in childcare facilities. More recently, an active government-led and NGO and civil society-motivated care reform pilot project which encompasses de-institutionalization was launched in mid-2018, in Western Kenya, and is expected to be expanded to other countrywide over the next years.

Children heading families all over the world are growing up without the care, protection, and guidance they need from adults. In Austria, Gmeiner and Hofe (2018) with other supporters founded the Societas Socialis (SOS), which stands for "Save our Souls" a non-governmental and non-profit organization working for the holistic development of parentless children and those heading families with the purpose that no child should grow up alone. The goal of the organization was to raise funds for the care of orphaned children in Australia.

In Namibia, every child heading the family is said to be placed under the supervision of an adult chosen by the children's court, the Minister, or a non-governmental organization designated by the Minister. Children heading families are a form of "family" that warrants support and protection in terms of the Namibian Constitution. Namibian Constitution Second Amendment Act 7(2010) Article 14(3): The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. General comments issued in terms of the Convention on the Rights of the Child have noted the need to provide special support to children heading families to ensure

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their access to basic rights and services. When family members cannot care for child-headed children the states should provide support, financial and otherwise, to child-headed children as necessary, and ensure that they receive community support as well (Hubbard, 2019).

The Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) underlines that children heading families should be supported and protected by an adult mentor, who will act in the child's best interests. The stories are a sample of the experiences of millions of children living in child-headed households across Africa, revealing both the gravity of their situations as well as the urgent need for action in terms of advocacy, policy and legislative development, social mobilization, and program design.

2.4.3 Poverty and Hunger Support Strategies

A study conducted by Valombola (2022) in Namibia, confirmed that social protection programs alone cannot eliminate poverty, some policies are aimed at reducing poverty by 2 to 10% by 2022 as articulated in the Fifth National Development Plan (2021/22).

According to a study conducted by De Hoop, Groppo, and Handa (2020) in Malawi, cash transfer programs that give children in the head of household regular, unconditional income support are quickly emerging as a crucial part of the social safety net in many Sub-Saharan African nations. These initiatives' main goals are to assist children heading families in enhancing their food security and managing their consumption during tough financial times.

Owing to the lack of affordable housing in Zambia, about 70 percent of urban dwellers in the country live in slums with inadequate access to water and sanitation. The lack of housing exacerbates includes children heading families' poverty. The project called PAMWESU in partnership with Stanbic Bank Zambia (2018), in Chilanga district, has become the latest to benefit from the Habitat for Humanity Zambians project of constructing fully subsidized three-roomed houses, installation of boreholes and water kiosks, awareness as the project brought great relief to children heading families (Wood and McElwee, 2020).

A study by Chademana and Van Wyk (2021) on child-headed households in Zimbabwe, indicated that children-heading families have no necessary documentation to go to school even when a good Samaritan exists. In addition, in a similar report, more than fifty children-headed households are without birth certificates, resulting in them failing to write grade seven examinations a mandatory step to secondary education. Lack of identity documents may be a result of them being misplaced upon the death of parents and may be a result of ignorance of the importance of registration documents by the parents before death. In South Africa, the lack of identity documents for children affects the country in achieving one of the Millennium Development Goals of promoting education which also widens the gap between the rich and the poor.

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In South Africa, learners who must walk a long distance to school, often without having eaten any breakfast before leaving home in the morning, find it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork during the day. For many children heading families, the school feeding program is the main incentive for attending school.

Social welfare and child protection systems are critical in delivering targeted cash transfers (via the Cash Plus program) and ensuring that South Africa's social workforce is highly trained in evidence-based best practices. Social assistance is when the State provides support directly to individuals to help them provide for their needs, usually in the form of cash grants. Social assistance schemes are normally 'non-contributory' schemes in that the person does not make any contribution towards the scheme.

Social grants are administered by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). SASSA is mandated by the South African Social Security Agency Act of 2004 to "ensure the provision of comprehensive social security services against vulnerability and poverty within the constitutional legislative framework." The legislative mechanisms and policies in place to protect children already include the child-support grant, no-fee schools, the provision of meals at school, and the strengthening of the National Register for Sex Offenders.

In South Africa, the Department of Social Development (DSD) is in the process of compiling a Child-Headed Households Register to formalize assistance for children heading families. The Department of Social Development began the campaign in (2014) when it asked South Africans to assist in ensuring that currently existing and new child-headed households receive the necessary support from the government by informing the Department where they are. To date, 3,214 child-headed households and 6,522 youth-headed have been identified and assisted by the (DSD) program in South Africa. Once identified, an assessment of the needs of the child and child-headed households is done and thereafter linked to the necessary therapeutic interventions and resources. The researcher identified the gap in the roll-out to ensure support reaches out to child-headed children in the Vhembe and Mopani districts of Limpopo province, SA.

Sections 24 through 29 of the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution recognize the socio-economic rights of citizens, including the right to social security. The government is obligated to progressively realize these rights, meaning that "the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realization of the right." Social Grants are in place to improve standards of living and redistribute wealth to create a more equitable society. Social grants remain the cornerstone of the government's key programs to fight poverty afflicting children.

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The Social Assistance Act 13 of (2004) and regulations to the act provide the legal framework for the administration of seven social grants. Grants are targeted at categories of people who are vulnerable to poverty and in need of state support. These are older people, people with disabilities, and children. Food parcels or cash for three months are given to individuals, including children heading families, who are in immediate need of temporary financial assistance through the Social Relief of Distress award.

2.4.4 Psycho-Social Support Strategies

The Care Reform Initiative was started by the Ghanaian government with financial and technical assistance from UNICEF to lessen the nation's reliance on orphanages to care for vulnerable children, especially children heading families. (Adayuga and Dadzie, 2022). The initiative was in reaction to the exponential growth of children heading families, between 1996 and 2006, which increased from 10 to 148. Nonetheless, only 10 orphanage establishments taking care of 4500 children had a license to operate. Furthermore, there were frequent media reports of abuse and illegal adoption of children in the orphanages.

In Dar es Salaam Tanzania, a study conducted by Makuu (2019), highlighted that in the past no orphan was left without care, but, lately, the situation is different due to the orphan crisis and social change, which have rendered the extended family system unable to play its role like before. As a response to the plight of orphans and children heading families, new alternative care systems such as community-based care (CBC), institutional/residential care, and group homes, have been established to provide care and support to them.

Zimbabwean families are traditionally stretched, the increase in the number of orphans puts pressure on relatives who must fend for additional children. Child-headed families' arrangements seem to represent a new coping mechanism for orphans in Zimbabwe. Community-based organizations (CBOs) also help extended families carry the burden of orphaned children heading families (Palmera, De Klerk, Esauc, and Ivy, 2023).

In Lesotho (2006), Prince Harry and Prince Seeiso established a Charity Trust Fundraising called Sentebale "meaning we will never forget you. "The Sentebale Charity has been established to ensure that the most vulnerable children including orphans and children heading families receive the support they need to lead healthy and productive lives (Sentebale Charity Trust Fundraising, 2024).

Over the past ten years, Prince Harry has worked to draw attention to the urgent issue of children who live in extreme poverty or suffer on their own, and the importance of delivering essential life skills and psycho-social support to help combat the crucial problems faced by child-headed children and vulnerable orphaned children. Working in partnership with local grassroots organizations,

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Sentebale Charity provided healthcare, education, and psychosocial support to orphaned vulnerable children and children heading families. The charity ran and collaborated on a diverse range of programs; from improving the emotional well-being of children and coping with hardships in providing care for orphaned children and those heading families, Sentebale Charity works in partnership with the community to positively transform the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable children.

In Namibia when children heading families remain together with their siblings in their parents' home, they can help each other grieve, maintain ties within themselves and their community, secure assets, avoid abuse by relatives, and obtain assistance and cultural guidance from elders in their community (Gentz, Chouinard and Ruiz-Casares, 2022).

Emotional support generally comes from family and close friends, and it is considered the most recognized form of social support as the support provides care, love empathy, and a sense of trust. Other support may come from relatives, educators, peer groups, and community members which is based on good communication. A study by Carroll, Bower, and Chen (2022) in Australia, revealed that the integration of social and emotional programs into the broader school curriculum can have a positive effect on the academic achievement and wellbeing of children heading families.

Theron and Van Breda (2021) discovered that children heading families developed strong social ties with their peers, extended family members, neighbors, and community leaders whom they often relied on for material and emotional support. This includes helping them when they do not have any food, providing money for medical treatment or school fees and other materials, encouragement, advice, and protection.

Effective community and relative support to children heading families should include context-specific social protection measures to strengthen community systems and safety nets. Nonetheless, the alternative care systems which through informal and formal residential care arrangements outside the family of origin accommodate children heading families existing. Informal care is provided by relatives or friends, but formal care is provided in a family environment sanctioned and regulated by the government or any administrative body or judiciary such as adoption. A study conducted by Tsegay (2022) indicated that great demographic changes have worsened the economic states of many African societies, the traditional safety net no longer copes, and this has led to calls for support from external sources other than the family and individual community.

Relatives and neighbors also sometimes helped with some work, such as doing household chores or collecting medicines for them. Others stated that relatives, peers, and neighbors were not always able to help, and some child-headed children found it difficult to spend time with their friends

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because of their caring responsibilities and they were stigmatized, leading to isolation and loneliness. In Kenya, several child-headed children said the worst aspects of their caring responsibilities were feeling lonely and different from their peers (Kanyi, 2019).

Children heading families have immediate basic needs in terms of food, security, housing, health, and education. The report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) describes the socio-economic difficulties experienced by orphan children-headed families and suggests community raising of issues affecting poor and vulnerable orphans and child-headed children.

In Namibia, the school development plan includes programs that address the needs of vulnerable learners including child-headed children's practical ways to involve the local community. School Boards, in consultation with the Advisory Committee and the Counseling Support Group, developed circles of support and facilitated referrals and appropriate community responses for child-headed children by liaising with traditional authorities, private sector, regional officials, line ministries, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organization (CBOs) and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs). Support responds to the wide range of needs that exist. School Boards and community members assist in the identification of out-of-school child-headed children for the necessary support and assistance to enable enrolment at a school or for appropriate alternative assistance (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Nigeria initiated Community Based Support (CUBS) to assist Orphaned Vulnerable Children including children heading families. The project involves multiple stakeholders and players including minister's departments, and agencies, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), the private sector, and development partners, with the federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development coordinate agency. The (CUBS) focused on mobilizing and supporting community-based responses that identify, locate, and protect Orphaned Vulnerable Children (OVC) in stance to vulnerable households including children heading families. Furthermore, the (CUBS) mobilized community awareness to reduce stigma, discrimination, and isolation of orphans and child-headed children. The intervention platforms were on key areas; education and vocational training, psychosocial support, and legal protection for orphans and children heading families.

Stakeholders of Trinity United Methodist Church in Naivasha, Kenya partnering with First United Methodist Church of Winter Park, Orlando, United States of America. In 2010, they conceptualized Panua Partners in Hope, a transformational ministerial-assisted non-profit organization program. These churches recently established support for orphans and vulnerable children in Naivasha, Kenya.

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Continued education was a key component of what Panua Partners in Hope mandated. Ongoing (learning) education ensured that each child remained in school in addition to ensuring Orphaned Vulnerable Children (OVC) were legally aware of their civil, human, and property rights. The program also outlined the provisions of governmental policies and assistance, or lack thereof to remedy such current challenges.

2.4.5 Health and Wellbeing Support Strategies

Section 27 (1) (b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 106 of (1996) provides that every child has the right to have access to health care services. Based on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, children heading families do not know the Constitution.

The Smile Foundation (2002), a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in India, comprised a group of young corporate professionals who came together to set up Smile Foundation to work with grassroots initiatives promoting positive changes in the lives of underprivileged children this includes child-headed children (Chahine, Shah, Al Abyad, Vyas and Hamdan, 2022).

A study conducted by Buzaare, Ankunda, and Menge (2023) in Uganda, attested that welfare institutions have struggled to come to terms with child-headed families. How to deal with the complex and varied nature of families headed by children requires the involvement of several sectors and cooperation between all spheres of government and civil society.

The Minister of Social Development Lindiwe Zulu and Mpumalanga MEC for Social Development Lindiwe Mtshalintshali launched the community-based child protection program in Kwa Guqa, in Emalahleni (2019). “The program aimed to protect orphans and vulnerable children, including children heading families, as some have chronic health conditions, and live and work on streets. The core package of service focused on seven social development services areas, namely: food and nutrition, economic strengthening, educational support, psychosocial support, childcare, protection, and health “says the department's spokesperson Lumka Oliphant.

Overall, the Consolidated Strategy and Guidelines are meant to harmonize legislation with practice to ensure that children living in child-headed families have access to essential services, benefits, and protection (Ramokoka, 2021). The guidelines provide an overview of norms and standards in offering services, protection from abuse, maltreatment, neglect, education, healthcare, and social assistance and security.

The constitution of the Republic of South Africa; Act. 108 of (1996) states clearly that “each child should be brought up in a safe, secure environment that is free from hazards.” Every child has the right “to family care, parental care, or appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment.” The basic needs such as nutrition, shelter, basic health care services, social

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services, and protection from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation are to be taken into consideration. No child should work underage or do work that would interfere with his or her educational development. A child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning such child."

The National Department of Social Development with support from the US President's Emerge-Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) commissioned the HSRC to merge the two documents into one, called the Consolidated Strategy and Guidelines on the Statutory Services to child-headed families. The consolidated document promotes "the rights of children living in child-headed households to develop their full potential within their communities, focusing on prevention, early intervention and a continuum of care through a multi-disciplinary and inter-sectoral approach. It furthermore provides a framework for rendering services that address the needs and challenges facing children living in child-headed households, and quality services to promote the care, protection, and well-being of children in these households."

2.5 Theoretical Framework as a Model of Support

2.5.1 Betty Neumann's System Model

Betty Neumann's theory was used in this study since her model is a comprehensive and dynamic, dimensional view of individuals, groups, and communities who are interacting with environmental stressors. Neumann's model views children heading families as an open system responding to a variety of stressors that they experience after the death of their parents (Mitchell, 2020). Children heading families experience psychological, physical, and emotional stress, which affects them differently. Therefore, the researcher finds it appropriate to use Neuman's model for the study as the model describes how individuals cope with stress.

The strategies were developed based on the findings of the study and how children heading families react to stress, the state of adaptation to stressors (reconstitution), and dynamic factors (Chitty and Black, 2020). One or more stressors may occur simultaneously and produce tension causing instability. Children heading families may become stressed when experiencing several challenges.

There are ten major aspects of Neuman's system model; the basic structure and energy resources; client variables; lines of resistance; normal line of defense; flexible line of defense; stressors; reaction; primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention; intra-, inter-and extra-personal factors; and reconstitution. Other inherent parts of the model are environment, health, and support (Rudland, Golding, and Wilkinson, 2020). The major aspects of Neuman's system model were

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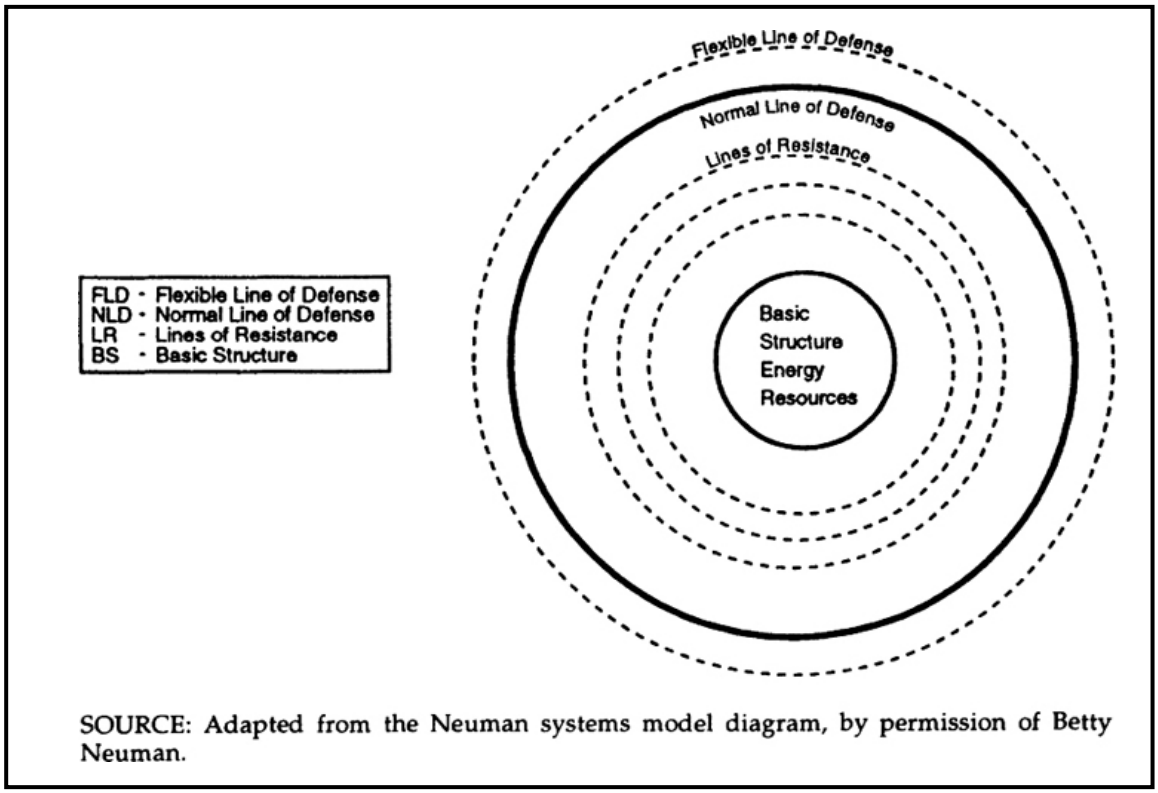
applied to the research findings and the development of strategies to improve support for children heading families in the Limpopo province of South Africa.

Neuman views the client as an open system consisting of a basic structure or central core of energy resources which are physiologic, psychological, sociocultural, developmental, and spiritual. They are surrounded by two concentric boundaries or rings referred to as lines of resistance. The lines of resistance in this study are internal factors that help children heading families defend themselves against stressors.

The normal and flexible lines of defense are outside the lines of resistance. The normal lines of resistance represent stability over time or developmental stage (Parker and Grote, 2022). The challenges may invade the coping mechanism of children heading families due to lack of support from children's relatives which serves as a flexible line of defense. A flexible line of defense is dynamic, and it can be rapidly altered over a short period. It is a protective buffer that prevents stressors from penetrating the normal line of defense (Hannoodee and Dhamoon, 2020). Single or multiple stressors may invade the flexible line of defense. In this study, a flexible line of defense refers to the support provided by the relatives and community members to maintain children heading families' state of equilibrium. It includes system variables and behaviors of the individual's usual coping patterns, and lifestyle. Figure 2.3. shows Neuman's system model.



SOURCE: Adapted from the Neuman systems model diagram, by permission of Betty Neuman.

Figure 2.3: Betty Neuman's system model

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Three types of environments influence the surroundings of children heading families. The internal is the environment that exists within the client system influenced by all forces and interactive influences that are within the boundaries. In the study, interaction took place within the communities where children heading families live, including their friends, relatives, educators, and community members. The external environment exists outside the client system and there are forces and interactive influences outside the system boundaries that were represented by challenges determining the quality of life for children heading families. In this study, children heading families irrespective of the challenges brought by the external environment strive to cope by becoming more resilient. Resilience is the ability to cope with and recover from setbacks. Resilient allows children heading families to emerge from life's challenges stronger, more adaptable, and more capable, transforming every aspect of their lives. The power of resilience is the ability to provide a resilient mindset that helps children heading families related to organized crime-related activity and that organized crime lies overcome life and emerge stronger (Selhub, 2021). However, resilience does not make the problem disappear, a need for developing support strategies is important. Thus, the researcher aims to develop strategies to improve support as children do not receive adequate support from a variety of sources.

According to Betty Neuman's theory, there are three categories of stressors inter, intra, and extra-personal that occur within the individual. The support that children heading families receive from their relatives and community members maintains stability in the situation they face. Interpersonal stressors occur within the client system and correlate with the internal environment and unrealistic role expectations. Children heading families' reaction to stressors depends on the strength of the lines of defense. Failure in lines of defense depends on the strength of lines and resistance. In that case, reconstitution occurs when a person's system adapts to stressors. The ability to change with circumstances, opportunities, and challenges without losing your equilibrium or your sense of direction is what it means to be adaptive. Reconstitution is the increase in energy with the degree of reaction to stressors.

Betty Neuman stated that the preventative levels can be used to retain and maintain system balance, and various interventions are used simultaneously. The support provided by children's relatives and community members reinforces the normal line of defense and strengthens the flexible line of defense.

2.5.1.1 Stress

According to the World Health stress (2013), stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges in our lives. This may result in mental stress which is associated with depression, anxiety, and physical exhaustion. A stressor is a situation or event that causes us to

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feel stressed in nutshell stressors trigger this reaction, as a result, stressors are the experiences that prompt those feelings stressors can be internal or external factors, like our memories, environment, or the people around us, and they are also very personal.

Children heading families often experience stress if they realize that their efforts are inadequate to handle a situation. Although they may react differently to stress, others are unable to cope with the challenges they experience. A significant source of stress for one person might cause no stress for another.

2.5.1.2 Internal Stressor

Internal stressors are ideas or actions that cause tension. These ideas originate from a person's psychological expectations or attitude. Internal stressors are the sources of stress that are inside individuals and are often the most common sources of stress (Greene, 2017). Internal stressors are the thoughts and feelings that pop into our heads and cause individuals to feel unease, these can include unrealistic expectations, uncertainties, low self-esteem, and apprehension (Lidbetter, 2023). Children heading families on most occasions do not have anyone to talk to and most of the time they bottle their problems within themselves, and this harms their psychological aspect.

2.5.1.3 External Stressor

External stressors are sources of stress that individuals are aware of in the environment, these can include traumas, life experiences, or simply daily hassles (Greene, 2017). Occasionally, there are additional external factors—forces originating from the surroundings that children heading families find difficult to manage, including significant life events. They may experience difficulties falling asleep, experience appetite loss, or lose interest in routine tasks as they are traumatized by the death of their parents and never find counseling.

2.5.1.4 Coping

Coping is defined as the thoughts and behaviors mobilized to manage internal and external stressful situations, to an active, effective person dealing with demands, often conflicting, of a biological, psychological, or social nature. It is generally an effort to prevent or diminish threat, harm, and loss, or to reduce the distress that is often associated with those experiences. Some theorists prefer to limit the concept of coping to voluntary responses (Kroeber, 2023). When developed support strategies are implemented children heading families' s challenges can be addressed hence improving coping mechanisms.

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2.6 Summary

Chapter two has alluded to the literature review and the theoretical framework background of the research study. The literature review showed that children heading families need support so that they may live a quality life. Hence in this chapter challenges experienced by children heading families and the support needed were highlighted. Chapter three describes the research methodology and designs.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter two described the literature review related to this study. This chapter describes the research methodology. Research methodology is the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analysis of information about a topic (Flick, 2020). Sileyew (2019) indicated that research methodology is the path through which researchers need to conduct their research. It shows the path through which these researchers formulate their problems and objectives and present their results from the data obtained during the study period. This chapter outlined the research approach, study design, study setting, study population, target population, accessible population, sample and sampling, sample size, sampling of districts, data collection method, unstructured in-depth face-to-face interview, focus group discussions, pre-test, plan for data collection and management, data analysis and management, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, delimitations and limitations, plans for dissemination and implementation of results and summary. The study employed a qualitative approach with explorative and descriptive designs. The study was conducted in two phases.

- **Phase 1**

Phase one addressed the first two objectives of the study. The objectives used in phase one were to explore and describe the challenges experienced by children heading families and the support provided to children heading families by the community member's children's relatives in Vhembe and Mopani districts of Limpopo province, South Africa. This has been achieved by conducting an in-depth face-to-face interview with children heading families, children's relatives, and community members.

- **Phase 2**

Phase two addressed the second objective which was to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

- **Phase 3**

Phase 3 addressed the third objective which was to validate the developed strategies to improve support for children heading families using the e-Delphi technique.

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Table 3.1: Summary of Objectives and Research Methodology

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3
Objectives	Exploring challenges and Exploring support	Development of strategies	Validation of the strategies
Research design	Qualitative Explorative Descriptive	Systematic review	Qualitative Explorative Descriptive
Research setting	Vhembe and Mopani districts		Vhembe and Mopani districts
Target population	Children heading families Children's relatives Community members	Children heading families Children's relatives Community members	Children heading families Children's relatives Community members Experts from institutions and organizations
Sampling	Purposive Snowball Convenience		Purposive
Data collection	Face-to-face interviews Focus group discussions		e-Delphi technique
Data analysis	Tesch's eight steps criterion		Consensus of opinions

3.2 Qualitative Research Approach

The qualitative research approach is a systematic model of inquiry into complex social structures, interactions, or processes by employing observational, interpretive, and naturalistic approaches (King, Keohane, and Verba, 2021). The qualitative research approach is highly flexible and takes place in a variety of settings, with different groups of people, and on various topics. The qualitative research approach usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, Bell, and Hirschsohn, 2021). A qualitative research approach was used to answer the in-depth questions for understanding the challenges children heading families experienced in Limpopo province, South Africa. Participants narrated and described their

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meaningful stories in a natural setting. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and their experiences (Jackson and Mazzei, 2022). The application of this approach allowed participants to share their experiences using their own words and reflect on matters that affected them. Qualitative research looks at the world in-depth and aims to uncover reality, as seen from the eyes of the research participants themselves or, in another context (Savin-Baden and Major, 2023). One of the main benefits of qualitative research is that it provides an in-depth understanding of human behavior. The researcher allowed children heading families to narrate their experiences and relatives and community members also described the support they provide to them.

3.3 Research Design

Sileyew (2019) refers to research design as a comprehensive plan for data collection and is intended to provide an appropriate framework for the study. The choice of research design depends on the researcher's decisions about the importance of various dimensions of the research process, including how to explain social phenomena, how they are interconnected and change over time, and whether, the results can be generalized to a larger group of people than those that are included in the investigation (Bryman et al., 2021). Leavy (2022) pointed out that research design is a "blueprint" for empirical research aimed at answering specific questions or testing specific hypotheses and must specify at least three processes: (1) the data collection process, (2) data collection tool development, and (3) the sampling process. Research design is also a plan or structured framework of how you intend to conduct the research process to classify according to whether they are empirical or non-empirical studies (Fellows and Liu, 2021). Qualitative explorative, descriptive, designs were used to address the objectives of this study.

- **Exploratory**

The aim of exploratory research is for the researcher to become conversant with basic facts, gain insight, and understand the nature of the problem (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, and Delport, 2018). It is aimed at exploring the full nature of the phenomenon and its manifestation and other factors. It is intended for a population that is not large and designed to increase knowledge. In this study, the challenges experienced by children heading families, and the support provided by children's relatives and community members were explored. The challenges and support needed by children heading families formed the basis for the development of the strategies.

- **Descriptive**

Aggarwal and Ranganathan (2019) stated that a descriptive study is designed to describe the distribution of one or more variables, without regard to any causal or other hypotheses. The descriptive design aims at more intensive examination and deeper meanings without the

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researcher attempting to manipulate the participants (De Vos et al., 2018). Siedlecki (2020) highlighted that descriptive design is useful for studying experiences about which little is known and provides the opportunity to define such phenomena through description. Furthermore, the descriptive design aimed to describe the phenomenon precisely through narrative-type descriptions concerned with challenges experienced by children heading families and the support provided by children's relatives and community members. It is usually used together with exploratory design to explain and describe explored aspects within the current practice.

The descriptive research design involves observing and collecting data on a given topic without attempting to infer cause-and-effect relationships as it provides a comprehensive and accurate picture of the population or phenomenon being studied and describes the relationships, patterns, and trends that exist within the data. Descriptive research design is a powerful tool used by scientists and researchers to gather information about a particular group or phenomenon and provides a richly detailed and accurate picture of the characteristics and behaviors of a particular population or subject (Sirisilla and Sirisilla, 2023). The design allowed the researcher to gain information about the study problem. In this study, the researcher used descriptive design to describe the challenges experienced by children heading families and the support provided by children's relatives and community members.

By observing and collecting data on a given topic, descriptive research design helped the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the challenges experienced by children heading families and the support provided by their relatives and community members that would provide valuable insights that informed future studies. Data was collected in a natural environment where there was free interaction with the participants. One of the main advantages of descriptive research design is that it can collect data from many participants, explore different aspects of a topic, and provide a clear understanding of complex topics.

3.4 Study Setting

The researcher conducted the study in Limpopo province, South Africa, and did not manipulate or change the environment in the study. Limpopo province is comprised of 5 districts namely: Vhembe, Mopani, Capricorn, Sekhukhune, and Waterberg. The study involved the Mopani and Vhembe districts. The Draft Annual Report (2020/2021) indicated that both districts' education has been rated as the priority in terms of Government objectives. Children heading families need support to realize their aspirations of becoming educated. Amongst the five districts, Vhembe and Mopani have the highest numbers of children heading families as indicated in Table 1.2.

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Table 3.1: Statistics of children heading families in Limpopo province 2020-2021.

Name of District	Children heading families
Vhembe	7 470
Mopani	7 166
Capricorn	5 201
Sekhukhune	3 995
Waterberg	2 035

Source: Limpopo Province Survey DCoG, 2020-2021.

The natural settings were children's homes and chiefs' kraal where the community traditional leaders and community members come together to discuss issues concerning their communities.

3.5 Study Population

The population is defined as the entire group of persons or objects that is of interest to the researcher, in other words, that meets the criteria that the researcher is interested in studying (Pandey and Pandey, 2021). Salkind (2021) defined a study population as a group of potential participants to whom the researcher wants to generalize the results of the study. In phase 1 of this study, the population was children heading families, children's relatives, and community members, in Limpopo province, South Africa.

3.5.1 Target Population

According to Akman (2023) target population is a group of people with characteristics that may be effectively defined to distinguish them from the general population. In this study target population in phase 1 were children heading families, children's relatives, and community members residing in Vhembe and Mopani districts who met the characteristics of the phenomenon under study.

3.5.2 Accessible Population

The accessible population is the portion of the target population that the researcher can access (Fetzer, 2020). The accessible population were children heading families who signed assent forms, children's relatives, and community members who volunteered to participate in the study and signed consent forms to participate in the study.

3.6 Sample and Sampling

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3.6.1 Sample

A sample is a smaller group selected from the population that is selected from the research population (Salkind, 2021). The researcher selected a sample of children heading families with characteristics that met the study's requirements. The sample was drawn from 10 rural villages in the Vhembe and Mopani districts of Limpopo province, South Africa.

3.6.2 Sampling

Sampling is the process of choosing a subset of the population to learn more about a phenomenon. It involves deciding how to choose research project participants (Baltes and Ralph, 2022). This sampling method was based on participants who were typical representatives of the study. The researcher used a non-probability purposive sampling method to select the 2 districts and 10 rural villages. The researcher included two districts in Limpopo province based on the highest statistics of children heading families (Table 1.2). Compared to other districts in the province of Limpopo, the Department of Cooperative Governance (2020–2021) showed the highest number of children heading families. The purposive sampling method allowed the researcher to select the sample based on knowledge of the phenomenon studied. Non-probability, snowball sampling method was used to select the children's relatives. The snowballing method was appropriate as children heading families didn't know all the relatives both from the paternal and maternal sides. Children's relatives assisted in identifying other relatives who were not known by the children heading families. Snowball is a sampling method where the researchers identify a few participants that match the criteria for inclusion in the study and then ask them to recommend others they know who also meet the selection criteria (Zhang, Che, Nan, and Kim (2022). Supported by Muslita and Gani (2022) who confirmed that snowball is when each person interviewed may be asked to suggest additional people for interviewing. The number of children's relatives was determined by data saturation.

The convenience sampling method was used to select the community members. When using the convenience sampling method, the sample was selected because of its availability to the researcher (Clark and Bryman, 2019). The sample consisted of community members who usually attended meetings at the chief's kraal once a month and were available at the meeting on the days the interviews were conducted. In this study, the researcher requested the traditional leaders from ten rural villages in Mopani and Vhembe districts to identify children who are heading families whose parents died.

3.6.3 Sample Size

Hennink and Kaiser (2022), refer to sample size as the number of participants, events, behaviors, or situations examined in a study. Five villages were selected from each of the two districts based on the traditional leaders' report of the highest number of children heading families. Villages

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selected from the Vhembe district were Magau, Tshiozwi, Gogobole, Dopeni and Khalavha. Rural villages selected under the Mopani district were Nhlaneki, Dzumeri, Dzingingidzingi, Homu, and Hlupheka. The researcher selected ten children heading families, ten children's relatives, and ten focus group discussions from the two selected districts. The sample size of children heading families was determined by data saturation. Data was collected through interviews with sample sizes of all three participant groups until no further information could be acquired. During the data analysis, no new codes surfaced, and all three groups had reached data saturation. Each village selected was represented by the participants of the three groups.

The researcher conducted focus group discussions with the males and females' community members of different positions such as pastors, traditional leaders, retired educators, health professionals, labor relation officers, heads of drop-in centers, business people, and civic community members in Vhembe and Mopani districts.

3.6.4 Sampling of Districts

Limpopo province consists of five districts namely: Capricorn, Sekhukhune, Mopani, Vhembe, and Waterburg. This study selected Mopani and Vhembe Districts using non-probability purpose sampling. The districts were selected based on the high number of children heading families. Figure 3.1 shows the five districts of Limpopo province.

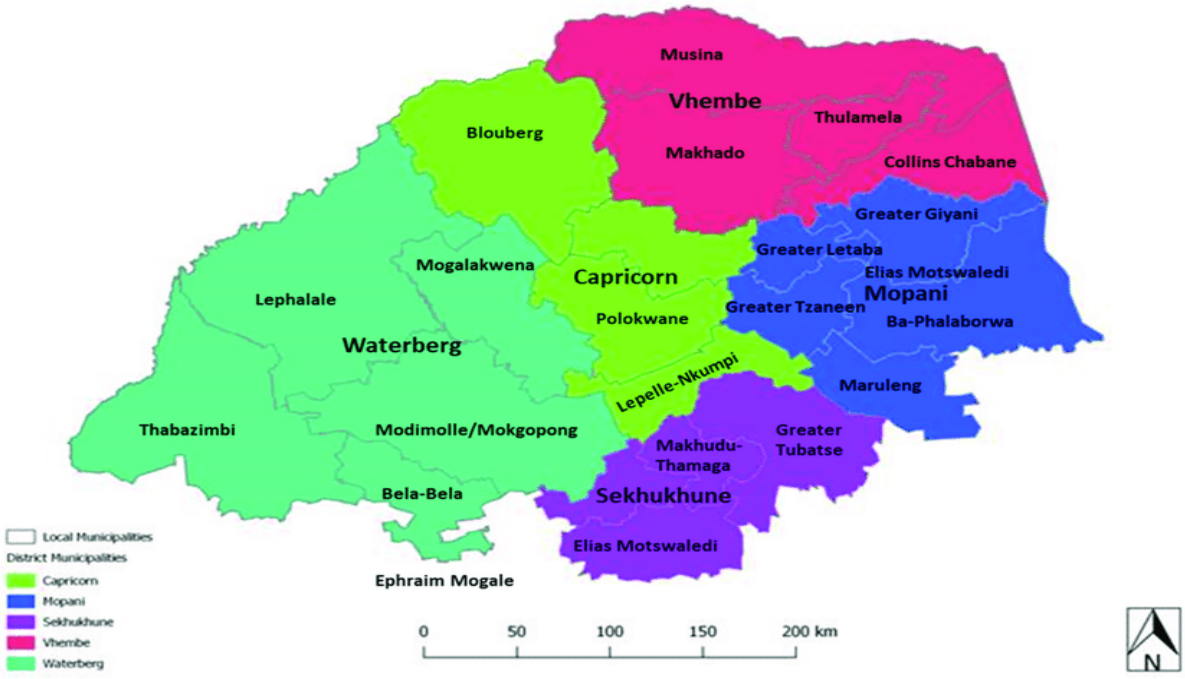

Figure 3.1: Limpopo province with five districts

Source: Limpopo Province Annual Report 2020/21

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Mopani district is situated in the North-eastern part of the Limpopo province. It is bordered in the East by Mozambique, and in the North by the Vhembe district municipality. Mopani district comprises five local municipalities: Phalaborwa, Greater Giyani, Greater Tzaneen, and Maruleng. The study was conducted at Greater Giyani. Figure 3.2 shows the Mopani District with villages.

Figure 3.2: Mopani District with villages

Source: Mopani District Draft Annual Report 2020/21

The Vhembe district is situated in the Northern Limpopo Province, sharing borders with Zimbabwe in the north including Mozambique through Kruger National Park in the east, and Botswana in the Northwest. It is comprised of four local municipalities: Musina, Thulamela, Makhado, and Collins Chabane. Figure 3.3 shows the Vhembe district with villages.

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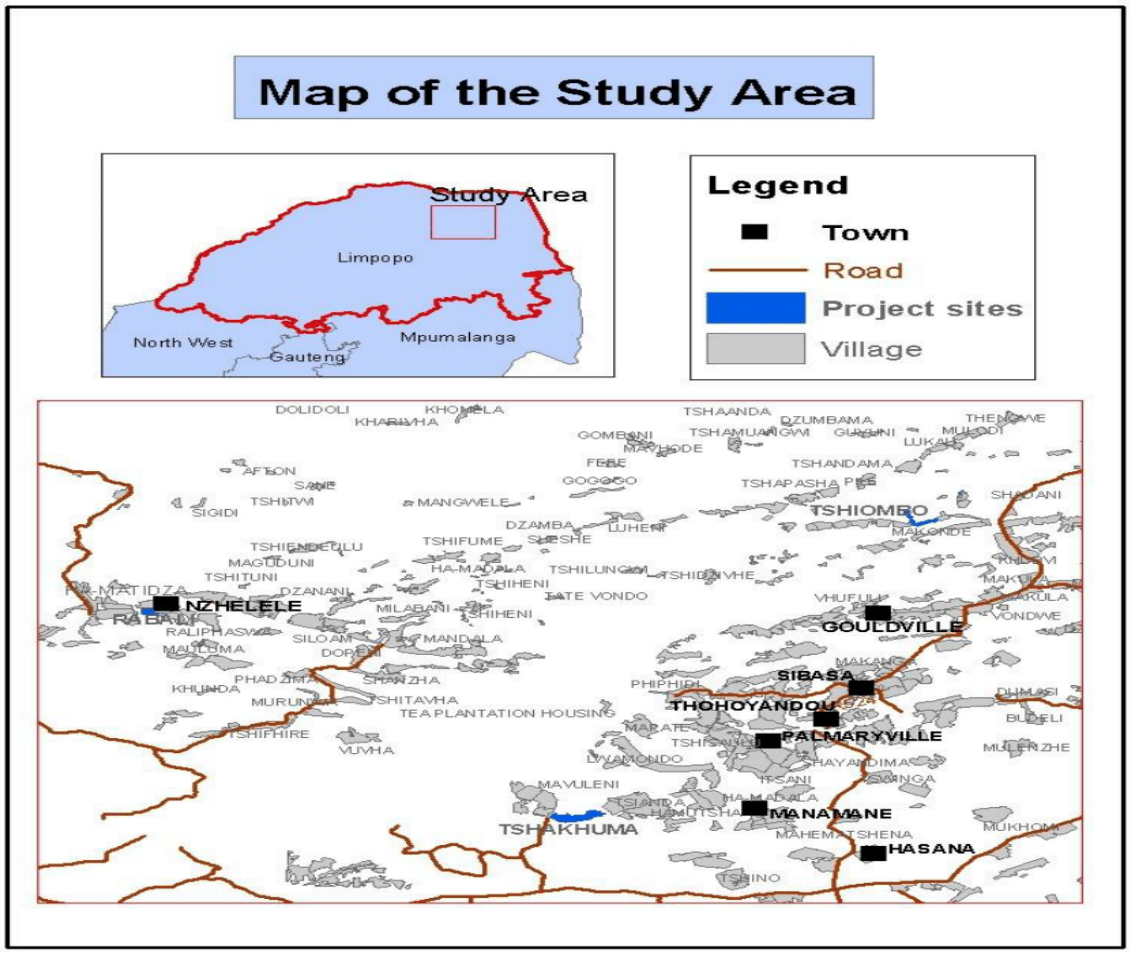

Figure 3.3: Vhembe district with villages

Source: District Health Information 2017/2018

3.7 Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria are defined as the key features of the target population that the investigators used to answer their research question (Neitzel, Zhang, and Slavin, 2022). In this study, children heading families, children's relatives, and community members residing in the Vhembe and Mopani districts of Limpopo province

3.7.1 Inclusion Criteria for Children

The researcher included:

- Children heading families residing in the Vhembe and Mopani district villages
- Boys and girls between 13-18 years of age

3.7.2 Inclusion Criteria for Children's Relatives

The researcher included children's relatives who were:

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- Residing in the Vhembe and Mopani districts villages
- Men and women between the ages19 to 65 years .

3.7.3 Inclusion Criteria for the Community Members

The researcher included:

- Men and women who were 19 years and above.
- Men and women residing in the Vhembe and Mopani districts.

3.7.4 Exclusion Criteria of the three groups of participants.

- Children heading families, relatives, and community members who were mentally unstable.

3.8 Data Collection Method

The most frequently used data collection methods are participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussions. Participant observation is a method of data collection through the participation in and observation of a group or individuals over an extended time (Polt and Beck, 2019). In phase 1 the researcher used in-depth unstructured face-to-face interviews to collect data from children heading families, and children's relatives. In phase 2 focus group discussions were used to collect data from community members on the support they provide and the development of strategies to improve support for children heading families. In phase 3 e-Delphi technique was used to guide validation the developed strategies. The researcher facilitated data collection assisted by a research assistant.

3.8.1 Unstructured Interview

In an unstructured interview, the researcher hardly follows a structure, but typically uses a general interview guideline with a list of topics or issues and a brief set of self-prompts to deal with a certain range of topics (Bryman et al., 2021). Unstructured interviews minimize misrepresentation and misinterpretation of the participant's responses as the researcher has the chance to ask probing and interpreting questions to clarify the participant's comments (Bihu, 2020).
The following questions were asked:

- **A central question for children heading families.**

  May you kindly share with me challenges that you experience as a child heading a family?

- **A central question for children's relatives**

  sMay you kindly share with the support you provide as a relative to children heading families who are related to you?

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- **A central question for community members**

- May you kindly as community members share with me the support provides to children heading families?
- May you kindly share with me the strategies to improve support of children heading families?

3.8.2 In-depth Face-to-Face Interviews

The honours degree student assistant and the researcher herself facilitated data collection. First, the researcher trained an assistant with the necessary skills. Face-to-face interviews are the most common method of interviewing. An in-depth interview involves asking open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses from participants. The interviews are typically one-on-one and involve observing people in their natural environment, and they are unstructured. The advantages of in-depth face-to-face interviews are that questions may be clarified, and non-verbal behavior and mannerisms can be observed. The disadvantages can be that participants may be anxious or emotionally affected and the researcher's characteristics may influence participants. The researcher would stop interviewing participants who were emotionally impacted and refer them to the appropriate services, such as psychologists In-depth interviews involve verbal communication in which the participants provide information about the challenges experienced (Minikel-Lacocque, 2019). The researcher developed one central question for children heading families (**Annexure G)** and one central question for children's relatives '' **(Annexure H).** To gain more clarity and understanding, the researcher provided probing questions after the participants responded to the main questions.

3.8.3 Focus Group Discussions

A focus group is a gathering of people who are being moderated by a member of a research team and perhaps observed, either openly or secretly, by other members of the research team (Caillaud, Nikos, and Doumergue, 2022). It is a method of qualitative research that brings together a small group of people to discuss a given topic and the researcher typically leads the discussions aiming to generate insights about the topic under discussion. Focus group discussions are often useful in allowing participants to share their thoughts. It is particularly useful in participatory research where members of the community are equal in planning and implementation, and where the topic is a practical community concern.

Focus group discussions are a qualitative data collection method where a heterogenous or homogenous group, with 3 to 15 participants, meets and engages in a group discussion on a topic

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the researcher proposed to generate diverse qualitative data (Fouche, Strydom and Roestenburg, 2023). Its disadvantage is that some people feel uncomfortable when requested to talk in groups. The researcher conducted the focus group interviews with an assistant who holds an honours degree. Everyone was made to feel comfortable in speaking and enforcing a respectful tone. Inattentive participants received encouragement and assistance to add to the conversation. Qualitative data collection methods such as interviews and focus group discussions allowed researchers to gather rich, detailed information about why people think and behave the way they do. Data was collected using focus group discussions during which participants developed strategies to improve support for children heading families, data were collected until data saturation was reached. A central question was asked of the participants (**Annexure I**). The researcher regulated dominant group members so that others could speak. Eight essential steps were adhered to by the researcher throughout the focus group discussions as described below (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2021).

Step 1: Choosing the topic of interest

The focus of the discussion was to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families. Focus group discussions were enhanced with unstructured interviews to explore the topic in greater detail.

Step 2: Defining the research scope and hypothesis

The focus group participants were given an explanation by the researcher about the value of the information, the type of questions that would be asked, and the aim of the focus group discussion.

Step 3: Determining the focus group questions

To gather information, the questions posed during focus groups were very significant. The questions had a clear path for inquiry. Good inquiries were, clear, open-ended, conversational, and non-leading. Leading and clear queries were avoided with open-ended inquiries.

Step 4: Selecting a moderator or co-moderator

Leading the group in stimulating discussions was the researcher's responsibility because it needed competence, ability, and knowledge. The researcher was impartial and made use of her listening and observing abilities.

Step 5: Recruiting participants

This step was to select participants with adequate subject knowledge. Eight groups of participants were comprised of different genders, ranging from 7-8 participants. The date, location, and time

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were set for discussion. The focus group discussions were face-to-face. The researcher selected participants with adequate knowledge of the topic.

Step 6: Setting up the focus group

Every participant signed a consent form after being explained their right to withdraw from participation at any time. Privacy and confidentiality were preserved. The researcher chose a place that could accommodate the group members and was noise-free ahead of the scheduled day. The researcher made sure there were restrooms at the location. Chair arrangements were created such that attendees could see each other while being comfortable. To capture the session, the researcher promptly set the audio recorder.

Step 7: Hosting the focus group

Before starting the session, the researcher welcomed the participants and explained the purpose of the study. The researcher gave an overview of the agenda and ensured that participants remained active and contributed to the discussion. Pauses, to allow participants a chance to add feedback were provided. The researcher probed ensuring that the answers were explored more. Non-verbal communication was observed. Notes were taken and at the end, the researcher gave a closing summary and thanked the participants for their time. Focus group discussions lasted for 45-60 minutes.

Step 8: Analysing the data and reporting of results

The final step was to review, tabulate, and reassemble the evidence that was collected throughout the session. It is necessary to investigate the following sources:

Notes made by the moderator; Audiotape recordings; Memory

Since the original data was largely descriptive and not quantifiable, it was translated into formats that allowed for examination. Written transcripts that were condensed from the audio recordings were produced. Indexing, organizing, and analyzing the data were indicated in data analysis.

3.9 Pre-Test

Pre-testing is an assessment measure given to participants before they have undergone some type of treatment as part of a research study and participants will not form part of the main study. A pre-test was done to test the researcher's skills and ambiguity (Chen, Lou, and Lo, 2020). Pre-testing is conducted in qualitative research, whilst pilot is used in quantitative research. The pretesting addresses the ambiguities in the formulated central questions, sequencing, and time allocated for the interview sessions, hence the adjustment of the question for any ambiguity. The researcher

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tested her communication and interviewing skills. For questions asked to different groups of participants refer to annexures (G, H, and I).

The researcher interviewed four children heading families, four children's relatives, and four community members in the villages of Vhembe and Mopani districts in Limpopo province and the participants did not form part of the main study. One focused group discussion per district was conducted.

3.10 Data Collection

Data collection is a systematic process of gathering observable or measurable data that allows the researcher to gain first-hand knowledge and identify solutions to research problems (Thomas, 2017). Gathering data is a crucial tool for comprehending participant behaviors and motivations. It assists the researcher in obtaining information on the initiatives they would want to see (Korkeamaki, Keskustalo, and Kumpulainen, 2022). The University of Venda ethics committee granted the researcher ethical clearance No. FHS/22/PDC/07/1907. The study and participant identification were conducted with consent obtained through visits to the traditional leaders of Vhembe and Mopani, two of the selected districts. Before the collection of data, plans were established to meet with children heading families, their relatives, and members of the community to inform them of the study's purpose. Participants were made aware of the importance of voluntarily signing consent/assent forms. Participants had the option to consent or not, thus the researcher obtained their agreement before recording. The researcher used an audio voice recorder to record all the interviews, and participants were made aware of this.

The interviews were held in an environment that was extremely appropriate and free of distractions. Since the homes were their natural environments, children heading families were interviewed at their home setting. Interviews with community members and children's relatives were conducted at the chief's kraal during their traditional gathering dates. Since no one was permitted in the area where the interviews were held, the privacy of the participants was preserved throughout. The researcher probed continuously as she wanted to understand more about the phenomenon. Unstructured face-to-face interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes. Eight focus group discussions were conducted in Vhembe and Mopani districts, as this was determined by data saturation. Data saturation is the point in a research process where enough data has been collected to draw necessary conclusions, and any further data collection would not produce value-added insights. Focus group discussions lasted for about 45-60 minutes.

3.11 Data Management and Analysis

The researcher ensured that field notes were completed, and data was properly labeled. The researcher used the process of bracketing and remained neutral, setting aside previous knowledge

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and beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher listened to the audiotapes used for data collection several times until the researcher was completely satisfied with the interpretation of the verbatim data. Data was organized into file folders and index cards. Data was kept in a computer which was opened by a means of password. Immediately after data collection, the researcher organized data following the levels of various stages. Data analysis was guided by Tesch's eight steps of the coding process (Creswell, 2018).

- **Step1. Getting a Sense of the Whole**

The researcher read all transcriptions carefully and wrote down some of the ideas identified.

- **Step 2. Underlying Meaning**

The researcher picked one document created during an interview and read it thoroughly. The researcher examined the meaning of the data that has been collected.

- **Step 3. Cluster Similar Topics**

The researcher compiled a list of topics after completing the task for all participants. Similar topics were clustered together; topics were formed into columns, organized as main, unique, and leftover topics.

- **Step 4. Abbreviate Topics as Codes**

The researcher used the list to abbreviate the data as codes writing them down next to the appropriate segments of the text. The categories and codes that emerged were listed.

- **Step 5. Topics turned into Categories**

The researcher found descriptive wording for the topics and turned them into categories, grouping topics that relate to each other to reduce the total list of categories. The researcher showed interrelationships by drawing lines between categories making a final decision on the abbreviation of each category and alphabetizing the codes.

- **Step 6. The Final Decision on Abbreviations.**

The researcher and an independent coder made a final decision on themes and sub-themes by assembling data material belonging to each category.

- **Step 7. Perform Preliminary Analysis**

The researcher assembled data materials that belong to each category in one place and performed a preliminary analysis.

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- **Step 8. Recode the Existing Data**

The researcher recorded the existing data if necessary. Verbatim transcripts were also sent to an independent coder. The co-coder then confirmed the findings (See **Annexure K**).

3.12 Measures to Ensure Trustworthiness

The level of confidence a researcher has in the validity, applicability, and dependability of their qualitative data and conclusions is known as trustworthiness (Earnest, 2020). Trustworthiness ensures that the data analyzed reflects the participant's experience. It is to establish the "true value" of data collected from the participants (De Vos et al, 2018). It is aimed at checking data that can be trusted by consistency in the use of methods and bracketing the prior knowledge. Lincoln and Guba (1994) identified the following criteria for trustworthiness, namely credibility (true value), confirmability (neutrality), transferability (applicability), and dependability (consistency) as indicated in Table 3.3. The researcher ensured honesty, integrity, and unbiased so that the quality of data collected should be accurate and true.

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Table 3.2 Trustworthiness

Credibility	Credibility can refer to the value, belief, and degree to which the findings and research methods used to generate research findings be trusted (Shufutinsky, 2020). • Prolonged engagement The researcher spent four months with participants during interviews and this helped the researcher to establish trust, rapport, and understanding of the participant's experiences (Polit and Beck, 2019). The researcher established a relationship with participants and trusted them to relate their experiences without fear of intimidation. • Member checking The researcher returned to the participants with the findings to enhance the accuracy and the truth value. • Triangulation In-depth face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data.
Transferability	The research findings are transferred from one specific situation to another with the same characteristics (Muzari and Shava, 2022). The findings of the study would be applied to another context with similar participants.
Dependability	Dependability is the extent to which a measure, procedure, or instrument provides the same results in repeated trials (Nassaji, 2020). The researcher shared the transcripts with an expert researcher and analyzed and compared notes. The findings of the analyzed data were checked for similarity.
Confirmability	Confirmability is the extent to which other researchers can review the audit trail and agree that the authors' conclusions are logical (Grove, Gray, and Faan, 2019). During the analysis of data themes, and sub-themes were identified by both the researcher and an independent coder compared and the codes were discussed and ultimately and agreement was reached.

3.13 Development of Strategies

Phase 2 addressed the third objective of developing strategies to improve support for children heading families. Strategies were developed based on the findings, theoretical framework, and

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literature review. Strategies development also included the description of how children's relatives, and community members (church leaders, traditional leaders, NGOs, CBOs, educators, civic organizations) can support children heading families. The rights of children according to Act 38 of 2005 were considered when the strategies were developed. The development of strategies was guided by the six effective brainstorming steps (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022).

1 Creation of a friendly and Comfortable Environment

2 Identifying the problem

3 Generating ideas

4 Sharing of Ideas

5 Narrowing the list of Ideas

6 Making an Action Plan

Strategies to Improve Support for Children Heading Families

At the end of the brainstorming session, six main strategies were developed based on the objectives and related activities.

- Psychological support strategies
- Financial support strategies
- Social support strategies
- Educational support strategies
- Health care, safety, and security support strategies
- Spiritual and religious support strategies

3.14 Phase 3: Validation of Strategies

The developed strategies were validated using the e-Delphi technique. The Delphi technique consisted of four rounds of written questions that allowed experts to give their opinions. The e-Delphi technique was well suited as a means and method for consensus-building by using a series of questions to collect data from a panel of selected participants (Kaggal Lakshmana Rao (2020). The e-Delphi technique is designed as a group communication process that aims at conducting detailed examinations and discussions of a specific issue for goal setting. The e-Delphi technique, mainly developed by Dalkey and Helmer (1963) at the Rand Corporation in the 1950s, was a widely used and accepted method for achieving convergence of opinion concerning real-world knowledge solicited from experts within certain topic areas. Eight steps were employed in running the e-Delphi method (Romero-Collado, 2021).

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3.15 Steps to Run the e-Delphi Method

- **Choosing a facilitator**

The first step was to decide on the facilitator. The researcher took on this role herself with the assistant as she was conversant with research and data collection.

- **Identifying the experts**

As the e-Delphi technique depends on the experts of the panelists, the panel consisted of traditional leaders, health professionals, educators, social workers, business forum members, pastors, and other experts from within the community.

1 **Defining the problem**

What is the problem or issue the group was seeking to understand? The experts needed to know what problem they were commenting on, so the researcher ensured that a detailed and comprehensive definition was provided.

2 **Asking the first round of questions.**

The researcher asked general questions to gain a broad understanding of the expert's view of future events. The organized questions were summarized together with the responses, any irrelevant material was removed, and common viewpoints were investigated.

3 **Asking the second round of questions.**

Based on the answers to the first questions, the next questions probed deeper into the topic to clear up specific issues. These questions were also in the form of an unstructured question. After collecting data, the results were summarized, removing any irrelevant material and looking for common ground. The purpose was to seek to build consensus.

4 **Round three questions**

The initial question aimed to focus on supporting decision-making. Refining on the areas of agreement. What was it that the experts all agreed upon? The researcher wished to have more than three rounds of questioning to reach a closer consensus.

5 **Round four**

After this round of questions, the experts reached a consensus, and have a view of future risks and opportunities for the strategies. Predicting the future was not an exact skill, but the e-Delphi technique helped the researcher understand the likelihood of future events and what impact they have on the study.

6 **Conclusion**

Responses to the questions formed a consensus of opinions concerning the developed strategies.

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3.16 Ethical Considerations

Ethics implies preferences that influence behavior in human relations, conforming to the code of principles, the rules of conduct, the responsibility of the researcher, and the standard of conduct of a given profession. The main purpose of ethical consideration is to help qualitative researchers structure their work within morally acceptable bounds. When designing and carrying out their investigations, qualitative researchers have a moral duty to adhere to the highest ethical standards (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019). The researcher took into consideration permission to conduct the study, informed consent, the right to autonomy and confidentiality, the principles of beneficence, and justice, including the right to privacy.

3.16.1 Permission to Conduct Research

The researcher presented the proposal to the Department of Advanced Nursing Science and the School of Health Sciences for quality purposes. An ethical clearance to conduct the study was granted by the University of Venda Research Ethics Committee (UREC) with project No. (FHS/22/PDC/07/1907. Traditional leaders of the villages in Vhembe, and Mopani districts of Limpopo also granted the researcher permission to conduct the study.

3.16.2 Informed Consent

Children heading families voluntarily signed assent forms and children's relatives who were given adequate information regarding the research enabled them to voluntarily sign consent forms. There were adequate opportunities for the participants to ask questions before the study commenced and during the study (De Vos et. al., 2018). Children heading families, children's relatives, and community members were informed that participation is voluntary. The purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and how confidentiality would be maintained became part of the information given to participants. Children heading families under 18 years voluntarily signed assent forms after the researcher explained the purpose of the study using their home language for them to understand. The relatives voluntarily signed consent forms, giving the researcher concern that children should participate in the study. Permission was granted by the traditional leaders to interview children heading families.

3.16.3 Right to Autonomy and Confidentiality

The right to autonomy and confidentiality is based on the privacy of the information obtained during data collection from the participants (Bhalerao, Hamilton, McDonald, Redmiles, and Strohmayer, 2022). The researcher treated participants as autonomous agents by informing them about the proposed study and allowing them to choose to participate voluntarily. The researcher would not share the information provided by the interviewed participants with others who were not involved

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in the study. Information was shared with others only if the participant had given authority. Participants have the right to anonymity and the right to be assured that the data collected will be kept confidential. Codes were used to replace names meaning that their identity was not used. The researcher made it a point that the participant's identity is not linked to the individual's responses (de Moraes, Kern, da Silva, and Tedesco, 2023).

3.16.4 Right to Privacy

The right to privacy includes the right to share information only with the researcher, participants, and supervisors (Bandara, Fernando, and Akter, 2020). The researcher avoided invading an individual's privacy which might cause a loss of dignity, and friendship, and create feelings of anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, and shame. Interviews were conducted in a private place with no disturbance identified by the participants.

3.16.5 The Principle of Beneficence

The researcher was polite and professional so that the best can be done, trying to prevent the risks that the participants may be subjected to. The participants were not exposed to any health risks. The discomfort and harm that are experienced can be physical, emotional, spiritual, economic, social, and legal (Arrant, 2020). The researcher has ensured that participants exercise their rights to choose to be part of or not in the study, and they gave consent willingly. The researcher informed them about the findings of the study and its benefits. The researcher did not expose participants to any temporary or permanent harm. For participants who became emotionally affected the researcher discontinued the interviews until such time when participants were ready. Those affected were referred to a psychologist for counseling.

3.16.6 The Principle of Justice

Participants were fairly treated throughout the study and agreements were respected (Grove, Gray, and Faan, 2019). The roles of the researcher and the participants were specified. The researcher gave information about what she would be doing and explained what was expected from participants. The researcher gave the same treatment to all participants during the study, risks, and benefits of the study were distributed based on the efforts, needs, and rights. The researcher made the selection based directly related to the problem being studied. The researcher ensured that appointments for data collection and agreed-upon time for termination were respected.

3.17 Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Akanle, Ademuson, and Shittu, (2022) describe delimitation in research as the boundaries that the researcher sets in a research study, deciding what to include and what to exclude. The community members and children's relatives not residing in Vhembe and Mopani districts did not participate in

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the study. The community members not attending the meetings during the data collection period did not form part of the study.

Limitations of a study are elements of methodology or study design that impact the interpretation of the research results. The limitations essentially detail any flaws or shortcomings in the study. However, Sirisilla (2023) claims that limitations can help the researcher structure the research better. Study limitations can exist due to constraints on research design, methodology, and materials and these factors may impact the findings of the study (Kumar, Dubey, and Pandey, 2021). In this study, during the interview process, some children heading families turned out to be emotionally affected and were reassured and further referred to social workers and psychologists for further support and management. The study cannot be generalized as the study was conducted in Vhembe and Mopani districts in Limpopo province and not all the districts or provinces.

3.18 Plans for Dissemination and Implementation of Results

The final step in the research process was for the researcher to communicate the findings. The researcher developed a scientific research report that was well-organized and informative of the findings. Dissemination of the results included presenting the findings at professional meetings, peer groups, provincial Department of Health, and peer review journals.

3.19 Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology and design followed in data collection. Attention was given to the research design used, data collection methods, data analysis, methods of ensuring trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. A brief description of the development of the strategies to improve support for children heading families and a detailed description was given in chapter five. Chapter Four gave detailed data analysis, interpretation, and discussions.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Introduction

Chapter three described the research design and methodology. This chapter presents data analysis, interpretation, and discussions of challenges experienced by children heading families, potential support from relatives, and community members, and strategies to enhance the support that children heading families need. In preparation for data collection, the researcher met children heading families, children's relatives, and community members on different dates at the chief's kraal to plan the dates and time for conducting the interviews. In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted at the children's homes during weekends and with their relatives at the chief's kraal.

Before the interview, the researcher made it clear to the participants that all information shared with the researcher would be kept confidential throughout the data collection process. The researcher explained the content of the assent and consent forms to all participants using their home language and they signed voluntarily. The purpose of the audio tape recorder was emphasized, along with its significance, and the participant's consent was obtained. During the interviews, Tshivenda and Xitsonga languages were used.

Unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted to explore and describe the challenges experienced by children heading families. An unstructured interview is a free-flowing conversation between a researcher and participants, and an in-depth interview is when the researcher wants detailed information and probe more during interviews. Unstructured in-depth interviews were also conducted with children's relatives to explore and describe the support provided to children heading families. Focus group discussions were conducted with community members to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families. Interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes and 45-60 minutes for focus group discussions. The researcher kept asking probing questions during the interviews until saturation was reached.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Children Heading Families

Data was collected from six (6) males and nine (9) females between the age of 14-18 years. The researcher intended to interview 10 children heading families per district (a total of 20). However, due to data saturation, 15 children heading families were interviewed. The educational levels of participants were between 7 and 12 grades. Table 4.1 shows the demographic profile of the

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participants. C stands for child participant. Table 4.1 shows the demographic profile of children heading families.

Table 4.1: Demographic profile of children heading families

Participants (Children)	Participant's Gender	Participant's Ages	School Grades	Participants' home language
C1.	Male	17	9	Tshivenda
C2.	Female	17	12	Tshivenda
C10.	Male	17	11	Tshivenda
C4.	Female	16	9	Tshivenda
C5.	Male	14	8	Tshivenda
C6.	Female	16	9	Xitsonga
C7.	Male	14	6	Xitsonga
C8.	Female	14	6	Xitsonga
C9.	Female	15	8	Xitsonga
C10.	Female	16	7	Xitsonga
C11.	Female	15	9	Xitsonga
C12.	Female	15	9	Xitsonga
C13	Male	17	11	Tshivenda
C14	Male	18	12	Tshivenda
C15	Female	16	10	Tshivenda

4.3 Challenges Experienced by Children-Heading Families

The findings of the study revealed that children heading families experience psychological, social, financial, spiritual, educational, and health-related challenges with inadequate support they receive from relatives and community members. Data collected was analyzed and discussed into six themes, and sixteen sub-themes. Table 4.2 shows themes and sub-themes.

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Table 4.2: Themes and Sub-Themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
4.3.1. Psychological Support Challenges	4.3.1.1 Parental absence 4.3.1.2 Endless Grieving and Mourning 4.3.1.3 Lack of Love, Care and Warmth
4.3. 2 Financial Support Challenges	4.3.2.1 Inadequate Material Resources 4.3.2.2 Food Insecurity 4.3.2.3 Child Support Grant Challenges
4.3.3 Social Support Challenges	4.3.3.1 A Need for Mentorship 4.3.3.2 Overburden with Home Chores 4.3.3.3 Discipline and Nurturing 4.3.3.4 Role Adaptation
4.3.4 Health Care, Safe and Secured Environmental Support Challenges	4.3.4.1 Poor Housing Conditions 4.3.4.2. Health Challenges
4.3.5 Educational Support Challenges	4.3.5.1 Inadequate Educational Support 4.3.5. 2 Unavailability of Scholar Transportation
4.3.6 Spiritual and Religious Support Challenges	4.3.6.1 Spiritual and Religious Support

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4.3 Challenges experienced by Children Heading Families whose both parents Have Passed on.

The findings of this study revealed that the absence of parents in the lives of children heading families resulted in enormous challenges, such as psychological impact, lack of parental love and guidance, endless grieving and mourning, role adaptation, unsafe and insecure home environment, and food insecurity which exposes them to child labour. Deb, Sunny, and Majumdar (2020) claimed that parental absence in children's lives is linked to various forms of maltreatment, such as exploitation, abuse, and lack of protection, resulting in unruly behavior. A study conducted by Muzurura, Mutambara, and Mahohoma (2022) confirms a study by Deb, Sunny, and Majumdar (2020) that child-headed children are exposed to the vulnerability of exploitation due to lack of parental supervision and proper guidance.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Psychological Support Challenges

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families suffer in silence since they never express their sufferings. This leads to psychological trauma because they never obtain counseling as a way of debriefing after their parent's death. Ntuli, Sebola, and Madiba (2020) a study in South Africa, discovered that children heading families are mainly affected psychologically and emotionally after losing their parents. The findings presented a variety of narratives of emotions related to their situations that were grouped into four main sets of feelings namely: pain and loneliness, isolation and low self-esteem, hopelessness and depression, frustration, and bereavement. It is crucial to stress that children heading families face obstacles such as poverty, starvation, high levels of psychological and emotional strain, and worry in addition to the psychological trauma of losing parents.

Participant C1 explained that:

> *"Sometimes I don't sleep when thinking about our situation and this is preventing me from concentrating in class."*

Participant C2 stated that:

> *"We desperately need mentors whom we can freely talk to especially when we feel frustrated. We want to be educated and have a better future."*

The necessity to address psychological and emotional support for children heading families is obligatory. Children leading families consistently face psychological issues since they do not receive any psychological or counseling services following the death of their parents. According to Kyaruzi (2022), a Tanzanian study on the psychological well-being of children heading families revealed that they should have access to counseling services. A study conducted by Ntuli et al.,

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(2020) in South Africa on parental death, revealed that children find it difficult to deal with the death of their parents, which leads to psychological issues such as sadness, rage, frustration, anxiety, fear, emotional pain, shock, and yearning for parents in most cases children heading families are left to mourn alone, which adds to the sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

They should endeavor to create a compassionate environment that may make it simpler to work with grieving children and ensure that they receive psychological support. An established charity in New York is working toward equipping schools with a plethora of resources to help children who are grieving by offering real and meaningful support to orphaned children including those living by themselves. Its objective is to offer nationwide grief support to students in need (Schonfeld and Demaria, 2018). This study has shown that there are no charitable initiatives in the districts of Vhembe and Mopani in Limpopo province, SA that support children heading families during their times of bereavement.

The findings of this study revealed that children who are heading families experience a variety of challenges and traumatic events with no support from relatives.
Their psychological trauma becomes a disturbing factor because it is mostly impacted by their ‘parent's absence and the weight of leaving orphaned children having to take on their many responsibilities. Molemane (2021) highlighted that children become the head of their families following the death of their parents and are abandoned by some of their relatives and community members which results in them carrying all the household responsibilities.

The extended family system's inability to assist orphans and child-headed children supports the argument mentioned above (Pote, 2019). The study found that although relatives or extended family would take the responsibility of caring for and providing for orphaned children, most families cannot do so due to the current economic hardships. A study conducted by Alem (2020) indicated that most orphans choose to stay in families headed by children fearing ill-treatment by their relatives. It can be concluded that the traditional safety net of caring for child-headed children has broken down.

4.3.1.1 Sub-Theme: Parental Absence

According to Palmera et al., (2023), children heading families face emotional shifts, greater obligations, safety concerns, and a lack of learning assistance after the loss of their parents. They go on to claim that the challenges they experience at home have a detrimental effect on their academic performance. The study's conclusions showed that when parents pass away, their children have a gap in their lives that will never go away.

The absence of a father figure harms children's well-being resulting in an identity crisis as they grow, even though most participants only mentioned that their mothers didn't live with their fathers

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and had never introduced them to their biological fathers. Rockers, Zuilkowski, and Fink, (2023) indicated that the loss of a mother may particularly affect children more than the death of a father.

According to Wambui, Njeru, and Menecha (2023) in a study, indicated that children whose both parents died grow up without a complete family structure. They are bound to meet difficulties, especially during their adolescent period, when they are trying to form an identity, and this would potentially lead to psychological challenges in their lives. The findings of the study by Li, Li, Yuan, Zhou, Zhang, and Qu, (2023) in China support the findings by Wambui et al., (2023) which confirmed that losing parents while still a child is a devastating event. The findings of the study by Matta (2019) in the United States, supported the findings by Wambui, Njeru, and Menecha (2023) and confirmed that the loss of a parent is the closest thing to a universal emotional experience that humanity has. The trauma of the event tends to affect the rest of the child's life, as parental loss changes the child both psychologically and biologically. Parents have an irreplaceable role in children's lives and their involvement can greatly benefit the child, impacting them on many levels, including health and development, academic progress, and eventual life choices.

Participant C3 explained that:

> *"Sincerely, I'm having a lot of trouble; I can't stop thinking about my parents. When my parents used to call, especially on the weekends and in the evenings when they weren't at work, I would always think about them. I was 14 years old when my parents passed away. I often think of my mother and wish she were still here because I know she would support me and be there for me to talk to when I face difficulties as a young girl."*

According to Mao, Zang, and Zhang (2020), parental absence during childhood in Finland is a painful life event that is linked to several detrimental short- and long-term well-being consequences, worsened mental health, and adjustment issues.

Participant C7 explained that:

> *"Following the death of our mother, we remained with our father and life was fine. Later my father died, and following his death, there was no one to satisfy our needs, life became very miserable, every day I missed the love of my parents. No one can love us; parental love is so special. I will forever miss my parents."*

Nahkur and Kutsar, (2022) in a study conducted in Nigeria, pointed out that children who live with their biological parents are more likely to receive better care and continue their education, even if their families are struggling. On the other hand, children who first lose their fathers are more

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likely to remain in the fair care of their mothers and continue their education than those who first lose their mothers because of the noteworthy variations in the roles that mothers and fathers play in the African culture.

4.3.1.2 Sub-Theme: Endless Grieving and Mourning

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families grieve and mourn in silence while maintaining a positive façade as they cannot share their pain with anybody. In schools due to the absence of privacy, they cannot talk to their teachers about what they are going through. The findings of the study conducted in Norway by Lytje and Dyregrov (2022) revealed that schools have a special and crucial role to play in comforting mourning students.

Participant C12 explained that:

> *"My mother died when I was 8 years old, I am 18 and I have never talked about the pain of losing a parent with anyone except today when I am talking to you. I am always depressed though I pretend as if I am happy, truly speaking I am not. I wish that at schools we could have people with whom we can talk or mentors that we children heading families may be able to share the pain and frustrations that we are experiencing daily. Though educators are very friendly, I can't discuss my problems in front of other learners."*

Participant C6 elucidated that:

> *"I'm thinking of my mother, ewwwhhhh , why did God take her away? Life is hard, I should die and follow my mother. I long to see my mother, and I always find myself admiring other youngsters who are with their mothers. Life is hard without a parent".*

Participant C4 stated that:

> *"Eshhhhhhh, why did God take my mother hi hi hi I am thinking of my mother. There is no one to talk to us. Life is tough, I better die and follow my mother, it's very painful to live a life without a mother. I miss my mother every day and always admire other children with their mothers whenever I see them. Why me?"*

In Zambia, Mathuthu (2019) recommended that the school heads and teachers as well as the Department of Education should try to identify children heading families without parental care so that they can assist at the earliest time.

The psychological wellness of children heading families should also be a priority for organizations that assist vulnerable orphans, such as those in child-headed homes. This can be accomplished

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by providing counseling to disadvantaged children heading families. It is important to consider the significance of counseling in the lives of traumatized children.

Participant C9 explained that:

> *"I am 17 years old and doing grade 9 which I am repeating as did not pass due to my mother's death. I used to perform well in class. My mother died when I was 16 years old, and that year I failed because I was always thinking about her. My younger sister is nine years old, and my younger brother is 13 years old. While the 9-year-old is in grade 3, the 13-year-old is in grade 7."*

The findings of this study indicated that children heading families deal with a range of problems that make it difficult to attain their educational goals. In Ethiopia, Tefera and Refu (2019) confirmed that orphan children heading families perform intellectually poorly when measured against non-orphaned children and further emphasized that their negative performance is impacted by the death of their parents. In Japan, a study conducted by Jiang, Xiao, and Yang (2023) confirmed that when children are left alone, they experience major psychological issues.

According to Makuyama et al., (2020), in a study conducted in Zimbabwe, children heading families experience tremendous, emotional and psychological challenges and live in constant memories of their deceased parents. They recommended moral regeneration, refinement, and realignment of welfare policies, practices, and an extension of grief counseling services to children heading families whose psychological problems are brought about by their failure to deal with their sense of loss. Children in child-headed families experience hidden grief manifested during prolonged bereavement.

Participant C2 said that:

> *"I am in grade 9. I recall my mother's death on October 10, 2016, quite clearly. While my mother was giving birth, both the baby and my mother died. This came to me as a shock as I was expecting my mother to come home with the newborn baby but that never happened and when I was told that she was no more I became confused as the pain was unbearable, and even now that pain has never vanished. I sometimes fail to concentrate in class, and this is affecting my school performance, I haven't shared this with anyone."*

The findings of this study revealed that there is a critical need for counseling in schools as children's formative years play a significant role in determining his or her destiny. In South Africa, Maree (2021) pointed out that counseling should be as early as primary school years, as it seems to hold numerous benefits for young individuals that may positively influence their life-long career development.

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Patton, McMahon, and Watson, (2021) indicated that counseling services would significantly improve how well children heading families and other vulnerable children may understand themselves. Making important decisions regarding their education, and general course of living would be made easier for them. Children heading families may experience a huge sense of comfort if this is implemented in South Africa.

The Department of Basic Education has created guidelines for a counseling program for pupils who are having academic difficulties, especially children from child-headed homes. However, the initiative acts as a very kind wake-up call for the Department of Basic Education, principals, and educators. If the program had been put in place and was being closely watched, children heading families and their siblings' situations would not have been suffering in silence up to this point. The Department of Education must assign knowledgeable and skilled coordinators for the guidance and counseling program so that they may work in different districts across the nation and ensure the program's effectiveness.

A study conducted by Amat (2019), in Malaysia, highlighted that counseling and guidance services in schools assist children including those who are heading families in resolving emotional and personal problems as well as behavioral concerns. Counseling services assist children heading families in gaining a stronger sense of purpose or direction in their lives.

The study findings revealed that the death of parents gives rise to emotional distress and children are susceptible to long-term psycho-social problems including depression, anger, anxiety, and feelings of sadness, and are prone to withdrawal syndrome and self-isolation. Psycho-social problems result in prolonged bereavement when children mourn the loss of their parents and weeping persistently in silence.

In South Africa, Ntuli et al., (2020) confirmed that parental absence has made a negative psychological impact on children's psychosocial wellbeing, resulting in the development of internalizing depressive symptoms. Subsequently, children heading families suffer from emotional distress and prolonged bereavement characterized by perpetual yearning for their parent and, they resort to silence as a coping strategy and are forced to leave school early for different reasons. Leaving school early became a major stressor and contributed to their negative psychosocial well-being. The findings of the study by Ntjana (2023) in South Africa, indicated that adolescent girls heading families are more likely to encounter early pregnancy, alcohol abuse, school dropout, prostitution, and psychological problems than their counterparts who live with parental authority individuals.

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4.3.1.3 Sub-Theme: Lack of Love, Care and Warmth

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families do not receive love and warmth from their relatives as this results in missing the love and warmth that their parents used to provide. They are forever admiring other children with their parents. In families that are headed by children, the eldest child continues to provide care to the siblings in the absence of parents or adult caregivers (Agere, 2018). In Norway, a study conducted by Vasbø and Hegna (2022) confirmed that children heading families need warmth and love which they used to receive from their parents. Those who experience warmth and love in their early years have a better chance of developing normally, overcoming obstacles, and contributing to society positively.

Participant C6 stated that:

> *"The proper socialization of children is positively impacted by the presence of loving and caring parents in the home. Quite frankly, children aren't meant to live on their own without a parent or other caring adult in their lives. Without our parents, our house is no longer a home. The warmth we used to feel from our parents has faded over time."*

Participant C10 indicated that:

> *"There is no one to show us love and warmth. I am forever feeling lonely and yearning for the love of my mother. I will forever miss her love."*

In Ukraine, a study conducted by Udovenko, Melnychuk, and Gorbaniuk, (2020) on preparing children heading families for independence indicated that children grow up unprepared for independent living and do not have the necessary social skills and habits. Parents provide children with a sense of security, stability, and dependability throughout their lives.

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families and their siblings desired the warmth and love that they received from their parents, and they would continuously feel a sense of emptiness in their hearts.

Participant C4 stated that:

> *"We need parents who will love us and take care of us. To be honest, children are not supposed to live alone without a parent or other adult who will provide love. Our house is no longer a home without parents. Our parents no longer radiate the warmth we used to receive as children."*

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Participant C8 further explained that:

> *"Home is no longer home because there is nobody to give us warmth, advise us as young people. I am forever missing and longing for my mother."*

Participant C15 emphasized that:

> *"The home where our parents used to provide warmth and affection is no longer there. We are all independent; nevertheless, as a child, I require parental support and direction to manage the household. I must see to it that my siblings are fed. I don't even know what to do most of the time."*

Thabethe, Mbatha, and Mtapuri in KwaZulu-Natal (2016) attested that the psychological needs of a child can be understood as the need to be happy, loved to belong to social groups, and have hope for the future. The feeling of love and affection is a fundamental characteristic of adequate development. The findings of the study conducted by Diago (2020), in the Sekhukhune district of Limpopo province in South Africa, revealed that children heading families are not loved, guided, or given parental warmth, they navigate unfamiliar terrain without the aid of road markers.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Financial Support Challenges

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families admitted that they have money problems because they are unable to meet their fundamental necessities. Financial challenges include failure to meet basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing as well as other requirements. GIRUM et al., (2020) study conducted in Ethiopia, highlighted that it is challenging to meet the fundamental needs of children who are the heads of families as there is no financial assistance from the extended families.

4.3.2.1 Sub-Theme: Inadequate Material Resources

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families with their siblings have various needs, such as shelter, clothing, uniform, health care, personal care, essential furnishings, and fees for transportation as this causes them great stress, which harms their mental health, social interactions, school attendance and performance.

Participant C8 indicated that:

> *"I will be more than willing to go and see a social worker, perhaps they will help me since sometimes I don't sleep because of thinking a lot and that prevents me from concentrating in the class."*

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Participant C9 stated that:

> *"Necessities including mealie-meal, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, water, electricity, winter and summer clothing, school uniforms, blankets, beds and beddings, furniture, and curtains are always in short supply. It is not comfortable for my brother and I to sleep on the grass mats on the floor. I wish I had a bed so I could precisely arrange my blankets."*

Participant C10 elucidated that:

> *"There is no tap water in our yard or nearer where we can draw water, the only place where we find water is when we buy from those people who have boreholes in their yards. It is very difficult because a tin of 25 liters charges us R1.00, we need water for cooking, cleaning and doing some washing. Most of the time we don't have money to buy food."*

In South Africa, a study conducted by Kwatumba and Ebrahim (2020) attested that children in child-headed families have many needs and may be vulnerable in many ways, such as food shortage, shelter, and educational needs such as stationery. Ntuli et al., (2020) supported the findings by Kwatumba and Ebrahim (2020) that children heading families are much more economically vulnerable, to food insecurity, educational disruption, poor housing, poor safety and security, and maltreatment by extended family members than children whose parents are alive.

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families have material needs such as inadequate nutrition which affects their physical and psychological growth and could result in severe cognitive impairment.

Participant C3 stated that:

> *"We usually do not have food to eat at home and most of the time we go to school hungry. Most of the days we sleep hungry, and this makes us unable to focus on class."*

Both internationally and in Africa, children are much more likely than adults to be living in poverty. According to the World Bank (2016), Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of child poverty, with one in every five children growing up there experiencing severe financial hardship.

The international conference that was held in Addis Ababa from October 23 to October 25, 2017, according to a study conducted by Roelen, Morgan et al. (2019) underlined a priority concentrating on putting children first. About five years ago, efforts were made to combat poverty and find solutions, but little has changed; vulnerable children and child-headed children continue to live in poverty.

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Participant C4 pointed out that:

> *"There is no water in our yard or nearby. The only place we can find water is when we purchase it from neighbors who have boreholes in their yards. It is challenging because we need water for cooking, cleaning, and occasional laundry and we do not have enough money to buy water."*

Low-income households with child-headed children often experience a variety of interconnected issues, including limited water, electricity, sanitation, and hygiene, which can lead to illnesses and impaired growth and development (Shrestha, Six, Dahal et al., 2020).

Participant C3 stated that:

> *"We need support when we celebrate our birthdays and Christmas like other children. We need support when it comes to our education as we want to be educated a live a better life since we will be able to find jobs, we need better houses, blankets, TV sets, beds, and bedding furniture, we need some recreational facilities as there are a lot of taverns around our village which young people are forced to go and socialize, and this exposes us to take alcohol."*

Participant C13 further explained that:

> *"Although it is extremely risky to enter the forest due to reports of attacks and fatalities happenings, we utilize electricity for lighting and some of the wood we collect for cooking. We only go there because we have no other choice, even if it is not safe. Even though some villagers sell wood, we cannot afford it."*

According to Motsa (2019), in the study conducted in Swaziland, the vulnerability of child-headed children in pursuing their education may be made worse by a shortage of basic needs like food, candles to provide light during evening study sessions as well as juggling household chores with study time. The findings of the study by Bhengu (2021) in South Africa, support the findings by Motsa (2019) which confirmed that many children heading families encounter the eminent reality of food insecurity, and many other basic needs as the money received from child support grant cannot cover all their basic needs.

Nsibande's (2022) study conducted in Swaziland, found that poverty is a predominant trait among child-headed children, despite the variety in the causes of vulnerability, ranging from children living in child-headed homes to other problems among children. The findings of the study by Hall and Sambu (2019) in South Africa, supported the findings by Nsibande (2022) which confirmed that poverty is a major characteristic among child-headed children.

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4.3.2.2 Sub-Theme: Food Insecurity

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families depend on feeding programs at school because, on most days, there isn't anything to eat at home, and frequently, they go to bed hungry and wake up with an empty stomach. Weekends are difficult because of the struggle to have food at home as during the week they receive food from the school feeding scheme. School feeding schemes played a huge role in the lives of children heading families because the children go to school without having breakfast or pocket money. However, long-term malnutrition may have an impact on both their mental and physical well-being.

According to studies conducted in rural East Africa, children heading families experience moderate to severe food insecurity, and orphans in these communities are more likely to go to bed hungry than other residents (UNICEF, 2006). The nutrition and health status of a child are a direct indicator of the well-being of the household. There is a likelihood of significant economic benefits from improved nutrition and health status in terms of improved mental and physical productivity and reduced healthcare requirements (Zambian Central Statistical Office, 2015).

A study conducted by Mkhize, Libhaber, Sewpaul, and Reddy (2022) highlighted that two ways were identified whereby food insecurity affects the school attendance and performance of children heading families. Children who are hungry and undernourished have low levels of energy as well as underdeveloped cognitive and mental abilities. The findings of the study conducted in Australia by Shair, Mir, Hussain, and Bukhari (2023) confirmed the findings of Van Woerden, Hruschka, and Bruening (2019) conducted in Europe that food insecurity adversely affects children's physical, psychological, and social experiences setting them on a trajectory towards sub-optimal health.

Participant C10 indicated that:

> *"My grandmother is the one who receives our child support grant but, it is so minimal, that it cannot be used to purchase more basic needs, she can only afford the little food that she can afford from the child support grant received, of which doesn't last for a month."*

Participant C14 stated that:

> *"There is no food as we don't eat breakfast and supper, we eat at school. Hunger makes us lose concentration in class and contributes to our school performances."*

According to a study by Anderson (2020), when learners have no breakfast, it may positively impact a variety of their cognitive functions including memory, academic performance, school

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attendance rates, and mood. Awkwardly, in this study, most of the child-headed learners indicated that they go to school hungry, and this makes them lose concentration and results in poor school performance.

In Swaziland, the primary concern of all household children's heads was how to get food. For instance, eight out of ten children who were interviewed stated they occasionally ran out of food to prepare for breakfast and supper or that they would only have enough maize porridge to last for a few days. A study conducted by Mugumba (2019), in Limpopo province, South Africa. indicated that children heading families would frequently beg for food from nearby homes and others as food insecurity negatively impacts children physically, psychologically, and socially. The study findings of Pote (2019) in KwaZulu-Natal have been confirmed by a study conducted by Mugumba (2019) that food insecurity puts children heading families on a trajectory towards less-than-optimal health.

4.3.2.3 Sub-Theme: Child Support Grant Challenges

The findings of this study revealed that children who are heading families together with their siblings are not receiving child support grants and this becomes difficult for them to survive with no assistance from the Department of Social Development. The lack of other documents needed by the Social Development Department resulted in difficulties for child-headed children to access child support grants. As child-headed families are mostly vulnerable and exposed to extreme poverty and a variety of socio-economic issues, it should be evident that these households must have access to social grants (Hall and Sambu, 2019). Though it is claimed that child support grants only offer a small amount of money that is not enough to cover the child's basic needs, it's better than nothing as the Government is not considering inflation.

The study findings revealed that children heading families find it challenging to get child support grants due to a lack of supporting documents when applying for funding. A study by UNICEF (2020) indicated that over 2.2 million children were disqualified, and nearly 10.3 million eligible children received child support grants.

Participant C11 expounded that:

> *"I used to receive a child support grant, although it has long since it has been discontinued for my younger brother. I can't meet all the basic needs with the money I receive. I tried to make a follow-up from the social worker's office but up to now we haven't received it."*

The child heading the household or adult completed in subsection (2) of the Childcare Act, may collect and administer for the child-headed household any social or other grants in terms of the Social Assistant Act (Act no 13 of 2004) or other assistance to which the household is entitled.

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Participant C1 stressed that:

> *"I do receive a child support grant, but it doesn't cover all the necessary needs. I would also like to attend Saturday after-class sessions because I struggle with mathematics. However, I am unable to pay R350 per month, due to financial challenges I am unable to attend."*

The findings of this study revealed that some child-headed students are unable to attend Saturday after-school classes because they are unable to afford the private educators' as they require monthly fees. It is difficult for them to cope, especially with subjects such as mathematics where such assistance is greatly needed.

The Gauteng Department of Education has started a Winter School Supplementary Program in Tshwane in support of the declaration to assist students from the chosen secondary schools in raising their grades in important areas including Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and English (Tshabalala, 2012). The Secondary Improvement Programme (SIP), which emphasizes the value of extra classes, was established by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) (Malema, 2023). However, the extra lesson program fails in rural areas because of several difficulties that rural students, especially orphaned children and children heading families experience, such as household duties, lack of money, and transportation problems.

Participant C2 indicated that:

> *"I went to the nearest clinic with my aunt to apply for the grant but the social worker that we saw stated that I was not eligible for a child support grant since the social worker needed a copy of my father's identification which I don't have. I was told my application would not be processed though I had my mother's death certificate and my birth certificate in possession."*

The findings of this study revealed difficulties in that many eligible children heading families do not receive grants either because they are ignorant of their entitlements or because they do not have the requisite paperwork, time, or support to enter the social support system. Children heading families are frequently denied the grants to which they are entitled under South African legislation due to administrative delays in processing grant applications as well as the poor attitude of some administrative staff.

According to the African Charter cited in Veriava and Paterson (2020), the best interests of the child must always come first in all decisions. The basic interest of the child takes precedence over any conflicting rights. The Constitution of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 section 28(2) further emphasizes the importance of the child's best interests in all matters involving them. Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "in all actions concerning children, whether

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undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration."

Participant C5 indicated that:

> *"I was told by the social worker that I don't qualify for child support grants since they demanded my father's Identification copy. I, therefore, asked my uncle if he knew my father, unfortunately, he didn't either, I don't know who my father is. I have a birth certificate and my mother's death certificate in my possession, but the Department of Social Development could not approve my application as my grandmother accompanied me."*

Although the Child Support Grant is intended to offer financial assistance to children who are living in poverty, both orphans and non-orphans, research has revealed that children may not always use the service. Some children do not receive child support grants because of insufficient administration. Any social grant or other grant under the Social Assistance Act (Act no. 13 of 2004) or other aid to which the household is eligible may be collected and administered for the child-headed home by the family or adult specified in section (2) of the Childcare Act.

Participant C15 further explained that:

> *"Although my brother and I receive child support grant, it is not enough to cover even our most basic needs."*

According to Zembe-Mkabile, Witten, and Edlemann (2021) in a study conducted in the Western Cape, South Africa, households that depend on Child Support Grant (CSG) faced a constant threat of food running out before the end of the month. The (CSG) is currently inadequate to meet the nutritional needs of children. Supported by a study conducted by Baloyi (2021) in Limpopo province, South Africa that it is acknowledged that the Child Support Grant (CSG) has had a significant impact in alleviating poverty, but it is provided at a value too small to protect the poorest children from hunger, malnutrition, and stunting. The findings of their study revealed that the Child Support Grant should be increased so that children have enough to eat.

Participant C12 elucidated that:

> *"My brother and I receive child support grants, but my little sister does not anymore. The matter has been reported to the social worker. The money we receive cannot cover all our needs for the entire month. Many times, we eat at school since we don't have enough food in the house."*

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families and poor nutrition because of their poverty and lack of cash to buy the requirements.

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4.3.3 Theme:3: Social Support Challenges

The findings of the study revealed that children heading families and their siblings lack support from extended families and community members. There would always be children who had the unfortunate experience of losing their parents. Children who are heads of families are part of the community and historically belonged to the community. Lack of assistance from relatives and other community members may contribute to a high prevalence of absence from school and educational discontinuity.

In Limpopo, a study conducted by Ntjana (2023), confirmed that a functioning support system, including extended families and community members, is essential in ensuring the safety of child-headed children therefore, children always need to be protected simply because they are children. If a child is exposed to unsafe circumstances, their extended family intervenes to protect them from the effects of vulnerability. If there are no extended family members available, the child receives support from the community.

According to a study conducted by McHale and Sirotkin (2019), community members play a crucial role in socialization, identity formation, and child protection. Most regrettably, this study finding revealed that children heading families receive no or ineffective support from their relatives and community members.

Participant C6 explained that:

> *"We hardly receive support from my aunt who stays far away from us. and she looks after her children, and she is not employed. She does not have any source of income. We have never seen anyone visiting us, community members or relatives."*

A study conducted in Australia by Kiraly and Farmer (2020), revealed that extended family and kinship care tackle difficulties including critical poverty, and how family members are crucial in helping and unable to provide care and play a part in the socialization and mentoring of children heading families. The findings of the study conducted by Sithole and Maluleke (2020) revealed that a child's immediate family is the first system to which they are exposed and where they receive love, care, and support because families are the fundamental building blocks of every civilization. Extended families are adapting to the nuclear family model, which places a strong emphasis on supporting the children who head the families.

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Participant C8 clarified that:

> *"Even our closest relatives are unable to help us in any way. Even though they are aware that we are raising ourselves without our parents, the community does nothing to help us. We are alive thanks to God's kindness."*

Families with a child as the primary caregiver are becoming more common. It is uncertain how to handle children heading family problems. Even if they can accept the affected children, it is difficult to take care of children heading families due to the high cost of living and unemployment. A rise in children heading families' homes with little to no support from family or the community is a result of the rising orphan population (Bhengu, 2021).

Participant C7 further showed that:

> *"The community members do not visit us so that we feel supported. We experience fear whenever we want to approach them because we do not know what they will say, they are aware that we are living alone."*

Paradza (2019) found that Zimbabwe's economic hardships during the last few decades had a significant negative influence on the relatives' inability to care for and protect children heading families. In South Africa, two community drop-in centres were opened, one in Zola with 100 children and the other in Emdeni, Soweto, also with 100 children. The created drop-in centres provide care for vulnerable children who are orphaned, including children who are heading families (Ntombela, 2011).

A study conducted by Dunga (2014) in KwaZulu-Natal, revealed that the drop-in centre's services allowed vulnerable children and orphans including those who are heading families to live as normally as possible and to have meaningful lives.

Orphaned vulnerable children and those heading families receive nutritious, home-cooked meals each day, as well as school supplies like notebooks and uniforms. Social workers also offer bereavement counseling and classes on life skills. Counselors and remedial teachers are employed at the centres to offer youngsters ongoing support for their problems and requirements.

According to Molemane (2021) in a study conducted in Gauteng Katlehong Township, South Africa, communities and families are ill-prepared to deal with the steadily rising number of orphans. Molemane (2021) in South Africa, supports the findings by Mugumbu (2019) which confirmed that ties between families, communities, and children heading families are deteriorating quickly, leaving children isolated.

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The government of Uganda has developed the National Policy for Orphaned Vulnerable Children including those children heading families to implement support programs. Ghana has made significant progress in legislation and social policy development for the protection of Ghanaian vulnerable orphaned Ghanaian children. This was because the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare and for that matter the Government of Ghana has always recognized it imperative to improve the quality of care for its children (Sarakbi, Mensah-Abrampah, and Syed, 2021).

As children are a country's future, Oliver Tambo stated that " Such a National Policy for Children Heading Families and the Orphaned Vulnerable must be established in South Africa as many children heading families will benefit." A country, a movement, a person that does not value its youth and children does not deserve its future" (South African History Online, 2019).

4.3.3.1 Sub-Theme: A Need for Mentorship

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families need mentoring that will assist them on the challenging route of adjusting to life without an adult caregiver or parent. Some children heading families claimed that if they had mentors, they wouldn't have fallen into bad habits since they would have received appropriate direction and assistance, especially throughout their adolescent years. Those children with parents are constantly listening to and hearing their parents' voices offering them guidance and can develop coping mechanisms on how to deal with the issues they meet in life, and this serves as a frame of reference for making the right choices.

Participant C2 said that:

> *"If ever there was someone, we could talk to in case we ran short of urgent needs such as food, toiletry, school items, electricity, and bread it would make our lives much better. We have a great need for mentorship in our daily lives, as we are still children."*

According to Udovenko et al., (2020), a study conducted in Ukraine, mentoring has been implemented to help orphans and children who have lost both parents due to death, including children heading families. This is important for the children's psycho-emotional growth and well-being. The interventions can be set up in the province of Limpopo to help with the psycho-emotional needs of children who are heading families.

A study conducted by Pallikkuth et al, (2023) revealed that there is an increase in the number of child-headed children who require adult mentoring and are taking on adult tasks such as caring for and supporting their siblings.

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In Zimbabwe, a study conducted by Goronga and Mampane (2021), attested that little is known about how children heading families manage, organize and sustain themselves after parental death. However, parents serve as mentors to their children, gradually initiating training them into adulthood through the enforcement of rules and discipline.

4.3.3.2 Sub-Theme: Overburden with Household Chores

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families become overburdened and overloaded with multiple responsibilities with no one to assist them and physical weariness effects, which makes it difficult for them to concentrate in class. A study conducted by Chidhumo, Zambezi, and Thondhlana (2024) in Zimbabwe indicate that the challenges of growing up in a child-headed family that affected academic performance included carrying out household chores.

Participant C11 stated that:

> *"Managing all these challenges that I've listed is just too much. Surely, I am not coping at all. When I think about our circumstances, I have a hard time falling asleep most of the time, which makes it difficult for me to focus in class and lessens my school performance."*

A study conducted by Vliet (2018), indicated that the managing of childhood and parenthood deprives children heading families of their childhood due to the roles and responsibilities to provide and manage all the household chores. The findings of the study by Bhengu (2021) in South Africa, supported the findings by Vliet (2018) that children heading families carrying adult roles and responsibilities that cause difficulties for them to focus in class, which can lead to dropping out of school altogether. Dropping out of school can be attributed to the pressure of caring for siblings. The siblings frequently drop out also as well because they face stigmatization and discrimination in their schools and neighborhoods, which puts them in danger.

Participant C9 explained that:

> *"I do all the household chores, like cooking, sweeping, laundry, fetching wood from the field, and drawing some water without any rest. It becomes very hard to do all these chores and concentrate on my studies."*

The findings of this study revealed that children in child-headed families reported that it is stressful to carry out home duties and make decisions as they must deal with the obstacles of doing regular household tasks following the passing of their parents, which is quite taxing to their bodies and minds. The overburden of responsibilities harms their academic performance.

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Children heading families become adults in their families and miss out on their childhood as they grow up without any adult to teach them the basic values of life. This is true because children do not have time to express themselves or to play as they wish as they are faced with so many responsibilities.

4.3.3.3 Sub-Theme: Discipline and Nurturing Challenges

The findings of this study revealed that participants acknowledged their inability to act as parents because doing so would require them to punish their siblings. Children heading families did not have access to the opportunity to gain cultural or life skills from their parents. They therefore struggle to discipline their siblings since they lack the necessary abilities. Children heading families have identity versus role uncertainty and are ill-equipped to handle any problem that their siblings may encounter as some of the problems may be like what they are also facing.

The impact of nurturing on a child's growth is enormous since it develops and molds the behavior that would be accepted in society. The Nurturing Care Framework serves as a road map for action to support children's survival and development and improve their health and potential (Darmon, 2023). In a study on well-cared-for children at the Washington University School of Medicine, Nielsen, Barch, Petersen, and Greene (2020) found that children who are nurtured by their parents grow up with well-developed brains responsible for learning, memory, and coping with stress.

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families are deprived of being children because of the duties of caring for, supervising, and punishing their siblings. Children heading families give up their youth and assume adult responsibilities making it more challenging and stressful.

The absence of parents in children heading families displays undisciplined behavior in schools. The influence of parental discipline on children heading families would never be practical since they have no parents who would enforce discipline in their homes. Some of the undisciplined behavior from learners is a result of dysfunctional families such as families who are headed by children (Mbalo, 2022).

Participant C7 said that:

> *"Growing up without parents is not a nice situation for me. I am supposed to take care of my siblings. I am compelled to take off my siblings and need parental guidance and advice. To make matters worse, I'm forced to discipline my siblings, who occasionally disobey me."*

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In support of the above quote, in Zambia, families with child-headed children view nightclubs as a normal way of recreation since they lack parental control, guidance, and supervision at home. The eldest child finds it very challenging to correct his or her siblings when they frequent nightclubs and return home late at night or early in the morning (Mulenga, 2022).

The findings of the study by Mulenga (2022) supported the findings of the study conducted in South Africa by Ntuli et al., (2020) which stated that it might be exceedingly challenging for children heading families to discipline their siblings. Most crucially, the adolescent's family-headed children continued to believe that discipline should take the form of punishment, as they reported being unable to communicate with their siblings due to a lack of skills. They worry that if they discipline one sibling, the other may retaliate.

Participant C12 further elucidated that:

> *"Playing the role of a parent is incredibly challenging because you can't correct your siblings when they act inappropriately. I don't want any youngster to be in a situation where they have to head the family without an adult to help them."*

Participant C14 explained that:

> *"We need adult figures to teach us good morals as we don't have parents. There is no one to discipline us whenever we are doing wrong things."*

According to Mpolase (2021) in the study conducted in South Africa, on the experiences of teachers in managing discipline, it was attested that there is a great need for training teachers to manage the behavior and disciplining of learners from child-headed families. Agere, Munyaradzi, and Agere (2020), in a study conducted in Eastern Cape province, South Africa, stated that children heading families face a lot of difficulties, such as substance abuse, discouragement, peer group pressure, and teen pregnancies are just a few of the prevalent vulnerabilities that children are to, and their occurrence resulting in dropping out of school.

4.3.3.4 Sub-Theme: Role Adaptation

The findings of this study revealed that immediately after the passing of the parents the eldest child must adapt to the roles and responsibilities of a parent unprepared and again at a very tender age. It is very difficult to take on the responsibilities of taking care of their siblings with schooling. Children heading families stated that they are not coping as this affects their school performance.

Bhengu (2021), in a study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, highlighted that if all stakeholders can volunteer to help affected children, child-headed children would not feel any load on their

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shoulders. The eldest child does all the home chores and school assignments without assistance from an adult. Children heading families end up becoming grownups in their households and miss out on childhood because they lack an adult to instill in them the fundamental principles of life.

Participant C1 stated that:

> *"I am still too young to assume this responsibility of taking care of my two siblings and concentrating on my schoolwork, heading a family as a child is challenging. I now must fill the position that my mother previously filled and take on the role of caring for my siblings."*

Participant C5 explained that:

> *"Heading a family as a child is very difficult because I am still too young to take this role as I must look after my two siblings and schooling. The role that has been done by my mother such as budgeting, managing a family, looking after us and now I must do it."*

The findings of this study revealed that when children live alone in homes without any adult caregivers, they are responsible for making daily decisions, budgeting, and all matters regarding themselves and their siblings. In South Africa, most children who are heading families find it difficult to manage all the duties that their parents previously undertook (Ndava, 2018).

According to Betty Neuman's theory, role adaptability is crucial for handling the daily obligations of managing a family, which can be quite challenging for children who are heading families. Since children are still too young to be parents, it is crucial that adults in the community, including children's relatives, take on the role of parents for them.

The difficulties cause disturbances in the educational process and result in poor school performance. The findings of the study by Makuu (2019) in Tanzania supported the findings of the study conducted by Ndava (2018) in South Africa which confirmed that children are unable to focus on their schoolwork because of their home chores. They forever arrive at school late, and it leaves them with insufficient time to complete their assignments. They found it difficult to concentrate in class because they worried about looking after their siblings, demanding work, and providing for the family. This leads to poor educational outcomes, which reduces their prospects of finding employment in the future.

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Participant C3 further indicated:

> *"Assuming the role and responsibilities of a parent when I am young is very hard as I struggle to take care of my siblings. Managing all the responsibilities is not simple. I am not coping at all. I find it difficult to fall asleep most of the time when I think of our situation, which affects my ability to concentrate in class and lowers my academic performance."*

In the Sekhukhune district of Limpopo province, South Africa, a study conducted by Diago (2020) indicated that children heading families have challenges as they move quickly from childhood to parenthood at a very tender age. Nonetheless, it follows an experience learning curve of the "learn-as-up-go" variety.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Healthcare, Safety, and Secured Environmental Support Challenges

The findings of this study revealed that children who head families often lack family members to care for them when they are unwell with siblings and occasionally seek medical attention a little bit later because they are not aware of the disease's symptoms. Due to the lack of physical security measures like locking doors and buildings and the fact that they dwell in an unsafe environment, safety, and security where they live is also a challenge.

Children heading families typically may have relatively few resources after their parents pass away due to costly medical care costs and other expenses. Due to their ignorance of healthcare resources and the lack of an adult to oversee their health, children heading families and their siblings may not have access to proper medical treatment.

Participant C4 indicated that:

> *"No one to take care of us when we are not well as we stay by ourselves. We also don't know how serious certain signs and symptoms of other diseases are."*

Participant C13 stated that:

> *"I am bound to stay away from school and look after my sick sibling at the same time I am left behind with schoolwork."*

Lee, Lo et al., (2020) emphasized the value of health in schooling and the main area of interest was health education for all children in schools for their physical, emotional, and social well-being. It was further advocated that curricula and instruction should include teaching students decision-making skills that they may use throughout their lives, such as encouraging healthy eating habits, physical activity, sexuality, and personal environmental hygiene. Further suggest

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teaching health education in schools alongside other subjects as of great importance. This is going to benefit children heading families and other vulnerable children.

A study by Bhengu (2021) in KwaZulu-Natal South Africa, found that children from child-headed families reported a negative impact on their schooling as they would often fall behind on schoolwork due to the demand to care for their siblings when they are ill. The most heartbreaking problem is that there is no one to assist them when they are unwell or to provide them with speedy advice on what to do to preserve life.

Children living in child-headed families may not be aware of the signs and symptoms of a particular ailment, prompting them to seek medical attention because there is no adult to supervise their health. The number of delays or on-attendance of medical problems in a child may have a devastating or fatal effect. The other challenge would be the knowledge on how to administer medication they receive from the clinic to their sick sibling as the instruction of administering the medication needs proper understanding.

Participant C10 further explained that:

> *"I wish there was someone elderly who comes and checks us especially when we are not well, as I am still young to realize that my siblings are seriously not well and have to seek medical help on time."*

In a study conducted in South Africa, children heading families frequently encountered hazardous situations because of the shortcomings and risks of their living circumstances. The study also revealed that children heading families and their siblings are not safe since they are residing in an unsafe and insecure setting (Bhengu, 2021).

Parents' absence and lack of an adult caretaker to watch over and safeguard children heading families and their siblings expose them to a variety of hazardous conditions. Under the National Childcare and Protection Policy (2019) outlined in our Constitution of South Africa Act 106 of 1996 and the ratification of child-rights treaties, South Africa has committed to enforcing children's rights to life, safety, and development. It declares that providing these programs and services in a coordinated, integrated, and uniform way is a national priority and acknowledges the importance of children's care and protection for sustainable development.

Participant C13 explained that:

> *"It is easy for anyone who wants to do something bad to us because there is no fence around the yard nor gate that we can lock during the day when we go to school or at night when we sleep. It is easy to break in as there are no burglars on the windows and doors to secure our safety."*

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Participant C15 highlighted that:

> *"Our neighbors are friendly people, but the husband works in Johannesburg his wife stays home with her three children. She locks her gate in the evening, so we cannot enter her yard during the night if something is happening to us, therefore we are so scared."*

Children need special care since they are among the most vulnerable members of society. When their relatives are unable to offer them care and protection, they then rely on the state. Things are different for children heading families and their siblings because their relatives are unable to care for them and they are forced to live alone because of the loss of their parents. Traditionally, relatives were always eager to accept children who were orphans and take care of them. Sadly, this custom and "Ubuntu" no longer exist.

Participant C11 further stated that:

> *"We feel unsafe staying alone as people know that we are all by ourselves. It is very easy for anyone to enter our yard since we don't have a fence with a gate where we can lock especially during the night."*

Makuu (2019) in a study conducted in Botswana indicated that children who are heading families are faced with caring for their siblings with no food to eat, lack of security, and protection challenges. Thus, it has been stated by some of the participants that they don't feel safe at their homes.

4.3.4.1 Sub-theme: Poor Housing Conditions

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families stay in homes with broken windows and doors, as well as other unsafe and insecure circumstances, and they continue to stay in fear. Section 26 of the Constitution of South Africa provides that "everyone has the right to access adequate housing" while Section 28(1) (c) states that children have "the right to shelter." Despite the existing legislation, it is evident from the findings that the children heading families did not have proper housing to accommodate them.

Participant C5 alluded that:

> *"Since there is no fence nor gate surrounding the yard, we cannot close during the day when we are at school or night while we are sleeping, it is simple for anyone who wants to harm us. Since there are no burglar bars on the windows or doors to protect us, it is simple for someone to break in."*

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The findings of the study revealed that children heading families reside in overcrowded or dirty settings. Poor housing conditions affect children's ability to learn at school and study at home. Their living conditions are, however, dreadful. The 'housing effect' is especially pronounced in health. Children living in poor or overcrowded conditions are more likely to have respiratory problems, be at risk of infections, and have mental health problems. Housing that is in poor condition or overcrowded also threatens children's safety (Curtin, O'Shea, and Hayes, 2023). Children heading families' requirements aren't being met to their full potential resulting in a societal issue. The researcher feels there is a great need for more research on poor housing conditions of children heading families as this an alarming situation that exposes children to health risks the findings of this study, call for a closer understanding of health issues in the housing policy of children heading families in South Africa.

Participant C4 stated that:

> *"We require police assistance because we don't feel secure, particularly at night. Since the streets are always dark at night, we feel unsafe, and load shedding has made it worse. We use pit toilets; thus, it can be hazardous to use them when we need to. In the summer and during extremely hot weather, snakes are more frequently seen."*

A study conducted by Lake et al., (2019) in South Africa, intensified efforts to give children's issues top priority. Even so, thirty years after the UNCRC was signed, South Africa is still dealing with the issue of child-headed families, which leaves children exposed and in a very vulnerable position.

Participant C8 further indicated that:

> *"We need better homes with sufficient space," this includes the kitchen, bathrooms, and bedrooms because it is dangerous to use the outside toilet at night, especially when it is dark."*

According to Ntuli et al. (2020), the government should give orphaned children and those heading family preference when awarding housing under the Reconstruction and Development Programme.

4.3.4.2 Sub-Theme: Health Challenges

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families contract any diseases like any other child, but their challenge is getting to the health centre and seeking medical help without an adult who will take the responsibilities of traveling costs and looking after them when ill.

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Participant C2 stated that:

> *"It becomes a challenge when my siblings or I are sick as I am compelled to take care of them. This resulted in absenting myself from attending school. Traveling to the clinic needs public transport as we can't walk such a distance and the cost of traveling, we cannot afford."*

Kanyi (2019) emphasized that social vulnerability exacerbated material deprivations and risks of poor health. Chademana and Van Wyk (2021) supported the findings by Kanyi (2019) that the deprivations and risks experienced by children heading families expose them to poor health outcomes such as malnutrition and infectious diseases.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Educational Support Challenges

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families have no educational support from their extended families or any other sources. This a big challenge to many of them as they stated that they are all by themselves as they struggle to get stationary and, on many days, they sleep in the dark with no lights or candles. The unavailability of lights prevents them from studying in the evenings. Children heading families are faced with pervasive poverty that leads to their losing out on education for the sake of financial income. A study by Stockero and Leatham (2020) asserted that lack of money causes children to fail to purchase school needs, and supplies and this leads to failing in class due to a lack of these needs.

The rights of child-headed children are not safeguarded, and very few of them complete their matriculations. They also lack access to basic services like sanitation, water, and shelter as they don't have any income, and have very little education because they frequently must leave school to take care of household chores.

Participant C5 further highlighted that:

> *"I am not coping at all. I am 18 years old and doing grade 11 which I am repeating due to my mother's death. I even thought of dropping out of school since I had lost hope. My mother died when I was 16 years doing grade 10 and my performance was quite satisfactory. The year that she passed on I failed because I couldn't concentrate as I was always thinking and longing for her. Looking after my two siblings is also a challenge as they are still young, a boy coming after me is 13 years old, and my little sister is 9 years old. The 13 years is doing grade 7 and the 9 years is doing grade 3."*

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Participant C14 specified that:

> *"We were given candles and matches by our neighbor which we use sparely for studying as we don't have money to buy, for cooking we use wood."*

The above responses correspond with the research conducted by Coburn et al., (2019) found that the death of parents might place a child at risk for educational delays. Educational delay is largely influenced by changes in family support. According to Barclay and Hallsten, (2019), a study conducted in Sweden, indicated that losing a parent during childhood might harm how well the child does in school for the rest of their life. The findings of this study revealed that all participants were high school students who wished to attend a university or technical college to further their education, but they also note that this presents some hurdles due to financial issues. Nonetheless, they are aware that education is the only way for them to escape poverty and overcome many of the obstacles they may face.

Study findings by Maila and Mabasa, (2023) in Zambia, indicated that education provides children with the opportunity to learn vital skills that enable them to overcome poverty. Stopping the wheel of generational poverty begins with prioritizing child poverty because raising poor children is tantamount to planting poor adults. There is mounting evidence that poor children grow to be poor adults (Hidalgo-Hidalgo, 2019). Children who are the heads of the family frequently fall behind in their academics, which can harm their performance and prevent them from achieving their goals.

The findings of this study revealed that all participants have financial difficulties, which negatively impact their education. Children heading families do not have access to the basic education that is one of the major millennium development goals and essential in preparing children for their future responsibilities in society (UNDP, 2010).

Participate C1 said that:

> *"Sometimes my classmates complain that I exhaust their data since I don't make any contribution. Purchasing data is challenging since I occasionally must enlist the help of a few of my classmates to conduct mobile internet searches for information."*

To our knowledge, only two studies have examined socioeconomic variation in child outcomes following parental death. Barclay and Hallsten, (2019) applied a sibling fixed effects approach to data from Sweden to study child educational attainment. They found that the marginal effect of losing parents is greater at higher levels of paternal education, while the educational level of the surviving mother did not exert a statistically significant effect. Examining the consequences of parental mortality in Finland, Prix and Erola (2017) discovered that high

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levels of education brought on by parental death negatively affect children's educational transitions to upper-secondary, tertiary vocational, and university education. The study by Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist and Erola (2020) in the UK confirms a study conducted by Prix and Arola (2017) in Finland that parental death for younger children was associated with lower transition rates into university.

For children heading families and their siblings, it is critical to develop and put into action proper policies, support programs, and monitoring strategies. Helping children who are the primary breadwinners of their families must be made available so that they can pursue education since doing so will reduce social and economic inequality, enable them to reach their full potential, and result in significant economic advantages for the country.

Participant C3 explained that:

> *"There is no library within the distance of 5 kilometers. The one I am aware of is a bit too far from our area, and getting there to and from will cost money. If one has some money for transportation, at least occasionally one could go and do some research, especially when the teachers give assignments and when preparing for tests and exams."*

Participant C6 indicated that:

> *"It is difficult to buy data because sometimes I am forced to ask some of my classmates to get information from the internet using their cell phones. This makes me feel so small. There is no library close by that one could sometimes go and search for information especially when the teachers give us homework and when preparing for exams."*

Participant further C10 stated that**:**

> *"Neither my school nor our community have a library. Finding information is difficult for children and can be discouraging. Because of the stressful atmosphere I live in, I also find it difficult to concentrate in class or when trying to complete homework. However, having a library close by would be incredibly beneficial."*

The findings of this study revealed that since there are no libraries in the villages where the child-headed learners live, there is a need for school libraries. Some of the participants said they would want to visit some of the libraries but that it would be difficult for them because they couldn't afford the cost of public transportation.

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In New Zealand school libraries give pupils a chance to enhance their lifelong learning skills. Students must have access to libraries, which will also help them develop crucial reading habits. In this study, participants highlighted the need for the availability of libraries within the vicinity of where they live. Libraries are required in every school since they are an important component of students' lives and act as a repository of knowledge. It is challenging for children heading families and other vulnerable children to attend libraries that are located far from where they live because they cannot afford the transportation costs (Altenburger, 2021).

Participant C9 alluded that:

> *"When a student in grade 11 applies to colleges and universities, there is no money available to submit application forms. After completing grade 12, one once more faces difficulty, such as how to pay for future study."*

In South Africa, a study by Mathuthu (2019) on children heading families indicated a frequent lack the money to support their siblings or their educational demands, which causes them to receive a substandard or occasionally no education. Chademana and Van Wyk (2021) in Zimbabwe, confirms that the poor level of education among children from children heading families is caused by their extensive household responsibilities, which prevent them from continuing or completing their education.

Every child is entitled to free education under the Department of Education's current regulations. Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the "right to education" and stipulates that everyone must have access to free basic education. Furthermore, Section 29(1)(a) of the South African Constitution's Bill of Rights guarantees children the right to a basic education. These policies allow children to go to school without having to pay any fees.

Participant C1 said:

> *"I'm not coping at all. I am unable to manage my duties since I have too much to do, which has a bad influence on my academic performance. I'm now in grade 10, but my goal is to enter grade 12 within the next two years. The problem is that I'm constantly stressed and worn out. I worry about my future, which sometimes keeps me awake during the night thinking about my situation."*

A study conducted by Bhengu (2021) indicated an alarming issue that educational institutions will experience absenteeism and an increase in school dropouts because children of CHF need to take care of other household duties and their younger siblings. Consequently, children heading families have a low rate of school attendance due to additional obstacles like a lack of learning

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resources, a lack of motivation to learn, a lack of access to food, and student involvement in household duties. Schools must equip teachers for their pastoral tasks so that they can identify vulnerable children who are orphaned or child-headed and offer the care and assistance they can within the context of the classroom (Kim and Asbury, 2021).

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families find it difficult to manage their schoolwork since they are constantly exhausted, which affects their performance in class. However, participants acknowledged that they are quite concerned since they recognize the importance of education. This makes it quite evident that since they interact with their teachers daily, child-headed learners require support from their teachers.

Participant C2 further illuminated that:

> *"Although some teachers are understanding, it is difficult to talk to them and express my concerns owing to a lack of privacy. When I talk to my educator about what I am going through, it is not just a straightforward exchange. Some of the educators don't understand us since they show no empathy."*

The findings of this study revealed that some child-headed children develop a distrust towards teachers, which may create a sense of less eagerness to study. Nonetheless, the study findings revealed that it is important to determine whether teachers are appropriately prepared to deal with students from child-headed backgrounds. The students' poor performance and rising absences may annoy teachers as they might not know what is bothering the learner who is from a child-headed family.

Participant C5 explained that:

> *"Since I won't have enough money to pay for trips I've decided not to participate in any school-related activities since I am struggling to receive a child support grant."*

According to Maila and Mabasa (2023) in a study conducted in Zambia, child-headed children experience difficulties such as financial hardships, and shortage of resources, and schools do not provide them with essential assistance.

The findings of this study revealed that it is difficult for learners from child-headed families to mail their application forms when enrolling for the tertiary level since the forms must be returned with a particular amount of money. Secondary education is expensive and there is no free education, children from child-headed families still must struggle to pay for necessities like food, books, and school uniforms. The long-term effects of the general low trend in enrolment

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of children heading families and their siblings affect both the lives of children and the economies of the country.

4.3.5.1 Sub-Theme: Inadequate Educational Support

The findings revealed that children heading families experience inadequate educational support from teachers and their relatives. According to Maila and Mabasa (2021), schools do not provide children heading families with the help they need, and they go on to highlight that this lack of support exacerbates the difficulties these youngsters face in their day-to-day struggle for survival. Children's relatives are unable to provide support, therefore child heads from both primary and secondary schools are obligated to buy books for every sibling under their care. Some of those younger siblings complained that this put an additional financial strain on them as the heads of the household because they frequently misplace or damage their books and must therefore be replaced.

Participant C7 stated that:

> *"No one will ever be able to fill the role that our parents played in our lives because most of our teachers are unaware that we are all living on our own without parents."*

Participant C11 further indicated that:

> *"We can't rely on our relatives because they are also struggling to raise their kids, so they don't provide us with adequate support for our education. I wish the government could do something to make us feel supported."*

Due to a lack of basic supplies such as school uniforms and stationery, learners from child-headed families are hindered from attending school regularly which results in losing interest and focus on school (Ogina and Ramare, 2019).

4.3.5.2 Sub-Theme: Unavailability of Scholar Transportation

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families travel a great distance to go to and from school. They also claimed that they feel uncomfortable and exhausted when they get there, which harms their academic performance. Frequent walking to school reduces the amount of free time learners have for activities, stresses child-headed and may result in more difficulty for them to focus on their academics. This may be more challenging for them to participate fully in extramural activities and to be at school on time. The exhaustion from begging on the streets to support the family and the poor availability of school transportation are other factors contributing to the high absenteeism rate among children from child-

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headed families and other vulnerable children (Bamgboye, Odusote, Olusanmi and Nwosu, 2017).

It has been further revealed during the study that most of the children heading families are faced with transport to school as they stated that they walk daily to and from to schools; however, when lightning strikes during summer are a problem and children have nowhere that they are safe to hide and the chances of being struck by lightning are very high. The distances that children heading families that they should travel to go to school is a big challenge. Children who live in rural areas must travel long distances because schools are far from where they are located and there isn't enough money to pay for public transport and their safety is compromised (Muthige, 2023).

Participant C7 stated that:

> *"The school that I attend is far and I walk daily to and from and most of the time I arrive at school tired. It's even worse when it's raining. I would wish to take a means of public transport, but money is a challenge. Since I commute by foot and don't carry an umbrella on rainy days, my books and I arrive at school wet."*

A study conducted in Easter Cape, South. Africa indicated that lack of transport and school fees were found to lead to absenteeism from school which results in missing classes (Mpolase, 2021). The Department of Transport together with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and other stakeholders developed the National Learner Transport Policy which is aimed at addressing the challenges of accessibility and safety of learners (Department of Transport, 2015).

Participant C10 explicated that:

> *"Travelling to school is a big problem, if I had enough money, I would prefer taking public transport because walking a long distance makes me feel exhausted and when arriving at school, one feels in need of rest before school starts."*

More specifically, it is stated that in rural South Africa, "the absence of transportation, poor roads, high cost of public transportation, and hazards to rural learners' safety along the routes to school, limit learners' capacity to attend school and engage completely and effectively." A scenario in Limpopo province appeared on the 18th of February 2023 news report stated that pupils including children heading families must travel more than 10km to schools and when they arrive late, they are locked outside and are only allowed to enter school during break time. The most pathetic issue is children are raped and abducted daily, while others are killed.

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Participant C14 explained that:

> *"We walk to school since no money to pay for public transportation there and back. It is even not safe to walk to school as we hear a lot of girl children being raped and killed, so we feel unsafe walking to and from to school. We don't have umbrellas to use on rainy days, so our books get wet, and we arrive at school being soaked."*

Participants stated that they have no option since they have no money to pay for public transport it is dangerous as they face harassment by strangers on the road and girl learners including child-headed children are harassed by male strangers when they walk to school. The strangers forcefully proposed love to the girls and if they refused to speak to them, they threatened them by promising them that they would ambush them when they returned from school in the afternoon. It is expensive and frequently dangerous in South Africa, regardless of the mode of transportation. The findings revealed a great need for subsidized transportation of vulnerable learners including children heading families and their siblings as a way of promoting safety whilst traveling to school (Hopson, 2022).

The Walking School Bus (WSB) is one of the distinctive and potentially effective solutions seeking to lessen issues brought on by children's long walks to school, according to a study by Martin (2018) in Germany. The (WSB) gave the orphans from child-headed backgrounds a relief. The researcher emphasizes learners' transport services are implemented with proper monitoring for sustainability. This will be a great relief to children heading families and other vulnerable learners.

4.3.6 Theme 6: Spiritual and Religious Support Challenges

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families need spiritual and religious support and the availability of pastoral in schools may play a very important role in building their resilience.

4.3.6.1 Sub-Theme: Spiritual and Religious Support

When stress is prolonged, it can easily result in physical and mental illness among children heading families. Participants acknowledged that they belonged to a religious organization in their local communities where they had a more profound spiritual sense of humanity. According to a study in Sub-Saharan Africa, Seehawer (2023), stated that Ubuntu gives spirituality a high importance because it is so important to Africans, especially children, in their daily lives.

Spiritual coping and religious coping have been shown to improve mental health outcomes (Thomas & Barbato, 2020; Richa et al., 2020; Swinton, 2020). Spirituality is different than being religious. Religion tends to be a set of rules and rituals that are organized around beliefs

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shared by a group. The more strictly children's lives adhere to these rules, the more religious they might be. Studies have shown that both spirituality and religion are related to positive coping with stress and mental health (Garssen, Visser, and Pool (2021). As child-headed children experience stress spiritual or religious coping mechanisms can aid them in dealing with their situation. Effective religious coping includes having a solid relationship with God, having confidence in life's bigger picture, and having a sense of spiritual community. Participants said that the spiritual support they received from the church kept them going as one participant remarked.

- **Spiritual support**

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families stated that they receive spiritual support from churches because pastors and fellow churchgoers provide a sense of peace and optimism. Most of them believed in relying on prayer.

Spirituality is often connected to God, the Divine, or a higher power, but may also be felt in your connection with others (Watson, 2021). Children heading families may turn to their faith and spirituality in stressful situations, which helps them cope and strengthens their fortitude.

Seehawer (2018) stated that because spirituality is so significant to Africans, particularly children, in their daily lives, Ubuntu accords it a high priority. The research showed that church members and clergy uplift children and families spiritually by telling them that their suffering will end because of God. The value of the spiritual guidance they receive from the church was emphasized by participants as they find a place of love and self-belonging and feel connected to society.

Children heading families and their siblings may develop strong bonds or relationships with spiritual support. Through these relationships, children can develop their sense of self and give meaning to the cultural values, beliefs, and standards that are important to them. Spirituality may help children heading families who have a strong feeling of caring, compassion, and belonging.

Participant C12 explained that:

> *"Since prayer is my everyday life, I think things will get better eventually. We frequently go to church because I trust that God will provide us with comfort and spiritual health."*

According to Villasenor (2023), a study conducted in the United States indicated that spiritual coping has been introduced as an effective way of coping with stress. In the basic sense, it involves children heading families seeking out coping strength from God (Lin, 2022). Spiritual

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coping enhances children's sense of trust, self-worth, hope, joy, and love of life, as it is crucial for young children.

Participant C15 stated that:

> *"I believe that one day our situation will improve because we have confidence in God that I will get an education and help my siblings. I am confident that God will help us get through this difficult period."*

Spiritual support aids with the painful scars of loss, rejection, and guilt for children heading families. However, to assist them deal with the painful impact of losing their parents, children who are responsible for their families need spiritual support from the pastors in church and follow-up support to find out if ever they are coping.

Children heading families are more likely to express their spirituality in novel ways, be able to speak about their spiritual convictions, and express hope that their circumstances will one day change. They claimed that because prayer heals the soul, churchgoers, and pastors prayed for them.

- **Religious support**

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families saw religion as a significant element that, via prayer, provides them hope for the future. Smith and Adamczyk (2020) indicated that people with psychological challenges often turn to the church for help. The traditional beliefs and practices associated with a particular group of people or faith, on the other hand, are referred to as religion. Religion is governed by tradition, laws, and culture. According to Dunfee, Brown, and Schoenberg (2021), a study conducted in the USA, stated that religion offers coping skills and can boost self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy. Churches are very imperative in boosting children heading families and their siblings' self-esteem and a feeling of self-worth.

Participant C8 explicated that:

> *"Since we receive religious support and a sense of belonging from pastors and church members, we love their presence. They give us a sense of optimism, self-worth, and comfort."*

The study by Agere and Agere, (2020) in South Africa, highlighted that schools and churches serve as autonomous community support networks, helping children heading families face a variety of everyday obstacles. The South African government should, among other things, provide a well-resourced, coordinated, and managed child protection system to support constituency work that addresses the actual needs of children heading families as well as SMART planning by social workers, systemic teaming around families with children heading

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families as the primary caregivers, and the Department of Social Development serving as the lead agency.

Participant C9 added that:

> *"Since the pastors and other church members encourage us, we like attending church every Sunday as we participate in the church choir. We are thankful for the support and love we receive from the church as we feel comforted. We believe that God will help us overcome the difficulties we are facing."*

Through partaking in religious activities, children heading families may feel a sense of belonging, which has been demonstrated in research to have favorable benefits on child-headed children in terms of improved self-esteem and a lower prevalence and involvement in wrongdoings such as substance abuse, alcohol consumption, and prostitution in girls. A connection with God may give them life meaning and purpose as these are found when child-headed children participate in religious activities. They may also develop positive relationships with peers and adults in a religious community.

A study by Pompele, Ghetta, and Veronese, (2022) in South Africa noted the enormous role that religious belief played in helping child-headed children to comprehend their parents' deaths and cope with the most trying times of losing parents, as this was also emphasized. A study conducted by Ilunga (2021) in Virginia USA, emphasized that upon entering the church premises, children heading families stated that they are welcomed by pastors and congregation and filled with a sense of love and beauty of God's creative work**.**

4.4 Data Analysis from Children's Relatives

The researcher met children's relatives at the chief's kraal to plan the date, time venue, and purpose for conducting the interviews. Before the interview, the researcher made it clear to the participants that information will be kept confidential. The researcher thoroughly explained the consent forms to the participants in their home languages. The purpose of using the tape recorder was discussed, along with its significance, and the participant's consent was obtained. There was no need for an interpreter since the researcher was fluent in both Xitsonga and Venda languages. Interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred areas.

Throughout the interviews, participants were allowed to explain the support they provide to children heading families. In-depth face-to-face interviews aimed at exploring and describing the support provided to children heading families by their relatives in Limpopo Province S.A. One central question was asked. **"What support do you provide as children's relatives to children heading families?"** The probing questions were based on the central questions.

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Data saturation was reached when the researcher interviewed fifteen participants. Data was collected from fifteen (15) participants, four (4) males and eleven (11) females. Table 4.3 shows the demographic profile of children's relatives.

Table: 4.3: Demographic profile of children's relatives

Participant	Gender	Relationship	Language spoken	Age in years	Occupation
1	Male	Uncle	Tshivenda	38	Unemployed
2	Female	Aunt	Tshivenda	41	Unemployed
3	Male	Uncle	Tshivenda	39	Unemployed
4	Female	Sister	Tshivenda	20	Unemployed
5	Female	Grandmother	Xitsonga	68	Unemployed
6	Female	Aunt	Xitsonga	44	Self-employed
7	Female	Aunt	Xitsonga	40	Unemployed
8	Female	Grandmother	Xitsonga	72	Unemployed
9	Female	Grandmother	Tshivenda	70	Unemployed
10	Female	Grandmother	Tshivenda	55	Unemployed
11	Male	Uncle	Tshivenda	40	Unemployed
12	Male	Uncle	Xitsonga	35	Unemployed
13	Female	Grandmother	Tshivenda	66	Unemployed
14	Female	Aunt	Xitsonga	65	Unemployed
15	Female	Aunt	Xitsonga	52	Unemployed

The findings of this study were discussed according to four (4) themes, and ten (10) sub-themes that emerged from data collected and analyzed from children's relatives. Support provided by children's relatives emerged as a theme. Table 4.4 shows the themes and sub-themes.

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Table 4.4: Themes, and sub-themes on support provided by relative's children heading families

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
4.5.1 Psychological Support	4.5.1.1 Encouragement for Regular Church Attendance 4.5.1.2 Development of a Meaningful Relationship with Children-Heading Families
4.5.2 Financial Support	4.5.2.1 Minimal Financial Support 4.5.2.2 Provision of Food Supply and Other Basic Requirements 4.5.2.3 Housing Maintenance
4.5.3 Social Support	4.5.3.1 Transference of Cultural Values 4.5.3.2 Guidance and Supervision 4.5.3.3 Overburden with Household Chores
4.5.4 Educational Support	4.5.4.1 Encouragement and Motivation Towards Education. 4.5.4.2 Assistance with Homework and Studies

4.5 Support Provided by Children's Relatives to Children-Heading Families

The findings of the study revealed that support provided by children's relatives was categorized under themes stated as indicated: psychological, financial, social, and educational support with their sub-themes.

4.5.1 Theme 1: Psychological Support

The findings of this study revealed that relatives find it difficult to comfort children heading families as the deaths of both parents impacted their psychological aspect negatively. Children heading families that have lost their parents need support, particularly teenagers who will be going through a lot of emotional and psychological turmoil. (Chilwalo, Rantho, et al., 2024). The said proclamation confirms that psychological support is an essential need for children heading families.

A study conducted by Karuga et al., (2022) indicated that children heading families reported considerable worry about how their psychological state was impacted by their living situations and the outside environment. In Zimbabwe, a study conducted by Ringson and Chereni, (2020) indicated a need for psychological diagnosis and intervention that is appropriate to their level of severity, risk, and complexities. In the African context, the relative's support is of paramount importance for the psychological and emotional aspect of children heading families.

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4.5.1.1 Sub-Theme: Encouragement for Regular Church Attendance

The findings of this study revealed that relatives provide limited support as some of them are unable to talk to the children heading families as they think that they may remind them of the pain they felt of losing their parents. The findings further revealed that relatives go to church with them with the hope that the pastors and church members would be able to console them. Specifically, churches may have the potential to promote resiliency and trauma recovery among children traumatized by reframing challenging life events (Rainville, 2018).

Participant 2 emphasized that: (Aunt)

> *"Every Sunday we attend church service together and find that church members and pastors comfort them."*

In addition to sharing all their worries with the children heading families when the church visited them, its members also assisted these families with gardening (Thwala, 2018). The support that was received by some, played a significant role in their lives as they could get food amongst other material things from the church members. Although the church helps children in CHF, it has been silent in caring for and supporting children heading families (Clark, 2018).

Participant 2 explicated that: (Aunt)

> *"I am not able to talk to them regarding the pain that they are experiencing of losing their parents. I noticed that pastors could help them deal with the grief and pain and as such give them hope."*

A study conducted by Wellington (2021) in Hong Kong, indicated that hope is a quality that improves people's lives both in the presence and absence of a problem. This was seen as relatives placing their faith in God for every circumstance that they are facing, hoping that God will step in and help children heading families through the difficult times.

The congregation and the pastor have a vital role in the lives of the child-headed children as godly examples and mentors. The congregation is a group of upright adults in the faith-based community who offer comfort to children heading families in such circumstances where children have lost their parents and other issues of concern. It is a key place where children heading families may have meaningful connections with people other than their family members (Pisani-Jacques 2020).

To encourage children's linguistic and cognitive development, Lytje and Dyregrov (2019) found that children heading families need regular contact with supportive relatives as they are aware of the psychological effects of their stressful lifestyles. Additionally, insufficient access to

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psychological services is hampered by both a lack of financial resources and knowledgeable expertise (Chademana and Van Wyk, 2021).

Mabetha, Wet-Billings, Nicole, and Odimegwu, (2021) confirmed that when children are abused or neglected, their psychological being frequently suffers more consequences than their physical health. Due to emotional and psychological impact, child-headed children are robbed of the tools they need to deal with stress and learn new capabilities that may help them develop into strong, prosperous adults.

The findings of the study by Ntuli et al., (2020) in South Africa, support the findings by Gomba (2018) in Zimbabwe which confirmed that the death of parents is accompanied by multiple losses such as loss of the family home, loss of multiple family members, loss of support from relatives, loss of friendships, loss of educational opportunities and future aspirations, and loss of childhood, which further contribute to their psychological vulnerability.

4.5.1.2 Sub-theme: Development of a Meaningful Relationship with Children-Heading Families

The findings of this study revealed that it is difficult for relatives to bond with children heading families. However, spending time with them and developing a trustworthy relationship should be the cornerstone of any successful interaction.

Participant 4 explained that: (Aunt)

> *"My relationship with my late sister's children is very limited because they seem to be too quiet and often, I don't find comforting words."*

Participant 8 indicated that: (Grandmother)

> *I am their grandmother, I do talk to my grandchildren always, and we have a very good trusting relationship."*

The findings by Molemane, (2021) indicated that it is difficult for children heading families to develop a meaningful relationship with their paternal family members as they feel alone, abandoned, and ashamed since they also feel like they don't belong. Contrary to the study's findings, Lemeyu et al., (2023) found that children heading families lacked trust and self-worth, which inhibits them from being open with their family members and implies that most of their relatives are unaware of the pain the children are going through.

4.5.2 Theme 2: Financial Support

The findings of this study revealed that relatives are also having financial difficulties and are therefore unable to provide adequate financial support to children heading families. According to

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African traditional practices, relatives are a particular family structure that has long been connected to African civilization and utilized to care for orphaned children. A study conducted by Thwala and Tshabalala (2023) highlighted the disadvantages of child-headed families because children will forever need someone who always protects them. The distinct family structure that once distinguished the African society, however, has been harmed by the present economic climate, which has reduced the presence of relatives that would take the place of parents. A study conducted by Gomba (2018), pointed out that children from child-headed families among the Shona people struggled to make ends meet in the existence of relatives' support and that they have financial challenges.

4.5.2.1 Sub-theme: Minimal Financial Support

The findings of this study explicated that it is difficult for relatives to provide financial assistance to orphaned children heading families when they have lost their parents because most of the relatives are faced with the challenges of unemployment. The study findings further elucidated that relatives reflected and reported that they are also struggling to meet their basic needs. A study conducted by Pote (2019) in Zimbabwe, on experiences and challenges of food insecurity in CHFs confirms that relatives used to take the responsibility of caring for orphan child-headed children but, with current economic hardships, most relatives are unable to take extra responsibility leaving child-headed children with no access to sufficient food.

Participant 6 explained that: (Aunt)

> *"It is challenging for someone like me to provide financial assistance to children heading families since they have so many needs. I am unable to provide needs like food, toiletries, clothing, school uniforms, and other necessities.*

Participant 7 stated that: (Aunt)

> *"Since I don't have a job and have five children, it's difficult for me to buy them food and other necessities. I only visit them occasionally to cook for them and enquire whether they are going to school regularly. I am a single parent, providing for my own children's requirements, thus I cannot even guarantee that I will be able to support them financially."*

Thobejane and Lorraine (2022) in a study conducted in Limpopo South Africa, highlighted that child-headed children endured a variety of financial difficulties, including malnutrition and famine. Due to financial limitations, resulting from unemployment, relatives are no longer able to provide for the requirements of children heading families who have been left on their own.

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The findings of the study by Mkhize, Libhaber, Sewpaul, and Reddy (2022) in South Africa support findings by Thobejane and Lorraine (2022), which confirmed that many orphaned child-headed children withdrew from school due to financial constraints which relatives see as an important strategy to reduce the school requirements and allow savings from these to cover other essentials.

4.5.2.2 Sub-Theme: Provision of Food Supply and Other Basic Requirements

The findings of this study revealed that relatives are also facing difficulties in supporting their children and are unable to budget food and other requirements for children heading families. Maharaj and Gumindega (2020) indicated that relatives are unable to supply children heading families with food as they are also grappling with feeding their children. Food insecurity in child-headed families is consistently associated with poor physical and mental health outcomes such as nutrition deficiency, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, depression, stress, and anxiety (Pai and Bahadur, 2020).

Participant 12 mentioned that: (Uncle)

> *"I try many times whenever I find a piece job and buy some food as I am their uncle. I am sometimes unemployed resulting in an inability to buy them food monthly."*

Participant 1 further stated that: (Aunt)

> *"I am an aunt to my late brother's children, I sell food, vegetables, fruits, and other smaller items like sweets and Simba's to learners in the nearby school. I sometimes supply them with food."*

In Swaziland, a study conducted by Thwala (2018), found that children heading families experience food insecurity and they would sometimes go to bed without having eaten anything. Thus, food insecurity is a crucial need for a healthy life. In Zimbabwe, a study by Chademana and Van Wyk, (2021) confirmed that a lack of material needs such as food creates increased exposure to extreme challenges and perpetuates related health challenges.

A study conducted by Pote (2019) in Western Cape, South Africa, found that children heading families frequently lose access to enough food when their parents pass away. Although children have the right to enough food, many homes, including those with children as the head of family, live in poverty. They are consequently at risk of food insecurity, which can cause developmental, social, and emotional problems. Based on this study's findings, relatives revealed that children heading families do not have access to healthy food and lack other

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accessories. They further, added that children enjoy going to school because they receive meals that they can't get at home.

A study conducted by Roberts, Tolar-Peterson, Reynolds, and Wall, (2022) in California, indicated that developing human brains require all essential food nutrients to form and maintain their structure. Children who do not receive sufficient food are at high risk of exhibiting impaired cognitive skills. Early childhood food supply creates a crucial basis for future health and development (Ansuya et al., 2023).

4.5.2.3 Sub-theme: Housing Maintenance

The findings of this study revealed that relatives have less influence on the maintenance of children heading families' houses as they are unemployed. They cannot do maintenance of children heading homes as they stay in dilapidated and neglected houses. Their sanitation systems are incredibly unhygienic since they use pit toilets, which are rarely kept clean and serve as a fly and ant breeding ground.

Demography of South African children survey by Hall and Sambu (2019) revealed that 6 million children living alone stay in backyard dwellings and shacks in informal settlements, and one in six children live in overcrowded households. Shortage of water and proper sanitation, result in children heading families experiencing substantial health risks and having no access to drinking water on-site, while access to toilet facilities becomes problematic.

Participant 5 explained that: (Grandmother)

> *"I'm their grandmother; all other five of my children are no more. I stay with some of my other grandchildren, the ones who stay alone in their mother's late homes typically need assistance in improving the homes I can't assist because I only receive a grant."*

Participant 3 further indicated that: (Uncle)

> *"I visit them rarely because I live far away, but when I do, I try my best to help fix some other household issues, as an uncle. It is quite hard since a lot of maintenance is needed and costly."*

In KwaZulu-Natal a study conducted by Gumede (2021) indicated that some houses where children heading families live are not good for children, as they have some cracks, the roofs are leaking and windows are sometimes broken, exposing them to draughts.

A study conducted by Dutta, (2020) in India, indicated that social workers employed by both government and non-governmental welfare organizations play a critical role in assisting children.

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Social workers frequently fail to recognize the connection between their social work responsibilities and children's safety, they should consider child-headed children's safety as a priority.

Hall and Sambu (2019) demonstrated that child-headed households are viewed as a violation of children's rights to protection, survival, and development. Child-headed children may easily be targeted, so, they must live in safe and secure homes.

Section 26 of the Constitution of South Africa provides that "everyone has the right to access adequate housing" while Section 28(1) (c) states that children have "the right to proper shelter." Despite the existing legislation, it is evident from the findings that children heading families are not having proper housing to accommodate them. They are therefore not supposed to reside in substandard housing since such a group of persons is expressly covered by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

4.5.3 Theme 3: Social Support

The findings of this study revealed that grandparents provide significant support, while other family members do not stay with children but instead make periodic visits when they have the opportunity. Grandmothers, whether on the maternal or paternal side, show love towards their grandchildren, but they worry about who will support their grandchildren when they have passed on. In Kenya, Mwinzi, Kathuri and Kinzi (2020) indicated that emotional, psychological, and social challenges could shorten the grandparent's lifespan. The study conducted in Zimbabwe by Chiimba (2020) found that children are a source of support to children heading families. The grandmothers, aunts, and uncles were described to be a caring source of emotional support and advice.

Participant 7 stated that: (Aunt)

> *"I am a direct family member to my late elder sister, and I wish to be available most of the time as children need an adult figure daily and be able to provide proper support, but when it comes to providing consistent support, I am unable to do so."*

Relatives have a crucial role in consoling and comforting children heading families as well as giving a normal family structure to the child's life after parental death. It is argued that if children heading families are accorded such, it is easier for them to regain control of their lives, and this results in the reduction of stress and makes coping easier after the traumatic experience of losing both parents (Thwala, 2021).

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Participant 9 explained that: (Grandmother)

> *“I relate well with my grandchildren, and they so much depend on me as I am always there for them. I wish God can give me good health so that I may find time to take care of them properly.”*

Participant 10 stated that: (Grandmother)

> *"Four of my children died and left behind their offspring. I try to visit my grandchildren who are alone in their homes. Providing for your grandchildren when their parents are more difficult. I often wish that their parents were still alive. Though I adore my grandchildren, I'm not sure how long I'll survive.”*

Attar-Schwartz and Buchana (2020) indicated that most grandparents spend quality time with their grandchildren, participate in meaningful activities with them, and value their role as grandparents. With certain key exceptions, such as when they require greater childcare responsibilities, relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren are generally associated with increased well-being for both parties (Fu, Wang, and He, 2020).

In Swaziland, a study conducted by Motsa (2022) indicated that traditionally, grandparents have assisted children heading families by providing advice and support to them throughout the parenting process. Grandparents nowadays, however, are more than just helpers; they are also assuming more significant roles and responsibilities and worry for their grandchildren hoping to live longer so they may help their grandchildren who are heading families. The challenges faced by children in families with children as the head of the family are a direct reflection of their social marginalization and the debilitating effects of poverty, which are made worse by the lack of adequate social support from their families and communities (Thobejane and Lorraine, 2022).

4.5.3.1 Sub-Theme: Transference of Cultural Values

The findings of this study revealed that children’s relatives are not able to provide cultural information, and this results in child-headed children lacking such skills. In the Traditional African community, the child-rearing of orphans was not the duty of biological parents alone, but it was the responsibility of the whole family. Makuyana et al., (2020) revealed that children from child-headed families experience poor personal grooming, indecision; sexual violence, and unplanned teenage pregnancy. Many of high school child-headed learners are going under challenging conditions with their relative's lack of adult guidance and support (Achiyo and Yambo 2020). The researcher finds it more imperative that relatives should provide guidance to children heading families as they are the future generation and should be taught some humanity and values, which can be passed on to the next generation.

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Unfortunately, some children heading families have no traceable relatives and those available may not be willing to take care of them.

Participant 12 explained that: (Uncle)

> *"As an opposite sex, it's quite difficult to handle adolescent girls' issues. Transferring female's cultural values to me seems difficult as a man."*

Participant 15 stated that: (Aunt)

> *"I sometimes visit them though I am unable to frequently since I stay a bit far whereby traveling is quite expensive. Upbringing children need constant supervision and teaching of good morals."*

Adolescent girls in child-headed families lack adequate social support from their relatives after parental death resulting in them living in isolation as they do not have a chance of interacting with their relatives. In addition, children heading families also lack adequate social support after their parental death resulting in a lack of adequate levels of engagement with their relatives.

A study conducted by Bhengu (2021) in South Africa, indicated that adolescent girls heading families experience adverse outcomes like early pregnancies, alcohol misuse, dropping out of school, prostitution, and psychiatric issues with no social support from relatives. The findings of this study were supported by Cross (2020) who confirmed that relatives who do not support children heading families find it difficult to transfer their cultural values.

4.5.3.2 Sub-Theme: Guidance and Supervision

The findings of this study revealed that relatives cannot guide children heading families and take over their parental roles following their parents' death, and frequently they are unable to offer guidance and supervision. Olli, Vehkakoski, and Salanterä (2020) revealed that children need direction and delimitation and parents are the agents in providing that to them. They do this by guiding the children through the different stages of their development. The study findings conducted by Agbola and Olojede, (2022) indicated that relatives must take responsibility for shaping and providing supervision to child-headed children and influencing their skills, and socialization, during the childhood developmental stages.

Participant 13 stated that: (Grandmother)

> *"I usually give myself time to talk to my grandchildren regarding normal behavior. As the grandmother, I try and supervise what is happening in their home but sometimes I am not available which makes it difficult for me to know what is exactly happening."*

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Participant 4 stated that: (Sister)

> *"I am the oldest of my siblings, and I live with the man who impregnated me. I stay a little bit far away from my siblings, which makes it harder to supervise them, but we have a good relationship. I fell pregnant at a very young age since I didn't have an adult caregiver to provide guidance. I am worried that my 15-year-old sister will experience a similar problem. I wish there was someone who can guide my siblings."*

The United Nations' International Day of Families (2021) appreciated the role played by relatives, especially grandmothers who shared stories, skills, and teachings, passing on cultural lessons and traditions, including language, to their grandchildren. The researcher in this study found it appropriate to encourage grandmothers who were in the interview to play a major role in guiding children heading families to build their adulthood.

Participant 11 stated that: (Uncle)

> *"My late sister's daughter is now 18 years old, and I believe that some of the advice I offer as a man she feels is inappropriate for her. I believe she needs a female advisor, and I am trying to look for someone who will be able to give guidance. With so many of our loved ones having passed away, I am the only member of their immediate family who is still alive. I have two nieces and nephews who belong to my sister."*

Teenage girls in child-headed homes, according to Monger and Lombard (2020), lack supervision and guidance, which prevents them from having the necessary knowledge and levels of engagement in the various transitions they are going through. Mogotsi (2021) recommended that once a teenager, particularly those from child-headed families, reach the menstrual cycle stage, contraceptive information should be introduced to them. It was further stated that if clinics can get girls on contraceptives before they become pregnant, nurses can be assigned to visit child-headed children and give advice regarding life and talk about issues of abstinence and contraceptives. Mogotsi (2021) further added that adolescent girls from child-headed families should be given guidance about the dangers of early sex engagement and pregnancy because they lack adult role models. As a result, social connection among adolescent girls may lead to an open dialogue in which relatives can function as advisors and provide them with some knowledge to help them overcome their issues.

It has been revealed that adolescent pregnancy and childbirth are among the major causes of death for young girls between the ages of 15 and 19 and can have a long-lasting effect on social and economic well-being (World Health Organization, 2018). As a result, girls from child-headed

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homes may be better equipped to make important decisions regarding their health and future if they receive guidance and supervision on contraceptives. In this study, participants disclosed that teenage pregnancy was caused by a lack of parental guidance and supervision.

4.5.3.3 Sub-Theme: Overburden with Household Chores

The findings of this study revealed that relatives are unable to constantly assist children heading families with household chores and this results in children carrying a 'heavy burden' with a lot of responsibilities and managing between studies and taking care of their siblings. This finding is congruent with the study conducted by Ramokoka (2021) in the Northwest province of South Africa who defined "household chores as activities which include fulfilling parental roles and carrying out tasks such as household chores, helping siblings with homework, cooking, washing dishes, sweeping and tidying, fetching water and firewood, doing laundry, heating water for bathing, cultivating food for consumption and cutting wood". Besides worrying about doing house chores, children heading families are also responsible for supervising their siblings.

Participant 2 stated that: (Aunt)

> *"I am employed in two part-time jobs. On weekends, I discovered that I have a lot of house chores, so on Sundays after church, I make time to visit them, though it's not always every Sunday, which makes assisting them very inconsistent.*

Participant 4 further alluded that: (Aunt)

> *"I assist them in cooking and cleaning the house once I visit them at the end of the month after receiving my social grant."*

According to Knijn and Patel (2018), family wellness in South Africa is hindered by deep structural causes and systemic impediments, leaving children heading families in desperate situations and making them powerless under their age.

In Limpopo province, SA, it has been revealed that children who are in child-headed families indicated that their housekeeping responsibilities affect their ability to learn at school. Children heading families lack enough time to revise their schoolwork and tend to arrive late at school. This results in poor educational outcomes which will reduce their employment opportunities (Maila and Mabasa, 2023).

4.5.4 Theme 4: Lack of Educational Support

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families do not have adequate educational assistance from their relatives. According to a study conducted by Kanyi (2020) in Nairobi, children

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who are the heads of families are deprived of the opportunity to pursue an education due to the lack of assistance from relatives. A study by Tanga and Tanga (2018) in Lesotho on the impact of the declining relatives support system on the education of orphans highlighted that most of them provided children heading families with poor living conditions, such as unhygienic houses, poor nutrition, and little or no provision of school materials, which has harmed the education of the orphans.

Participant 6 highlighted that: (Aunt)

> *"I am not able to support them with their educational material needs. As I stay far it is difficult to supervise them when doing their studies or when writing their homework. I am not sure whether they are attending school regularly as failure to attend school may lead to loss of educational focus."*

Participant 7 stated that: (Aunt)

> *"I cannot afford to support children heading families with their educational materials, since I have my children whom I am also struggling to meet all their educational needs."*

A study by Motsa (2019) in Swaziland pointed out that children heading families struggle with a lack of educational support and end up dropping out of school with no further prospects for education resulting in inadequate support by relatives. This was supported by a study conducted in Zimbabwe by Msangi (2020), that lack of educational support by relatives results in psycho-social pressures that push child-headed learners out of primary education prematurely. Although children from child-headed families view school as having better adult lives, they also worry about their relatives' probable lack of support for their educational needs. Lack of study supplies, such as candles to provide light during evening study sessions, and insufficient support from family members contributed to the vulnerability of children heading families in pursuing their education. Susceptibility in children can have a detrimental effect on their dedication to learning and lead to school dropout (Samuel and Burger, 2020).

When children heading families are not provided by their relatives with sufficient funds to cover the cost of schooling, including having to purchase books and stationery, they may not be able to attend school (Valombola, 2022) A study conducted by Blake (2022) in USA confirmed the study by Valombola, (2022) in Namibia that children heading families who are not supported by their relatives are less likely to enroll in school and possibly fall behind or drop out of school.

In Kenya, a study by Karuga et al., (2022) showed that relatives historically pay close attention to children heading families and emphasized the usage of family members to take over tasks after parental death, as children are the country's future and tomorrow's citizens, the Swazi culture is

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comparable to most other African cultures in that most people think that family are the greatest option for maintaining continuity educational support in child-headed schooling (Nehru, 2021).

It is well known that education is regarded as a key factor in working towards a better future, but children heading families often must abandon their education due to the circumstances they are confronted with. This statement has been supported by a study conducted in Kenya which revealed that many of the high school child-headed learners are going under challenging conditions with a relative lack of adult guidance and support (Achiyo and Yambo, 2020). The National Youth Policy (2020-2030) highlighted that children's relatives should provide appropriate support to child-headed children otherwise their academic participation will be disrupted resulting in increased school dropout rates.

4.5.4.1 Sub-Theme: Encouragement and Motivation Towards Education

The findings of this study revealed that relatives are not available to provide words of support and encouragement to children heading families toward education.

Participant 1 narrated that: (Uncle)

> *"I am not there all the time to encourage them but, whenever I find time, I encourage them to take education seriously."*

Goronga and Mampane (2021) in a study conducted in Zimbabwe, revealed that children's relatives highlighted that care arrangements should be made a priority for child-headed children to enhance mentoring and motivation for them.

Participant 4 further stated that: (Aunt)

> *"It is difficult to motivate my late sister's daughter because she argues that I am not her parent when I try to reprimand her. She sometimes ends up sleeping out leaving her siblings alone and uncertain of her whereabouts."*

A study conducted by Darmon (2023) revealed that relatives play a significant influence in education support as well as in their socialization and provide direction to children heading families. Children heading families who are not supported and do not receive encouraging words from relatives are more likely to experience significant levels of emotional stress and turn to using drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes (Mirza et al., 2020).

4.5.4.2 Sub-Theme: Study Assistance

The findings of the study revealed that relatives don't help children heading families with their schoolwork or during their study time at home because they are left on their own. Children heading

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families, often must abandon their education due to the circumstances they are confronted with (Maistry, 2022).

Participant 11 mentioned that: (Uncle)

> *"I stay far away from their home, visiting them frequently is quite impossible, I went as far as grade 6 and therefore cannot help her with grade 12 homework. I sometimes buy them candles for studies because electricity sometimes becomes a challenge."*

Children from child-headed homes, according to Amerson et al., (2019) lack an adult to assist them with daily necessities including motivating them to study and complete their homework as well as someone to enforce dedication to academics and commend good performance. According to a study conducted in Swaziland Manzini region by Nxumalo, Shongwe, and Gwebu (2023), children who are the heads of families have no one who can assist them with their homework and also an adult caregiver who will notice even if they skip classes.

4.6 Support Provided by Community Members to Children-Heading Families

Eight focus group discussions were held with various community members from the two districts, Mopani and Vhembe in Limpopo province, S.A. The focus groups comprised of males and females holding various community positions and occupations. Table 4.5 shows the demographic profile of community members.

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Table 4.5: Demographic Profile of Community Members

The first Focus Group Discussions comprised of eight participants from the community which were four (4) males and four (4) females.

GENDER	COMMUNITY POSITION	OCCUPATION	LANGUAGE
Female	Civic member	Labor relation officer	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	Pastor	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	Tribal committee member	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	Traditional leader	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	Pastor	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	Tribal committee member	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	Headman	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	None	Tshivenda

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Focus Group Discussions Group 2

The second focus group discussions comprised of seven participants from the community.

GENDER	COMMUNITY POSITION	OCCUPATION	LANGUAGE
Female	Chiefs' wife	None	Tshivenda
Male	Student	None	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	None	Tshivenda
Male	Traditional leader	Traditional leader	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	None	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	Pastor	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	Retired educator	Tshivenda
Female	Community builder	None	Tshivenda

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Focus Group Discussions Group 3

The third focus group discussion comprised of eight participants from the community.

GENDER	COMMUNITY POSITION	OCCUPATION	LANGUAGE
Female	Drop-in centre manager	Head of drop-in-centre	Xitsonga
Male	Community member	Retired principal	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	Self-employed	Xitsonga
Male	Municipality officer	Employee at municipality	Xitsonga
Female	Traditional leader	Chief	Xitsonga
Male	Community member	Headman	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	Self-employed	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	Unemployed	Xitsonga

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Focus Group Discussions Group 4

The fourth focus group discussion comprised of eight participants from the community

GENDER	COMMUNITY POSITION	OCCUPATION	LANGUAGE
Male	Traditional leader	Chief	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	Businesswoman	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	Retired police	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	Retired Health Professional	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	Pastor	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	None	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	None	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	Civic member	Tshivenda

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Focus Group Discussion Group 5

The fifth focus group discussion comprised of eight participants from the community.

GENDER	COMMUNITY POSITION	OCCUPATION	LANGUAGE
Male	Community member	Farmer	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	Church leader	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	Retired educator	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	Retired educator	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	Retired police officer	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	Civic member	Tshivenda
Male	Community member	Councilor	Tshivenda
Female	Community member	None	Tshivenda

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Focus Group Discussions Group 6

The sixth focus group discussion comprised of eight participants from the community members

GENDER	COMMUNITY POSITIONS	OCCUPATION	LANGUAGE
Male	Community member	Retired educator	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	None	Xitsonga
Female	Community members	Woman's League	Xitsonga
Male	Community member	Headman	Xitsonga
Male	Community member	Traditional healer	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	Pastor	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	Manager at a drop-in centre	Xitsonga
Male	Community member	Businessman	Xitsonga

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Focus Group Discussions 7

The seventh focus group discussion comprised of eight participants from the community.

GENDER	COMMUNITY POSITION	OCCUPATION	LANGUAGE
Male	Community member	Retired teacher	Xitsonga
Female	Church member	None	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	None	Xitsonga
Male	Community member	Headman	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	Pastor	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	None	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	None	Xitsonga
Male	Church member	None	Xitsonga

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Focus Group Discussions 8

The eighth focus group discussions were made up of nine participants from the community w

GENDER	COMMUNITY POSITION	OCCUPATION	LANGUAGE
Female	Chief's wife	None	Xitsonga
Male	Community member	Headman	Xitsonga
Male	Community member	Educator	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	Retired professional nurse	Xitsonga
Male	Community member	Clerk	Xitsonga
Female	Church member	None	Xitsonga
Male	Church member	None	Xitsonga
Female	Community member	Manager at a drop-in centre	Xitsonga
Male	Community member	Pastor	Xitsonga

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Table 4.6: Themes, and Sub-Themes on Support provided to Children Heading Families Provided by Community Members.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
4.7.1 Psychological Support	4.7.1.1 Provision of Comfort
4.7.2 Financial Support	4.7.2.1 Supply of Vegetables
4.7.3 Social Support	4.7.3.1 Application of Ubuntu 4.7.3.2 Neighbors Serve as Community Watchdogs 4.7.3.3 Traditional Leaders' involvement
4.7.4 Educational Support	4.7.4.1 Supply of School Uniform

The following section gives an indication of the findings based on the themes and sub-themes that developed from the analysis of the focus group discussion transcripts and field-jotted notes gathered to apprehend the support provided by community members to children heading families.

4.7 Support Provided by Community Members to Children-Heading Families

The findings of this study revealed that because there is no community network system or collaboration, support from community members is extremely restricted. The study concludes that community collaboration is essential in tackling the problems society faces concerning children heading families.

4.7.1 Theme 1: Psychological support

The findings of this study revealed that community members believe pastors and church members are essential in helping children heading families psychologically by providing comfort to grieving children before the funeral. They gather as church members in the family of grieving children conducting prayer sessions. Pastors and church members are primarily concerned with spiritual and moral matters, and they are only laterally involved in assisting children's heading families. A study conducted by Ndlovu (2020) indicated that children who grow up in child-headed families often face numerous challenges such as bereavement, discrimination--financial burdens which have an impact on their psychological aspect.

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4.7.1.1 Sub-Theme: Provision of Comfort

The findings of this study revealed that community members believe that pastors and church members are the ones to provide comfort to children heading families. Pastoral care, according to Kwatubana and Ebrahim (2020) concentrates on helping children who are heading families by providing psychological support for them to remain resilient and withstand challenging circumstances. Church members and pastors show empathy to children heading families by way of support during grieving. According to a study conducted by Depow, Francis, and Inzlicht, (2021), a psychologist describes empathy as a notion that allows us to connect with other people by taking their perspective, sharing their emotions, and feeling compassion for them. This ability, coupled with unprecedented access to the emotional experiences of other people, should lead to increased social connectedness.

Participant 1 FGD1 explained that:

> *"We cannot provide psychological support for children heading families and rely on pastors who play an important role during funerals."*

Participant 2 FGD1 indicated that:

> *"To comfort children heading families during bereavement and mourning period, church members and pastors pay regular visits to their homes conducting prayers sessions."*

In North India, a study by Muniappa (2018) indicated that the ministry of God's people can be carried out by providing encouragement and a framework of support to children heading families. The church was reported to be fundamental in instilling courage and resilience among children in CHF. Thwala (2018) noted that children resorted to praying when faced with challenges and memories such as the death of their parents which gave them relief from the troubles. From the church, children were able to learn morality and other life principles. Buzaare, Ankunda, and Menge (2023) in Uganda, supported the findings of Thwala (2018) conducted in Swaziland that in this system, the pastor plays the primary leadership role in overseeing the church's operations and ensuring that it completes its God-given mission, which has spiritual rewards and blessings. Because children do not reciprocate and do not donate money, many pastors refrain from providing pastoral care.

4.7.2 Theme 2: Financial Support

The findings of this study revealed that community members indicated that individuals in the community with means should voluntarily supply necessities to families with children that are heading families. A study by Agere and Agere (2020) revealed that the main problem with

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children heading families is poverty, lack of support structures, for example, support from friends and the community at large, and secondly, the unavailability and inaccessibility of service providers. Community members also established that lack of economic capital leads to children heading families being unable to purchase stationery, data, and uniforms thereby affecting their academic performance. The following quotations portray these findings:

Participant 7 FGD 2 mentioned that:

> *"We wish we had the financial resources to help children heading families with little money for the cost of uniforms and other school-related expenses."*

Participant 3 FGD 8 put it this way:

> *"Children heading families are faced with financial difficulties and the problem seems to be affecting every community member, making it difficult to offer. whatever support that demands money."*

A study conducted by Palmera et al., (2023) emphasized that financial challenges were the main stressors that resulted in the vulnerability of children heading families' lives. Additionally, Desmet and Fokkinga (2020) considered the strongest biological and physiological needs in Maslow's hierarchy and sought financial assistance to fulfil these.

4.7.2.1 Sub-Theme: Supply of Vegetables

The study findings revealed that community members mentioned that some farmers give veggies to families with children heading families. In his backyard and on the sidewalk outside his house, Djo BaNkuna, a pavement gardener in Pretoria, cultivates bananas, herbs, avocadoes, spinach, beetroot, sweet potatoes, and onions. He and her spouse, a social worker, then provide these crops to families with children heading families. According to the researcher, such initiatives must be started in the province of Limpopo because they would alleviate the difficulties that families headed by children have due to food shortages.

Participant 1 FGD 5 stated that:

> *"When we harvest, we supply spinach, cabbage, and tomatoes to families that are headed by children."*

Participant 1 FGD 7 stated that:

> *"Traditional leaders supply children heading families with food parcels during Christmas time."*

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Participant 4 FGD 2 explained that:

> *"Traditional leaders try to create good relationships with the children heading families."*

In Zimbabwe, a study conducted by Ringson (2020), indicated that traditional leaders are regarded as important figures by the communities based on their capacity to provide for the needs of orphaned, and children heading families, by administering justice, and ensuring that they supply food and other necessities.

A study conducted by Nemukula, (2019) in Limpopo province, South Africa, seeks to find ways through which traditional leaders can be capacitated to perform their roles effectively in their communities according to the White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance 2003). The act clearly states that traditional leaders should assist members of the community in dealing with issues of their concern such as crime and, the safety of the community and this includes child-headed children's safety as they form part of the community. Children heading families with their siblings always need to be protected by effective community-based support systems (Reyneke, 2018).

4.7.3 Theme 3: Social Support

The findings of this study revealed that community members are concerned about the safety and security of children who live in child-headed homes. A study conducted in Nairobi by Karuga et al., (2022) indicates that relatives did not offer any support to children heading families but support from school was evident. Social support can offer affection, guidance, and care and can have an impact on well-being via psychosocial, behavioral, and physiological pathways.

4.7.3.1 Sub-theme: Application of Ubuntu

The findings of this study revealed that community members stated that they are to practice Ubuntu as it is a way that African tradition in which people assist one another. Ubuntu is an African philosophy that has several rough translations such as humanity to others, "I am what I am because of who we all are, and I am because of who you are." Ubuntu is a Zulu word that means "humaneness." Its essence is captured in the principle: "A person is a person through other persons. Ubuntu is an African concept referring to humanness. It gives expression to deeply held African ideals of one's personhood being rooted in one's interconnectedness with others (Ewuoso and Hall, 2019). According to the study, children heading families would be safeguarded and taken care of by the community members if they followed the African culture of Ubuntu. In addition, the study's conclusions indicated that a variety of assistance techniques should be offered to children who are the heads of families in their local communities. Several

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positive support strategies that could be very helpful in addressing the difficulties faced by children heading families were emphasized.

Participant 1 FGD 6 stated that:

> *"It takes a village to raise a child, therefore, we as community members practice Ubuntu as is norm in the society. We show love and care to children heading families."*

Participant 3 FGD 8 further mentioned that:

> *'We as community members should practice Ubuntu to assist children that are heading families."*

Ubuntu provides communal-based support to produce the resourceful and disciplined child desired by the environment and community. Ubuntu asserts that every child has the right to grow up in a nurturing and protective environment (Koen, 2021). The moral philosophy of Ubuntu is premised on the reciprocal belief that an individual's humanity is expressed through personal relationships with others in a community and in turn other people in that community recognize the individual's humanity (Eke and Onwuatuegwu, 2021).

4.7.3.2 Sub-Theme: Neighbors Serve as Community Watchdogs

The findings of this study revealed the significance of neighbors showing ubuntu to children heading families demonstrated both before and following the parents' funerals. Neighbors console and support children in their time of grief. According to Chademana and Van Wyk (2021), neighbors are the first people that children heading families may turn to when in need.

Children heading families' relationships with their neighbors provide them with a sense of security and assurance that help is easily accessible. Sometimes all it takes to provide children's heading families a sense of security and well-being is knowing that reliable neighbors are nearby. The act of providing support and aid to children and their families in times of distress or dire need is known as neighboring. Neighboring is the act of offering assistance or support during emergencies or times of calamity.

Participant 5 FGD 4 stated that:

> *"We continuously provide support to children during funerals and after as we felt we should be closer to them as a way of Ubuntu."*

Neighbors will 'keep an eye' on children for short periods whilst families offer more extended and regular forms of care. This "latent" aspect of neighborliness is frequently seen in offers or displays of support in times of need. According to Ntuli et al. (2020), children from child-headed

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families occasionally received financial support from their neighbors in the form of cash, food, clothing, and help with school expenses. In some circumstances, local NGOs give school uniforms and food deliveries, help with schoolwork, and feed their siblings after school.

Participant 4 FGD 4 further mentioned that:

> *"We, as neighbors, frequently visit children in their homes to provide them with emotional support and to demonstrate our empathy."*

The findings of this study revealed that community members are concerned about the safety and security of children heading families as they are living on their own without adult caregivers.

Participant 3 FGD 6 stated that:

> *"We stay close to children heading families we take observation on what is happening in their environment and are willing to act as watchdogs in overseeing their safety."*

Consequently, this promoted the Ubuntu philosophy, which acted as a uniting force, hence enabling members in each community to cater to the well-being of child-headed families.

4.7.3.3: Sub-Theme: Traditional Leaders' Involvement

The findings of the study revealed that traditional leaders assist children heading families with food parcels during Christmas time.

A study conducted by Ringson (2020) indicated that traditional leaders (chiefs) were the sole rulers over their areas of jurisdiction, and the community was a combination of many households and villages under the chiefs' domain. It was within this domain that the Shona chiefs had the power to ensure that their participants and the disadvantaged groups in their communities including children heading families were well-fed and lived in peace and tranquility.

Musitha, Netshidzivhani and Mamokhere (2022) in Limpopo, South Africa, revealed that traditional leaders uphold law and order, confer with traditional communities through imbizo or lekgotla, and assist community members with issues that arise. As such, traditional leaders must be involved in the welfare of children heading families as this can greatly alleviate their struggles.

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Participant 6 FGD 3 stated that:

> *"During festive sessions like Christmas and New Year traditional leaders supply food parcels to children heading families."*

Mawere, Matshidze. Kugara and Madzivhandila (2022); and Mathebula (2023) argued that the institutions of traditional leadership are still trusted institutions for governance in most rural areas of the country. A study conducted by Musitha, Netshidzivhani and Mamokhere (2022), found that traditional leaders represent an institution that is still relevant and trusted for governance by the majority of people living in rural areas of South Africa. Traditional leaders live close to the rural community at a grassroots level, so they are best positioned to know the problems and appropriate needs of the people who live in rural areas. The researcher finds it appropriate that traditional leaders should involve themselves in the lives of children heading families in their communities as this may help in protecting children and will create safety and security.

4.7.4 Theme 4: Educational Support

The findings revealed that community members have very limited support for children heading families on their education. A study conducted by Ramokoka, Jager, and Mokwele (2022) on support for sustainable learning for learners from child-headed families found that there was a limited role played by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in support to children heading families' education. The study findings revealed that there are many challenges facing children heading families' education, therefore, suggest that there is still much work to be done by the Government, community members, and various stakeholders to assist children heading families' education.

4.7.4.1 Sub-Theme: Supply of School Uniform

The findings of this study revealed that some community members, including company owners and other stakeholders, provide school uniforms and other clothes to children heading families. Supply of school, clothes, and other necessities should be initiated by volunteer community members to assist children heading families and other vulnerable children (Brooks and O'Shea, 2021).

Participant 3 FGD 5 mentioned that:

> *"We request school uniforms from the local business owners and* other *stakeholders to give out necessary items to children heading families, especially in January when schools reopen."*

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Participant 4 FGD 5 stated that:

> *"We assist in giving out old clothes including school uniforms to children heading families."*

In Kenya, a study conducted by Umija, Aloka, and Wachianga (2021) indicated that because of high poverty levels, children heading families learners failed to afford decent clothing and new school uniforms. The findings have been confirmed by a study conducted by Hamilton (2021) which revealed that most children heading families and those in poverty were found to have been embarrassed and have felt isolated because of their inability to afford school uniforms.

The results of the focus group discussions are shown in Table 4.6 The following section gives an overview of the findings based on the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the focus group discussion transcripts and summaries collected to understand the strategies to improve support for children heading families.

The findings of the study collected from children heading families and the support provided by children's relatives were used as a basis for the development of strategies. One of the study objectives was to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. Five (5) themes and fifteen (15) sub-themes emerged from data collected and analyzed by community members. Table 4.7 shows the themes and sub-themes that emerged from data collected from community members through focus group discussions.

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Table 4.7: Themes, and sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
4.8.1 A Need for Psychological Support Strategies	4.8.1.1 Trauma Counseling 4.8.1.2 Provision of Drop-In Care Centre Services 4. 8.1.3 Provision of Love, Guidance , and Care
4.8.2 A Need for Financial Support Strategies	4.8.2.1 Regular Supply of Food Parcels 4.8.2.2 Establishment of a Fundraising Organization 4.8.2.3 Provision of a Well-Balanced Diet 4.8.2.4 Reviewing of Child Support Grant Policies
4.8.3 A Need for Social Support Strategies	4.8.3.1 Proper Socialization and Nurturing 4.8.3.2 Reinforcement of Good Moral Values 4.8.3.3 Instilling an Attitude of Resilience
4.8.4 A Need for Educational Support Strategies	4.8.4.1 Equipped Educators with Skills to Support CHF's 4.8.4.2 Provision of Various Educational Skills to Children Heading Families 4.8.4.3 Establishment of Man-to-Man Empowerment Programmes
4.8.5 A Need for Safety and Security Support Strategies	4.8.5.1 Provision of Proper Housing Structures 4.8.5.2 Visibility of Police and Proactive Participation in Community Policing Forums 4.8.5.3 Neighborhood Watchdogs

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4.8 ` Strategies to Improve Support for Children Heading Families.

4.8.1 Theme 1: A Need for Psychological Support Strategies

The findings of this study revealed that community members felt a great need to open drop-in centers in their villages that may be able to address the psychological needs of children heading families. The drop-in-center is a desirable model of care as it employs an environmentally friendly approach that relies on inter-sectoral collaboration to provide care and psychological support for children in need (Zibengwa and Bila, 2021). Drop-in-centers supply children heading families with all the requirements of schooling such as uniforms.

4.8.1.1 Sub-theme: Trauma counseling

The findings of this study represented by community members revealed that children heading families suffer prolonged trauma and have never found an opportunity for counseling. Losing parents to children heading families has psychological effects that expose them to mental instability, loneliness, and a lot of stress. The implementation of trauma counseling by competent professionals such as educational psychologists and counselors may greatly ease the psychological aspect of children heading families. Kwatubana and Ebrahim (2020) emphasized the importance of using trauma-informed approaches to support the psychological aspect of children-headed families. Trauma counseling is therefore necessary to greatly improve the awful circumstances that children heading families experience. Counseling is considered a therapy given to children heading families to relieve them from trauma and stress so that they can concentrate in class without being distracted.

Makuyana et al., (2020), emphasize that improvement, and realignment of welfare policies, and practices, as well as an expansion of bereavement trauma counseling services to children-headed families, are all advocated at the drop-in center.

Participant 4 FGD 8 clarified that:

> *"Children heading families appear to be unhappy and it seems that there are a lot of issues bothering their minds, therefore, the establishment of trauma counseling programs in drop-in centers may alleviate their psychological challenges."*

Participant 7 FGD 6 expressed the following:

> *'When children heading families and their siblings are placed at the drop-in centers, they may be able to socialize with other children who are facing similar challenges and even share their frustrations as they mingle together."*

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Children who live in child-headed homes are forced to navigate the world on their own and endure traumatic circumstances (Lwandiso, 2020). They struggle with a variety of psychological issues and find it difficult to handle stress. The establishment of trauma counseling programs in drop-in centers may lessen the psychological challenges experienced by learners from children heading families, as it has been revealed that teachers regularly face challenges from different learners, including children heading families.

Children heading families experience emotional challenges as well as changes to one's self-perception. These changes may include a sense of self that is impacted by feelings of low self-worth, guilt, and shame as well as a sense of one's relationships with others that is impacted by feelings of mistrust and isolation. The need for counseling in the life of traumatized children is critical.

Roberts (2020) emphasized the importance of providing bereaved children with pertinent information, especially plain-spoken realities about death. Through trauma counseling, children heading families can better deal with their circumstances. Kisombe (2020) maintains that, when children heading families are given proper psychological support, can heal from the trauma's physical and psychological injuries and avoid its most severe emotional and behavioral consequences.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2024) suggested that all organizations that serve children should integrate trauma-informed care practices throughout the structure of the organization. For example, a trauma-informed approach within the educational system involves universal strategies intended to help all students feel safe, build supportive relationships, and their emotions, and achieve academic success (List and Alexander, 2019).

4.8.1.2 Sub-Themes: Provision of Drop-In Care Centre Services

The findings of this study revealed that community members find it appropriate that opening drop-in centers in villages may lessen the difficulties faced by children heading families. Drop-in centers offer an informal centre where children heading families can be provided with psychological support. This is made possible by the fact that a variety number of professionals, and nonprofessionals including psychologists, social workers, nurses, and lay people work at drop-in centers and that a significant number of community members volunteer their time to assist (Spring et al., 2019).

The drop-in centre is an alternative, community-based response that encourages local people to actively participate in local caring initiatives. The creation of drop-in centres in local communities

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as a substitute, community-based solution will motivate residents to actively take part in local caring programs for orphans and children heading families.

Participant 5 FGD 7 elucidated that:

> *"I suggest that communities should focus on establishing drop-in centers that will cater for children heading families and other vulnerable orphans who are struggling alone without parents as relatives are not taking care of them."*

Participant 8 FGD 4 indicated that:

> *"Children heading families are all by themselves, but if drop-in centres are established, I believe the facilities will take care of child-headed children and other orphan vulnerable children who are in desperate need of such care."*

Mampane (2020) defines the drop-in centre as a community-based initiative practiced in South Africa, that incorporates early childhood development and home-based care. Further stated that the main benefit of drop-in centers is that they help locals build their capacity to care for children heading families in a welcoming setting that would address the psychological needs of children heading families. other school equipment, providing three meals a day, and teaching various kinds of skills like gardening, beadwork, pottery, and basket weaving to generate income.

Child-headed children were cared for by relatives, neighbors, or both in traditional African civilizations until they could not sustain themselves. Due to the remarkable increase in orphans and spiraling poverty, it is currently unstable for families and communities to continue with this practice (Ringson and Chereni, 2020).

The establishment of drop-in centers to take care of children heading families is important. Organizations such as Bonukhanyo Youth Organization (BYO), which caters to children heading families and other orphaned vulnerable children, were founded in 2001 and situated in the Alfred Nzo District of South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. They find it imperative for such an organization to be established in Limpopo province. Bonukhanyo Youth Organization, a drop-in centre provides access to nutritional support, academic assistance, and a social network of children in similar circumstances; and conducts home visits by volunteers to provide childcare.

Through these activities, the project can deliver an array of services. The services involve child protection (OVC) including children heading families, identified as at-risk; general health care (either through facilitation of access to local clinics or through home visits); assistance with general education by lobbying for school fee waivers and the provision of uniforms and stationery; and psychosocial support. Beneficiaries' ages range from preschool to secondary school level, with

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some of them being school dropouts. Children heading families are identified by volunteers, community members, and teachers from local schools.

4.8.1.3 Sub-Theme: Provision of Love, Guidance and Care

The finding of this study revealed that the community members highlighted that children who live alone with their siblings and have no adult to look after, lack love, guidance, and sufficient care. A study by Jaure and Makura (2021) in Zimbabwe, indicated that children in child-headed families face numerous challenges since they are forced to navigate life without supervision and guidance from a parent or adult caregiver who will provide love and care. In addition, some extended families that would normally take up this role are also grappling with their orphans. For the same reason, the community is heavily burdened too. This leaves children heading families with nowhere to go but to care for themselves (Ngqushwa and Mkhomi, 2023).

Participant 1 FGD 3 stated that:

> *"It will be of great relief to children heading families when they can be catered at the drop-in centre as they may receive guidance, love, care, and warmth like other children."*

Participant 3 FGD 2 further stated that:

> *"Drop-in-centers may be of noticeable help to child-headed children as they will be properly taken care of and at the same time receive proper supervision, affection, care, and warmth that they are deprived of."*

A study conducted by Chademana and Van Wyk (2021) indicated that children seem to be a universal challenge since such children are often vulnerable to many problems such as lack of parental control, affection, care, and other harsh living conditions. The findings of the study by Chademana and Van Wyk (2021) confirmed the findings of Ameyaw-Akumfi, (2022), that children heading families lack the love and care they would have expected to receive from parents.

According to a study conducted by Alem (2020) when parents die, children do not only miss their physical presence but also many positive things they provided them with when they were alive, such as love, supervision, care, and protection. Children heading families frequently show up at school with no parental guidance, affection, warmth, a shoulder to cry on, or responsibility, therefore, teachers have a big influence on how learners from children heading families and other orphaned vulnerable children are developed and prepared for their adult roles Ntuli et al., (2020).

Shofiyyah and Komarudin (2023), indicated that children have specific needs for love, affection, and warmth and those who receive affection, stimulation, and support in early childhood have a

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good foundation for growth and development, coping with challenges, overcoming disadvantages, and making contributions to society,

The researcher finds it appropriate that child-headed children and their siblings should be accommodated at drop-in centers where they may be able to receive proper guidance, love, warmth, and some skills that may enable them to handle some of their challenges and become more resilient in dealing with them.

4.8.2 Theme 4: A Need for Financial Support Strategies

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families are frequently impoverished and that this may harm their schooling. Most children heading families are under 16, according to the study's findings, which makes it challenging for them to receive their child support grant. But someone in the family takes care of this for them, sometimes forgetting to provide for their fundamental needs. Section 137 (1)(a) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 states that only a person above the age of 16 years may act as the head of the CHF because at that age they will be able to apply for a social grant for them to take care of their younger siblings.

4.8.2.1 Sub-Theme: Regular Supply of Food Parcels

The findings of the study pointed out that community members stated that child-headed children face a variety of challenges such as food shortages that lead to hunger and starvation. Further indicated that community members suggested that children heading families can be supplied with food parcels by volunteers in the community.

Participant 7 FGD 2 further explained that:

> *"Children living in child-headed homes are extremely poor, frequently going to bed hungry, have appalling housing conditions, and have no alternative means of reversing the situation."*

Participant 8 FGD 2 highlighted that:

> *"The supply of food parcels can be of great help as most child-headed children experience food shortages."*

Participant 2 FGD 4 further suggested that:

> *" Engagement with business community forums can be of great relief to offer a helping hand to children heading families especially supplying them with the basic needs for their survival."*

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Many children heading families live in very impoverished states. Studies in rural parts of East Africa have shown that families headed by children reported moderate to severe food insecurity and were more likely to go to bed hungry than those who were not orphans (UNICEF, 2006).

The study findings revealed that children heading families are faced with poverty, hunger, starvation, and stress as these are not good ways to start the day. Providing children who are heading families with their siblings the necessities—food, clothes, water supply, and hygiene products—may be a huge relief. Poverty reduction, through youth-appropriate economic strengthening activities, cash transfers can provide essential support for food, medicine, and access to school. Drop-in-centers and extra hands in taking care of younger siblings must be considered so that the child heading the family can be a child on his/her own and enjoy being a child without worrying about taking care of their siblings.

A study by Mkhize et al., (2022) discovered that food insecurity impacts childhood nutritional status, and physical and cognitive development, and increases lifetime risk for chronic diseases. Therefore, eliminating poverty is not a kind act. Protection of the fundamental human right to dignity and a decent existence is what this entails." Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, (2014) stated that poverty is something to be embarrassed about in the context of a well-run nation. A nation with poor governance should be ashamed of its wealth.

Food security is essential in achieving good health in the growth and development of every child. Children in child-headed families will typically have a low quality of life due to frequent food shortages and an inability to acquire proper clothing. This is because any child-heading family may experience poverty. Allowing continuity of child poverty and not making investments in children, has consequences that may harm society in terms of future generations' health, happiness, and productivity (Schmidt, Merrill, Gill, and Miller, 2021). The researcher believes it is more acceptable to develop supportive strategies as well as strong economic, social, and ethical justifications addressing policy solutions that will provide support to the challenges faced by child-headed children.

4.8.2.2 Sub-themes: Establishment of a Fundraising Organization

The findings of this study revealed that community members felt that it may be very relieving to find people who will provide certain necessities for children heading families. The use of donors such as the Children's Charity Foundation (NCCF) which aimed at making a difference to children in need, such as children heading families can be established in Limpopo province.

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Participant 2 FGD 3 added that:

> *"Establishment of fundraising organizations can be of great help to children heading families and those who are vulnerable. This can be initiated by the community members as a way of voluntary affiliations aiming at improving the education status and other needs of child-headed children in their respective communities."*

Participant 8 FGD 6 stated that:

> *"Willing individuals and churches should be free and be given a chance to help wherever they can afford to provide for children heading families as a way of charity contributions, for example, the willingness to provide groceries, school uniforms, clothing, and other necessary needs."*

A study conducted by Earnshaw and Karpyn (2020) indicated that the chief land is used by the community to raise food for vulnerable children and other vulnerable community members including orphaned child-headed children. Further added that the success of the findings was made possible through training and sound governance, which helped the local leaders uphold the values of accountability and openness. The researcher recommended that communities in Limpopo province initiate such projects as such may bring great relief to food shortage to children heading families.

Thwala et.al., (2018) a study in Swaziland, revealed that children in households endure food insecurity, poverty, and strained extended family relationships. Children heading families have demonstrated perseverance in the face of adversity, which they said was made possible by using church support, family togetherness, and prayer as coping mechanisms. Individuals and church members may consider sponsoring child-headed children to ensure they have the education, nutrition, shelter, medication, and care that they require to develop into responsible adults who can contribute to their society.

Participant 7 FGD 2 explained the following:

> *"The Department of Social Development should examine its policies in light of the needs of children who are the heads of families, which primarily include food and other necessities for which children continue to face significant difficulties and which are not covered by child support grants."*

Participant 8 FGD 6 further stated that:

> *"Children belong to the society, if children can be assisted by the community members many challenges, they experience may be minimized."*

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It is not only the responsibility of the government to assist child-headed children, but it should also be a concern of community members. Thus, the proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child” This originates from an African proverb and conveys the message that it takes many people in the village to provide a safe, healthy environment for children, where children are given the security, they need to develop and flourish, and to be able to realize their hopes and dreams (Glasgal and Nestor, 2020). This includes extended family members, civic, and community members, and policymakers, who can provide support for a child. However, communities, in many countries today, are dissipated and fragmented and individuals are increasingly isolated and are not eager to ask for, or provide help to, others (Reupert et al., 2022).

4.8.2.3 Sub-Theme: Provision of Well-Balanced Diet

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families do not receive a well-balanced diet due to poverty, a healthy diet is essential for a child’s good health, growth, and development. As a result, children who find an opportunity to be accommodated at the drop-in center may be able to eat nutritious meals regularly.

One of the fundamental services offered by the drop-in centers is the distribution of meals to children heading families and orphan vulnerable children. This has been proven by Inkosinami drop-in center, a non-profit organization in Embalenhle Secunda Mpumalanga which has been operating for the past 4 years offering orphan and child-headed children’s daily meals and assisting them with homework (Letsoisa, 2023).

Participant 1 FGD 1 said the following:

> *“Children will discover themselves and be relieved from difficulties such as food, and dealing with the hardships of cooking, yet at the drop-in center, they will find themselves greatly relieved from the problems.*

Participant 3 FGD 8 further elucidated that:

> *"Children heading families when admitted at drop-in centers may have the opportunity to receive a well-balanced diet because they do not currently have one at home, which will be very important for their health."*

In California a study conducted by Suha (2020), indicated that malnutrition has severe overall consequences for children as they frequently struggle to obtain enough food to consume, which may have an impact on their physical development, subsequently, they usually spend several days without enough food at home. Caregivers at drop-in centers may take on parental roles for children who are under their care and be responsible for providing them with a healthy diet, a safe

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place, and medical attention. Thus, children heading families may have a chance of receiving the proper diet at a drop-in centre.

In China a study conducted by Zhang, Zhang, Cheng, Wang, Tao, and Tang (2021) pointed out that, a child's physical development can be stunted by early starvation, rendering them short and feeble as adults. Additionally, it may obstruct brain development, which lowers a child's aptitude for learning, and this has a great impact as they approach adulthood. There is proof that children who experienced early malnutrition perform less intellectually. They might also be less capable of doing strenuous labour. There are repercussions to national development when there are a lot of malnourished children in society. According to the researchers' findings, it is more acceptable to attend to children who are heads of families at the drop-in centre so that they can receive the proper nutrition necessary for their bodies.

4.8.2.4 Sub-Theme: Reviewing of Child Support Grant Policies

The findings of this study revealed that certain children who are child-headed are not eligible for child support grants because of additional requirements from the Department of Social Development. Over 10 million South African children receive monthly payments from the child support grant (CSG), a vital social safety net that also protects children in child-headed families and other vulnerable children.

Typically, some children heading families struggle to receive child support grants since they lack the necessary documentation. Larsson (2021) revealed that some children heading families might not receive their child support grants because of failure to produce the required documents and administrative challenges. The (CSG) was introduced in 1998 following a recommendation by the Lund Committee, which was set up to explore alternative policy options to improve the well-being of children as part of the ANC Government's commitment to poverty reduction (UNICEF, 2011). Therefore, the researcher finds it essential to review the policies and processes controlling Child Support Grants (CSG) so that orphan children and those who are heading families may not have been excluded. Lack of identity documents may result in them being misplaced upon the death of parents and also ignorance of the importance of registration documents by the parents before death. The following extracts from the participants attest to this:

Participant 3 FGD 3 stated that:

> *"Not all children heading families, and their siblings are eligible for child support grants. Some of their relatives or next of kin may exploit the grants; as a result, children in child-headed families, and their siblings suffer from not obtaining their child support grants."*

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Participant 5 FGD 5 further indicated that:

> *"The Department of Social Development needs to evaluate its regulations and policies so as not to discriminate against orphans who are heading families together with their siblings."*

Literature has demonstrated that the (CSG) is intended to offer financial assistance to children living in poverty, including orphans and heading families. In South Africa, a study conducted by Thobejane and Lorraine (2022) revealed that some of the children in child-headed families lack knowledge of how to access child support grants, while others lack the necessary paperwork, such as identification documents and birth certificates, to apply for the grants. Additionally, the lack of identity documents hinders the nation's efforts to advance education, which is one of the Millennium Development Goals and worsens the division between the rich and the poor.

4.8.3 Theme 3: A Need for Social Support Strategies

The findings of this study revealed that there is a great need for social support needed by children heading families. Nevard, Green, and Bell (2021) accentuated that social networking is one of the best-developed strengths among child-headed households.

4.8.3.1 Sub-theme: Proper Socialization and Nurturing

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families lack proper socialization and nurturing as they have no parents or adult caregivers who will constantly provide proper grooming as they grow. The findings of this study further, revealed a failure to socialize and nurture children heading families may lead to antisocial behavior which may later affect society.

An Addis Ababa study conducted by GIRUM et al., (2020) revealed that orphans and children heading families are inclined to exhibit a serious lack of proper grooming in African culture and values, which the phenomenon predisposes them to negative behavioral tendencies.

Participant 1 FGD 4 stated that:

> *"Children heading families should be well groomed so that they should not be problematic to the society or in schools where they attend. The absence of parents deprives child-headed children and their siblings of opportunity for proper socialization and nurturing as compared to those with parents."*

Participant 2 FGD 5 attested that:

> *"When children live without parents or adult caregivers they end up with deviant behavior and demonstrate an unaccepted behavior in schools where*

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educators may struggle in coping with children heading families who are living without proper socialization from their parents."

Waheed, Cheema et al., (2018) pointed out that children look up to someone, a role model, for positive inspiration and a person who will groom them to be better individuals. Accordingly, parents and other primary caregivers are the most significant sources of nurturing care for children, as revealed by the Nurturing Care Framework (World Health Organization, 2018).

Children who are left alone after parental death lack sufficient socialization, which prevents them from receiving the proper guidance, discipline, or control while they are still young and may harm their adulthood (Magidi, 2022). Nonetheless, traditionally, nurturing children is considered a responsibility shared by the extended family, and the community members in the absence of parents. Thus, children are not supposed to live alone as they need an adult to give them proper grooming and nurturing into adulthood.

4.8.3.2 Sub-Theme: Reinforcement of Good Moral Values

The findings of this study revealed that traditional leaders should collaborate with teachers and principals to instill moral principles in all students as well as include children heading families. Although there isn't much data on traditional leaders' involvement in education, children as well as those heading families could benefit from principals, teachers, and traditional leaders cooperating to uphold discipline. The Ubuntu ideal, which emphasizes respect, is endorsed by traditional leaders as well.

The term "ubuntu" refers to the same concept but is conveyed differently in several African cultures and languages. That is acting in a way that is advantageous to the community or acting with kindness toward others. They could take the form of far more intricate interpersonal relationships or something as straightforward as lending a hand to a stranger in need. Someone with this kind of behavior is exhibiting "ubuntu." A complete person, that is. Children heading families would not suffer in silence if "ubuntu" was practiced in the community (Thompsell, 2019).

In KwaZulu-Natal study conducted by Mngomezulu (2020) supports the findings of the studies by Ramolobe (2020), which confirms that schools working with Izinduna (traditional leaders) or Amakhosi were able to reduce student misbehavior. Nhlengethwa (2021) further revealed that although educators are often left to deal with students' lack of discipline in the classroom, educators occasionally feel helpless to deal with the matter because of the aggressive behavior of undisciplined students especially those who come from child-headed families where there is lack supervision and guidance.

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Mpolase (2021) highlighted that parents instill disciplinary measures at home, so learners coming from child-headed families are sometimes prone to display bad behavior as they do not benefit from any disciplinary measures at home. In Colombia, a study conducted by Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2023) emphasized that good child-rearing practices equip a child with relevant skills, norms, values, and attitudes that make the child fit well into society.

Participant 2 FGD 5 indicated that:

> *"Relatives should be encouraged to visit children heading families regularly and talk to them regarding how they should have good manners and acceptable behavior by then they will be able to transfer cultural good moral values which their parents would have done if they were alive."*

Participant 1 FGD 8 explained that:

> *"Children heading families need some adults that will teach them good moral values which may shape them to decent adulthood. It is important that traditional leaders should investigate it otherwise their deviant behavior may directly affect the whole society."*

In Ghana, a study conducted by Komesuor and Nsamenang (2023), highlighted that children generally first learn the moral and spiritual ideals that give their lives purpose in the home. Family values and national development go hand in hand, and as the family is the main provider of socialization, it is the parent's responsibility to instill standards and values that will contribute to the advancement of the country. The family was further added, as the most important component in forming a child; it has the power to either enable and support children in realizing their full potential and achieving their ultimate goals or to cripple and obstruct them in doing so. Consequently, community members and relatives must assist children heading families and their siblings in instilling moral values.

Children living in child-headed families face difficulties that are a reflection of their social marginalization and harrowing experiences of poverty, which are made worse by the inadequate social assistance they receive from community members and their relatives (Thobejane and Lorraine, 2023). Children heading families can benefit from receiving strong moral principles from their community members and relatives.

Parents serve as mentors to their children, gradually initiating the latter into adulthood through the enforcement of family ground rules and discipline. Mooney et al., (2021) emphasized that parents must teach their children social skills so they can engage with people and serve as role models for behavior that encourages children to engage with the outside world. The absence of

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parents in the lives of children heading families creates a need that must be filled, and society must step in to help them acquire moral principles that will prepare them for adulthood.

4.8.3.3 Sub-Theme: Instilling an Attitude of Resilience

A study conducted by Van Breda (2018) described resilience as the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten its function. Therefore, children heading families are not immune from the pressure or stress they are exposed to in their environment, ironically, they are created to prepare them to become functional adults.

The study findings revealed by the community members indicated that children heading families should be raised with strong spiritual and religious convictions to help them overcome the difficulties they experience. It has been determined that schools should observe the morning prayer period again to equip students with the resilience they will need to overcome obstacles in their lives (VanMeter. and Cicchetti, 2020). A study conducted by Lawrence, Makhonza, and Mngomezulu, (2022) revealed that the church also plays a big role in assisting children heading families to remain resilient through the use of prayer.

Participant 5 FGD 1 said the following:

> *"The spiritual side of children heading families should be examined because they can receive spiritual assistance, and this may increase their capacity for resilience in the face of all the numerous difficulties they are facing."*

Participant 6 FGD 2 alluded that:

> *“Pastors should play an important role in comforting and supporting child-headed children as they go through a period of grieving and have to deal with the vacuum of losing their parents.”*

Roberto, Sellon, and Cherry (2020) support the idea that to overcome challenges effective religious coping includes having a stable relationship with God, believing that life has meaning, and feeling as a part of a spiritual community. Spiritual struggle is an expression of conflict and doubt about God and religious relationships and is an effort to preserve or alter a spirituality that is in peril.

Olasky (2022) revealed that because children were raised without spiritual guidance, child-headed children expressed a sense of religious disorientation. The study's conclusions point to the importance of churches in this situation as children heading families turn to prayer as a

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coping mechanism in facing their challenges. In other words, churches have a role to play in assisting child-headed children to deal with issues of death and grief.

A study conducted by Jaure and Gregory (2022) indicated that the difficulties faced by children heading families due to lack of parental or adult supervision could have negative effects and these include rejection, stigmatization, being forced to drop out of school due to lack of funds and being separated from friends due to relocation.

Theron (2020) indicated that despite all these difficulties, many children living in child-headed families are resilient and move on with their lives despite the pressures and adversities they face in their surroundings. Further, indicated that few child-headed children had simply come to terms with their circumstances. After all, some did not have a vivid memory of their parents because they were still quite too young when they passed away.

Mhaka-Mutepfa and Maundeni (2019) in Sub-Saharan Africa, religion showed the importance of building resilience in children heading families who are repeatedly facing harsh life situations. Due to the various negative occurrences that have an impact on a child's development, it is necessary to define the function of faith in children's lives.

4.8.4 Theme 4: A Need for Educational Support Strategies

The findings of this study revealed that community members highlighted the need for introducing programs in their communities that give children heading families a variety of skills so that they can be empowered and lead independent lives as well as head households. Utilization of such programs is rooted in giving children-heading families the power to change their own lives and lead a positive life. Furthermore, this study revealed that community members emphasized the necessity of an educational support structure to assist educators in overcoming the challenges that are presented by students from diverse backgrounds.

4.8.4.1 Sub-theme: Equipped Educators with Skills to Support CHFs

The findings of this study revealed a need for educators to be well-equipped to deal with children heading families. A study conducted by Agere and Agere (2020) in South Africa indicated that there is a need to ascertain whether educators are prepared to handle learners from children heading families in their academic pursuits and assess how those learners view teacher preparedness. Further emphasized that to equip and ready educators to work with learners from CHFs, they should attend professional development meetings, workshops, seminars, and in-service training.

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The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund Report (2001) reports that South Africa has the fastest-growing rate of children who are heading families. There was therefore a need to establish whether educators are sufficiently well equipped to deal with them. S'lungile et al., (2021) noted that educators were frustrated by the learners' escalating absenteeism and low performance, especially from children heading families.

Participant 5 FGD 7 voiced that:

> *"Educators must be well equipped on how to deal with children who are faced with challenges of heading family's episodes as this will help them handle them whenever they face their challenges."*

Participant 2 FGD 7 explained that:

> *"Child-headed children are increasing every day and teachers are the ones that suffer more since they deal with them for quite some hours in schools and might not know the background of their learners and are unable to deal with different behaviors."*

Ngqushwa and Mkhomi (2023) noted that the number of orphans in children-heading families can be expected to increase significantly, and educators are increasingly frustrated by the lack of capacity and resources to support these learners that they face every day.

A study by Quennerstedt and Moody (2020) pointed out that one of the biggest challenges schools have today is the increasing number of children coming from children heading families. The question is, "Are educators prepared to handle these learners who come to school troubled, shabby, lacking basic things, and emotionally and psychologically depressed?

In Harare a study by Lemeyu et al., (2023) emphasized that educators are ill-equipped to deal with children heading families in schools, and orphaned vulnerable children's problems can become seriously psychological. However, when these children enroll in schools, no one seems to be aware of their situation or background and teachers frequently misjudge them. Additionally, Matongo (2022) emphasized that educators should attend in-service training, workshops, seminars, and professional development meetings to prepare them to deal with such children who are heading families. In addition, teachers appear to lack the authority to deal with such learners. The researcher found out that there is a limited amount of literature available concerning how children view teacher preparedness to assist them.

According to UNESCO (2010), teachers are seen to have an important responsibility in ensuring that children and young people acquire essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Chisango et al., (2020) further revealed that educators are seen as pivotal in ensuring that orphaned children including those heading families have access to care and support.

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A study conducted by Pillay, Patel, and Setlhare-Kajee (2023) revealed that teachers are grappling with the task of teaching those vulnerable children and this includes children heading families, the inadequacy of proper training of teachers to deal with these learners often results in the teachers' ill-treating them, therefore, a need to empower educators is of paramount important that they should be able to deal with orphaned and children heading families and able to understand what they are going through.

According to a study conducted by Mpolase (2021) pointed out that teachers also experience all the challenges learners from children heading families face at school. He further recommended that there is a need for training of teachers in the management of behavior and discipline of learners from children heading families. The researcher noted that this is a gap this study intends to fill. The affected children know and feel that they are not entirely accepted like children from normal households. Generally, many studies and reports, as discussed above, concur with the view that teachers are not prepared to handle learners who are orphaned and those living in CHF because of a lack of training. Conversely, educators play an important role in shaping and grooming learners coming to school. It has been revealed by a study conducted in Limpopo province South Africa, that nothing in the teachers' training and practice prepared them on how to deal with orphaned and children heading families (Ntjana, 2023).

4.8.4.2 Sub-theme: Provision of Various Educational Skills to Children Heading Families

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families should receive education since it will provide them with the skills and information they need to succeed in society as well as lay the groundwork for a lifetime of learning. Attaining an education is viewed as a prerequisite to living a better life and providing a better future (Mishra et al., 2020). The principle of empowerment means that children heading families should know their rights. It also means that they should be fully supported to participate in the development of policies and practices that affect their lives and to claim rights where necessary (UNICEF, 2004).

Education is considered a tool of empowerment, a means to promote children's rights, and can provide children heading children with the necessary skills to have the best possible life. It is also said Education is important because it reduces poverty and social inequalities, empowers and helps children heading families to reach their full potential, and brings a significant economic return for the country, it is also the key to all human rights. Children heading families fail among many high-risk groups, which includes challenges in receiving ideal educational opportunities (Palmera et al., 2023).

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Every child has the "right to basic education," according to Section 29 (1) (a) of the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution. Everyone also has the "right to further education," as stipulated in Section 29 (1)(b) children must receive education to reach their greatest potential. Governments must provide free, compulsory elementary education for all children, as required under human rights treaties.

One of the main Millennium Development Goals in South Africa is to provide basic education for all children, which is essential for educating young people for their future roles in society (UNDP, 2010). Though the Millennium Development Goals clearly state that South Africa is aiming at providing basic education for all children nevertheless, children heading families are still having challenges in furthering their education.

Participant 3 FGD 8 highlighted the following:

> *"The Department of Education should evaluate policies and regulations regarding how to support children from child-headed families in their education because they are faced with obstacles at the secondary school level about application and registration costs for post-secondary education. The situation is even worse because when planning to further their tertiary education with no finance this makes them feel very anxious and uncertain of their future."*

Participant 1 FGD 6 indicated that:

> *"I find it difficult to understand how children heading families manage, especially the grade 12 students who need to further their tertiary education as they don't have the funds to do so."*

A study conducted by Chigama and Goronga (2023) in Zimbabwe, suggested that reviewing the existing educational policies and interventions might improve the well-being and educational opportunities for learners from children heading families. The researcher finds it imperative that learners from child-headed families can also be categorized as special children when reviewing the educational policies and be taken into consideration.

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is a bursary program supported by the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa for students who lack financial means to pay for their education and are unable to secure study loans from banks or other sources or bursaries. Several aid packages are available from TVET colleges, universities, and technical universities, and each one has its prerequisites unfortunately this is not known by children heading families.

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According to the researcher, it is ideal for (NSFAS) to start in the secondary grades because students who struggle financially during their secondary school won't have an opportunity to continue their education beyond that level. The researcher further found that there is a lack of adaptable interventions to support children heading families in secondary schools. However, this is very unfortunate as learners from child-headed backgrounds require support from the education system to survive and develop, as they are a marginalized group within the system (Statti and Jaafar, 2020).

The aforementioned assertions, according to a South African study by Stivers (2022) reflected what occurs in underprivileged schools when children heading families are not given special consideration. Further, indicated that pastoral care responsibilities for all students who feel uncared for must receive special emphasis in schools as education is a right for children. It is a right that also helps the individual enjoy other rights.

Participant 4 FGD 3 explained that:

> *"Providing children heading families with a variety of skills, such as gardening, horticulture and cleaning techniques and many others may help them battle poverty as they may be able to support themselves."*

Participant 7 FGD 7 further stated that:

> *"Children heading families can be taught various skills such as gardening, sewing, and many other various skills as these will empower them."*

School is where children not only gain academic knowledge but also a place where they can obtain life skills. Any lifesaving and enhancing skills that the parents who died did not transfer to their children can be given to them in informal institutions such as schools. According to a study conducted by Wheatley and English (2020) indicated that children who are heading families are to be empowered in a variety of skills, including gardening, sewing, beading, pottery, and basket weaving, to help them earn money.

Children heading families are not given the chance to learn life skills or cultural awareness as these were going to develop them. Although Uganda's new strategic plan for orphan and children-heading families (Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, 2011) articulated the need to strengthen and support the capacity of child-headed families (e.g., through skills training), we believe there needs to be more recognition and understanding of children's unique household competencies to ensure that meaningful financial, material and human resources are made accessible to them. It is in this study, that the researcher aims to

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develop strategies to improve support for children heading families as they are faced with numerous challenges that hinder them from reaching their goals.

4.8.4.3 Sub-Theme: Establishment of Man-to-Man Empowerment Programs

The findings of this study revealed that some child-headed children never saw their fathers which leaves them with an identity crisis. However, fathers have a profound and lasting impact on their children's development. A lack of father involvement in childrearing is increasing across the world. It has been estimated that around 54% of men aged 15-49 years are fathers, but nearly 50% of these fathers did not have daily contact with their children based on a small sample of children growing up in Johannesburg who were referred by the courts for psychological intervention at the Teddy Bear Clinic, father absence was particularly notable among children under 12 years of age (Magqamfana, 2019).

Participant 3 FGD 2 explained the following:

> *"Most children in child-headed families are raised by their deceased moms."*

Participant 3 FGD 3 elucidated that:

> *"Man-to-man education initiatives could help inform men, especially young men, on the rights and obligations they have to their children. The initiatives might assist males in raising their children. The purpose of this is to safeguard the child's identity and mental health."*

Participant 2 FGD 2 further indicated that:

> *"It is the biological father's responsibility to raise his or her children; it is the children's right. Every child has a biological father. However, it seems that some parents—fathers in particular—are ignorant of their responsibilities and rights toward their children."*

According to UNICEF's (2007) report on the well-being of children in economically advanced nations, children in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. rank extremely low regarding social and emotional well-being. Studies repeatedly show that children without fathers positively present in the home greatly suffer psychologically. In this study, some of the child-headed children highlighted that they became orphan heads of families after their mothers passed on as they have never been in contact with their fathers throughout their lives.

The South African Constitution is the highest law governing the country. Section 28 of the Constitution Act. 106, 1996 provides for the rights of children, and subsection (1) (b) states that a child has the right to family care or parental care or appropriate alternative care when removed

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from the family environment if children living in a CHF's are not well taken care of they can be removed to alternative care because it is in their best interest to be in a safe and a caring environment (sub-section 2 of the Constitution).

Due to historical and contemporary social factors, most South African children grow up in families where their fathers do not reside with them or are otherwise not present. This perpetuates the impossibility of growing up in an intact family (Mashiane, 2021).

A study conducted by Sanford (2021) revealed that children heading families are uncooperative in the absence of authority figures like fathers. The necessity of man-to-man empowerment programs based on the role they should play in the lives of their children is of paramount importance.

4.8.5 Theme 5: A Need for Safety and Security Support Strategies

The finding of this study revealed by community members highlighted that children heading families stay in unsafe and insecure homes which predisposes them to various challenges. Safety and security are of great importance for children heading families as they are all by themselves.

4.8.5.1 Sub-theme: Provision of Proper Housing Structures

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families reside in poor housing structures, where there is a likelihood of overcrowding and a lack of resources. Most children heading families lack personal space, and overcrowding conditions are linked to unhygienic conditions and improper sanitation. Deshmukh et al., (2023) discovered that household congestion enhances psychological anguish, it also causes mental health conditions in children heading families and powerlessness in girls. They further highlighted that overcrowded home affects children, as they have limited space to complete homework or rest, practice skills and develop their own identity.

Participant 1 FGD 4 explained that:

> *"The Government should prioritize the building of better houses for children heading families as it is a great need for them and their siblings since they stay in very poor houses."*

Participant 4 FGD 1 further identified that:

> *"There is no one to see whether children heading families and their siblings are staying in a conducive environment as most of them are living in houses which are in a terrible state and lack maintenance."*

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Child-headed children live in poor houses where there is no maintenance. The state of houses affects children's lives in ways that go beyond the normal standard of living. There are several reasons to think that housing would be crucial to children's overall well-being. The study findings by Clair (2022), confirmed that the influence of housing on children has been more restricted and has only focused on adult concerns about risk behaviors and behavioral problems.

The quality of housing is the most important challenging aspect for child-headed children's safety. When children live in poor-quality housing, they experience more psychological stress, and show elevated levels of emotional problems, including symptoms of depression and anxiety; as well as elevated behavioral problems, like aggression, lying, and deceitfulness. In this study, community members expressed serious concerns about the substandard living conditions faced by orphaned children heading families because, in South Africa, there is no official system that addresses housing and health for them.

4.8.5.2 Sub-Theme: Visibility of Police Officers and Proactive Participation in Community Policing Forums

The findings of this study revealed that there is evidence that children heading families are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in many ways and generally have no one to turn to for protection when at risk. Community Policing Forums (CPFs) should work with the police and community together, assisting in bridging the gap between the public and the police to solve problems that will make children heading families safe. There is not enough information on "what works" to enhance the safety and well-being of children heading families who are impacted by the circumstance of living without parents or an adult caregiver, despite the challenges as well as detrimental effects of the rising number of children heading families in South Africa.

Community participation plays an important and valuable role in assisting in changing perceptions of ordinary people on the police, empowering people, and developing a common understanding of issues that require the collective effort of communities and the police. For the police to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the communities, partnerships will have to be developed. However, some community members are reluctant to participate in crime prevention activities because they feel that the state will not protect them once they provide information (Masuku and Motlalekgosi, 2022).

Participant 3 FGD 4 illuminated that:

> *"Community members should be involved in the wellbeing and safety of child-headed children and engage with the police for their protection. Child-headed children will then feel that the police are aware of their safety and are willing to*

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assist them if ever they need help. This will reassure them when they are alone in their homes."

The South African Police Service Act 68 of 1995 set out the rules of CPF, area community police boards, and provincial community police boards. A major objective of CPF is to establish an active partnership between the police and the community through which crime, service delivery, and police-community relationships can jointly be analyzed and appropriate solutions designed and implemented. This requires that the police consciously strive to create an atmosphere in which potential community partners are willing and able to cooperate with the police (Malatji, Madima, and Rakubu, 2023).

Participant 6 FGD5 further expounded:

"Child-headed children stay without any adult supervision; police officers and community policing forums (CPF) must keep a frequent eye on their dwelling place."

The safety and protection of children heading families by their parents are no longer available once parents pass away and children turn to live alone with no options, and this puts them in a difficult situation (Ramokoka, Jager and Mokwele, 2022). Therefore, the government should put children's safety and protection first because they no longer have the right to care from their parents or other caretakers or to be protected. Child-headed homes should also be protected so that they have the same opportunities as other children living with their parents.

The findings of the study by Mkhize (2020) revealed that there is a significant stride towards creating laws and policies that uphold children's rights. The findings by Mack and Barth (2023) confirmed that to address the issue of children heading families, certain programs are to be developed and the fact that policies were failing to address this issue was demonstrated by both empirical data and observational evidence (Ntjana, 2023). There is a great need to significantly address the issues affecting children heading families by the government (Palmera et al., 2023).

Since the purpose of Community Policing Forums (CPFs) is to ensure that local police can explain to the public what they are doing about safety in the area, CPFs can be very helpful in protecting children heading families. They also have to make sure that the police are carrying out their duties, mobilize community support for crime detection, and monitor police actions to maintain accountability and transparency (Rahman and Simonson, 2020). Children living in child-headed families will be in a safe environment if the SAPS and Community Policing Forums work together effectively.

However, in South Africa, the move towards legally recognizing child-headed children has resulted in the inclusion of child-headed households in the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 as

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amended by the Children's Amendment Act No 41 of 2007. The South African way of legally recognizing children heading families as a protective measure is the first in Africa. Providing legal recognition acknowledges the existence of children heading families and endeavors actively to provide legal protection to such families.

The challenge is how to legally recognize child-headed children while protecting and fulfilling the rights of children in child-headed families, especially the right to alternative care, and special protection and assistance. Legally recognizing child-headed families, and therefore, in effect socially justifying their existence, when adequate protection and assistance is lacking for child-headed children, would not only be a serious violation of children's rights but also be morally shameful.

4.8.5.3 Sub-theme: Neighborhood Watchdogs

The findings of this study revealed that neighbors can act as watchdogs to safeguard children heading families from a variety of unforeseen situations. Residents of a community who want to be proactive about safety and keep an eye out for any threats to the safety of children heading families have established a community watchdog.

Ensuring the safety of children heading families are protected from abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation is a collective community obligation. On the other hand, the attitude of community members toward assisting children heading families would favourably impact the effect of parental absence.

Participant 2 FGD1 explained that:

> *"Safeguarding child-headed children's safety, community members should work with the traditional leaders and submit a regular report of children's safety during Imbizo meetings so that every community member should be aware of what is happening."*

Participant 6 FGD 2 detailed the following:

> *"Neighbors and community members should act as watchdogs to identify any threat that will affect child-headed children so that they contact the responsible authorities imminently."*

A study conducted by Spitzer and Twikirize (2023) accentuated that everyone in the community can be a community watchdog by simply watching their neighborhood including children heading families and their siblings for things that seem out of place, keeping an eye out for signs of abuse or other unsafe behavior, and reporting anything that seems suspicious.

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Section 137 of the Children's Act 38, 2005 provides that child-headed households must function under the supervision of an adult and further states that an adult may be appointed by the Children's Court, a governmental organization, or a non-governmental organization (NGO). The provision of adult supervision is a commendable aspect of this Act. However, considering the heterogeneous nature of society accompanied by unreported cases of CHF, it is therefore doubtful that all children heading families receive adult supervision.

4.9 Summary

Chapter Four outlined the challenges experienced by children heading families, the support provided by children's relatives and community members, and data was collected through face-to-face individual interviews with children heading families, children's relatives, and focus group discussions with the community members conducted in this chapter. The findings were similar and related as the needs of children heading families were fitting to the challenges, children's relatives and community members brought to light, which assisted in the merging of the findings. Literature control was done on the findings and presented following the merging. The focus group discussions and interviews shared the valuable support they provided to children heading families. The development of strategies outlined in chapter five was derived from the challenges experienced by children heading families and the inadequate support provided by children's relatives and community members in Limpopo province, South Africa.

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CHAPTER FIVE

DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four of this study dealt with data analysis, interpretation, and discussions of the study findings. This chapter focuses on the development of strategies to improve support for children heading families, the development of strategies guided by six steps in the brainstorming process, strategies to improve support for children heading families, and a summary of chapter five. Chapter six will outline the validation of the developed strategies.

5.2 Development of Strategies

Strategy development is a plan to achieve consistent growth and improvement on a problem (Ertem, 2023). According to Barad (2018), a strategy is a high-level plan designed to accomplish one or more goals in an uncertain environment, which comprises several specialized knowledge areas like tactics, siege warfare, and logistics. Thus, it is meaningless to talk about strategy without having an objective in mind. The proposed strategies were formulated based on the themes and sub-themes that emerged from challenges experienced by children heading families and the support provided by children's relatives and community members.

5.2.1 Establishment of a Brainstorming Meeting.

Brainstorming is a group problem-solving method that involves the spontaneous contribution of creative ideas and solutions. The method requires intensive, freewheel discussion in which every member of the group is encouraged to think aloud and suggest as many ideas as possible based on diverse knowledge. The basic idea of brainstorming is that it is a way to quickly generate many ideas and then later evaluate them to see which ones are most promising (Bernstein, 2017).

The researcher invited the participants who were going to form part of the brainstorming session a week before, through the traditional leaders to attend the community meeting. Participants who formed the brainstorming group consisted of community members children heading families, traditional leaders, non-governmental organizations, and children's relatives. The researcher met the group at the chief's kraal to plan for a brainstorming session. The researcher informed the group about the purpose of brainstorming and the importance of working together. After their positive responses, the date, time, and venue were set. The

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researcher agreed with the group that Saturday was appropriate to cover those who were working.

On the actual day of the brainstorming session, "ground rules" were established to encourage individuals to feel free and work in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. The researcher became the facilitator in the brainstorming session. Then a welcoming environment was created throughout the meeting. The researcher shared with the group the challenges that children heading families were experiencing with insufficient support from their relatives and community members. The findings of this study revealed that children heading families are exposed to numerous challenges without tangible support strategies from relatives and community members.

The researcher presented challenges experienced by children heading families to the group so that they have an understanding when developing the strategies. The challenges experienced by children were highlighted to ensure that each group member brainstormed toward the same goal. This provided direction when brainstorming. The challenges experienced by children heading families were psychological, financial, educational, and social support challenges.

- The question presented to the group by the researcher during the brainstorming session was: **“What are the strategies needed to improve support for children heading families in your community”?**

As each member worked together, everyone had an opportunity to express themselves succinctly and effectively. The researcher urged the group members who were more reserved to express their opinions and speak up. This helped the group to share their thoughts and ideas better. Each group member was encouraged to think out loud and provide as many suggestions as possible based on their varied areas of expertise. As the group exchanged thoughts, they could see any gaps in their understanding and reach the main goal. To ensure that no information goes missing during brainstorming, the researcher recorded every concept that was discussed. The researcher, then read the strategies jotted as said by the group members to ensure all that had been captured in the brainstorming session. After the group members listened to what the researcher was reading the group agreed that what the researcher captured was the true reflection of what was said. Strategies were heard, and respected and helpful criticism was freely expressed.

5.3 Six Steps in the Brainstorming Process

The development of strategies was guided by the six effective brainstorming steps (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). The effective brainstorming steps are described below.

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5.3.1 Creation of a Friendly and Comfortable Environment (Step1)

Primarily, to ensure the effectiveness of the brainstorming session, the researcher established a friendly environment at the chief's kraal where they felt comfortable and free to share their thoughts as no one was shy to bring forth ideas. The location where the brainstorming session took place was assessed so that everyone in the group felt comfortable. The materials or resources that the group needed such as writing tools were assembled and the researcher made sure that nothing was forgotten.

5.3.2 Identifying the Problem (Step 2)

The researcher and the group identified the challenges that children heading families were experiencing from the study findings. The group worked together in developing strategies that would address the support needed by children heading families. This step ensured that the developed strategies were associated with the challenges experienced by children heading families, as the first and second objectives of the study were aligned with phase 1, which was to explore and describe the challenges experienced by children heading families and insufficient support provided by children's relatives and community members.

5.3.3 Generate ideas (Step 3)

In this study, the researcher gave the group time to come up with ideas on their own. The group had the opportunity to share and list their suggestions and the researcher jotted down what had been said on a sheet of paper. Step three was strategy formulation indicated by (Cavallo, 2021) the process aimed at establishing goals and determining the proper plan of action to achieve goals. In this study, the goal of developing strategies was to improve the support for children heading families. Developing strategies was a way to focus the efforts and figure out how they were going to improve the support of children heading families.

5.3.4 Sharing of Ideas (Step 4)

The group exchanged and discussed their thoughts after they had been generated. The group was allowed to discuss the aspects of each strategy that they developed and expand on them to make them even better or more. The group tried to limit the discussion to one idea at a time.

5.3.5 Narrowing the List of Ideas (Step 5)

After sharing and debating many ideas that were created in this study, the group was able to reduce the list to six strategies. Discussing and evaluating each strategy and considering how the strategies would improve support for children heading families narrowed down the list. It

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included initiatives and plans that had to be implemented to address the challenges (Bryson and George, 2020).

5.3.6 Making an Action Plan (Step 6)

Before adopting any solutions for their buy-in, ideas, and recommendations were given to relevant stakeholders in seminars and meetings at the chief's kraal. After approval, a project team was formed, and the selected strategies were put into action. Strategy evaluation seemed significant because it identified areas that needed improvement. The strategic evaluation conducted for this study demonstrates whether the strategies that were established could improve support for the challenges experienced by children heading families.

5.4. Strategies to Improve Support for Children Heading Families

At the end of the brainstorming session, six main strategies were developed based on the objectives and related activities.

- Psychological support strategies
- Financial support strategies
- Social support strategies
- Educational support strategies
- Health care, safety, and security support strategies
- Spiritual and religious support strategies

In this study, recommendations of the developed strategies are to be shared with appropriate stakeholders such as community members and various governmental departments during workshops, meetings, and seminars.

5.4.1 Strategy 1: Psychological Support Strategies

The results of this study showed that children heading families suffer in silence since they never talk about their problems. This may have a detrimental psychological effect because most of the children heading families did not obtain psychotherapy or debriefing after their parents passed away. The results of this study also showed that children heading families undergo continuous weeping and mourning without anybody noticing while putting up a happy front since they are unable to express their suffering to others. Because there is no privacy in schools, they are unable to discuss their challenges with their teachers.

A child's psychological needs might be characterized as the desire for happiness and creativity, a sense of social group membership, and optimism for the future. The psychological health of children heading families is inevitably impacted by changing responsibilities, living situations,

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and the absence of support from relatives and community members (Ntshuntshe and Taukeni, 2020). Effective psychological support therefore becomes necessary in schools.

The findings of this study revealed that the absence of parents is the fundamental root of the challenges listed below as children continually feel void since parents can never be replaced.

5.4.1.1 Endless Grieving and Mourning

Objective

To ensure that children heading families receive psychological support through counseling during grieving and mourning periods.

Activities

- Establish a trauma counseling centre by the community members that will assist children heading families during the grieving and mourning period.
- Counselling of children heading families by volunteering counselors at the chief's kraal and continuously assessing the progress.

5.4.1.2 Love, Care, and Warmth

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families do not receive love, care, and warmth from their relatives and community members, and these cause children heading families to miss the love, care, and warmth that their parents used to provide. Children heading families have specific needs for love, affection, care, and warmth, and children who receive love, in early childhood, have a good foundation for growth and development and contribute positively to society (Grimmer, 2021; O'Connor et al., 2019). The dissolution of the family unit leads to the emergence of a distinct type of child-headed family, wherein the eldest child takes on the role of caregiver for the siblings if parents or other adult caregivers are not present (Jaure and Makura, 2023).

Objective

To ensure that children heading families are shown love, care, guidance, and receive warmth.

Activities

- Celebrate birthdays of children heading families and their siblings by relatives as a way of showing them love and care.

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- ❖ Relatives should welcome children heading families and their siblings into their homes during festive occasions such as Christmas and New Year as a way of demonstrating love, care, and warmth.

5.4.2 Strategy 2: Financial Support Strategies

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families highlighted the difficulty of their relatives to provide financial assistance because most of their relatives are faced with the same challenges of poverty and unemployment. The findings of this study further elucidated that relatives reflected and reported on how they are also struggling to meet their basic needs and seeking employment.

5.4.2.1 Inadequate Material Resources

Objective

To ensure that children heading families receive adequate material resources.

Activities

- ❖ Relatives who are appointed by the Department of Social Development to receive child support grants should make it a point that they buy adequate material resources.
- ❖ Members of the community and family members voluntarily provide tangible resources that are required by children heading families.

5.4.2.2 Food Insecurity

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families do not receive support from relatives as they also struggle to support their children and are unable to routinely provide food for children heading families. Insufficient food supply may continue to affect children heading families unless certain actions are taken. Children who do not receive enough food run the danger of long-term health implications. In addition, the findings of this study revealed that children heading families depend on feeding schemes at school because, on most days, there isn't anything to eat at home, and they frequently, go to bed hungry and wake up with an empty stomach. Weekends and school holidays are difficult because they struggle to have food at home. Food supply with proper nutrition also plays a crucial part in ensuring that children maintain a healthy weight. Long-term malnutrition may have an impact on both their mental and physical well-being.

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Objective

To ensure that children heading families receive sufficient food with the proper, well-balanced nutrients for their cognitive and physical development.

Activities

- A holistic approach should be initiated through the involvement of families, churches, community members, and civic, NGOs, the list is endless, as it said, “It takes the whole village to raise a child.”
- Comprehensive health education is to be taught in schools throughout all grades so that learners should know the importance of eating healthy food and staying more physically active.
- The home-based care unity must be capacitated to engage in this activity of providing health and care to children heading families.
- Community members and relatives should request food packages from local businesses and be given to children heading families after school to eat in the evenings to prevent them from going to bed hungry.
- Business forums should incorporate social investment by plowing back to the community by voluntarily donating some food parcels to children heading families.
- Farmers in the community should provide some vegetables to children heading families during their harvesting time.

5.4.2.3 Child Support Grant

The findings of this study revealed that some of the children heading families are not receiving child support grants and this becomes difficult for them to survive with no assistance from the Department of Social Development. The lack of other documents needed by the Social Development Department resulted in difficulties for children heading families to access child support grants. Though it is said that child support grants only offer a small amount of money that is not enough to cover the child's basic needs it is better than nothing “stated the participants.

Objective

To ensure that every child heading the family receives their child support grant.

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Activity

Relatives should assist in ensuring that all the necessary documents needed by the Department of Social Development are obtained when children heading families apply for child support grants.

5.4.3 Strategy 3: Social Support Strategies

The findings of the study revealed that children heading families receive insufficient support from their relatives and community members, in addition, insufficient support from relatives and community members may contribute to a high prevalence of absence from school and educational discontinuity. Children who are heads of families are part of the community and historically belonged to the community.

5.4.3.1 Role Adaptation

Objective

To ensure that children heading families are assisted in taking on their parental roles and responsibilities following the death of their parents.

Activities

- To ensure that children heading families are empowered in dealing with various parental roles and responsibilities, therefore, family members and community members should develop a practical program that teaches children heading families different skills, such as home chores, so that they can adjust.
- Relatives are to train children heading families on the day-to-day running activities in their households.

5.4.3.2 Ubuntu

The findings of the study revealed that community members believe they should practice Ubuntu because it follows an African tradition in which neighbors help each other. Ubuntu, a Zulu word, is a synonym for "humaneness." The guiding premise of it is, "A person is a person through other persons." Acting for the good of the community and putting the interests of the community ahead of one's own depends on a person's value as a human being (Seehawer, 2023).

Objective

To rebuild a culture of caring amongst community members, as Ubuntu is the essence of humanity.

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Activities

- Re-enforcement and practicing of Ubuntu by the community members may lessen some of the challenges experienced by children heading families.
- Communities should support child-headed children with various daily tasks when they are ill or in need.
- Community members should demonstrate that everyone in the community belongs to a greater community.
- Community members should cultivate the spirit of interconnectedness and solidarity, compassion, respect, and dignity with children heading families.

5.4.3.3 A Need for Mentorship

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families require mentors to help them on the challenging route of adjusting to life without an adult caregiver or parent. Some children heading families claimed that if they had mentors, they would not have fallen into bad habits since they would have received appropriate guidance and assistance, especially throughout their adolescent years.

Objective

To make sure that children heading families are taught about their culture's values since doing so would help them distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior that is required from them.

Activity

Collaboration of various stakeholders such as traditional leaders from the communities, NGOs, and churches, in mentoring children heading families.

5.4.3.4 Overburdened with Household Chores

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families experience physical exhaustion because of carrying too many duties without someone to help them, which makes it difficult for them to pay attention in class.

Objective

To ensure that children heading families are relieved from household chores.

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Activities

Home-based carers should visit children heading families frequently and offer services when needed.

5.4.3.5 Discipline and Nurturing

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families acknowledged their inability to act as parents because doing so would require them to punish their siblings. They, therefore, struggle to discipline their siblings since they lack the necessary abilities. Children heading families do not have parents to provide guidance, impose rules, use discipline, set limits, establish and follow through with consequences, hold them accountable for their behavior, and teach values. In addition, they do not have access to the opportunity to gain cultural or life skills from their parents or adult caregivers.

Objective

To reinforce good moral principles to children heading families and their siblings.

Activity

Relatives and community members should teach good moral principles to children heading families and their siblings.

5.4.4 Strategy 4: Educational Support Strategies

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families do not receive educational support from their relatives and community members. It is a big challenge to many of them as they stated that they are all by themselves and struggle to get stationary and on many days, they sleep in the dark with no lights or candles. The unavailability of lights prevents them from studying in the evenings.

5.4.4.1 Inadequate Educational Support

Objective

To ensure that children who are heading families receive appropriate educational support from their relatives and community members.

Activity

Volunteerism by the community members and relatives in buying wi-fi for learners in children heading families as this will help them when doing their schoolwork.

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5.4.4.2 Unavailability of Scholar Transportation

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families travel a great distance to and from school. They also claimed that they feel uncomfortable, unsafe, and exhausted when they arrive at school, which harms their academic performance. Frequent walking to school reduces the amount of free time learners have for activities and may result in less focus on their academics.

Objective

To ensure that children heading families are safe and free from any harm whilst traveling to and from school.

Activity

Family members and community members should look for reliable transportation that can deliver kids to school safely.

5.4.5 Strategy 5: Health Care, Safety, and Security Support Strategies

The findings of this study revealed that when children's parents pass away, children heading families are often left with little or no money because of expensive funeral costs and other expenses which makes it difficult for them to travel to clinics looking for medical assistance when ill. Due to their lack of awareness about healthcare options and the absence of adult supervision to keep an eye on their health, children heading families may not have access to essential medical treatment.

5.4.5.1 Poor Health and Safety Conditions

Objective

To ensure that children heading families reside in a safe and secure environment and maintain optimal health.

Activities

- Identification of volunteered community members by relatives who are skillful in repairing doors and windows in houses where children heading families reside.
- Report any wrongdoing affecting children heading families by the community policing forum to the traditional leaders.
- Nominated relatives to frequently supervise the safety of children heading families and their siblings.

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- ❖ Educating the community to safeguard children heading families through increasing awareness.
- ❖ Neighbors should observe and identify any wrongdoing occurring on children heading families' homes and report it to the police immediately.
- ❖ Children heading families should report to the police whenever they feel unsafe.
- ❖ Relatives should assist children heading families and siblings when sick.

5.4.5.2 Poor Housing Conditions

The findings of this study revealed that children heading families live in homes with broken windows and doors, as well as other unsafe and insecure circumstances, and they continue to live in fear.

Objective

To ensure that children heading families and siblings live in good quality houses that will promote their self-esteem and build confidence.

Activity

Home-based carers should educate children heading families about general cleaning so that they can learn how to keep their environment clean.

5.4.6 Strategy 6: Spiritual and Religious Support Strategies

The findings of the study revealed that children heading families do not receive enough spiritual support from their pastors and fellow churchgoers, who can do so by fostering a sense of calm and optimism. When children heading families learn about religious teachings, they learn good morals, compassion, faith, empathy, and respect.

5.4.6.1 Inadequate Spiritual Support

Objective

To ensure a strong spiritual relationship between pastors and children heading families.

Activity

Pastors should establish a solid spiritual rapport between themselves and children heading families.

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5.4.6.2 Religious Support

This study revealed that children heading families rely on prayer and have faith that God will one day put an end to their misery. A study in Sub-Saharan Africa, by Mutepfa and Maundeni (2019) found that religion has a crucial role in helping children who are heading families as they frequently encounter challenging times to develop resilience.

Objective

To teach children heading families and their sibling's religious beliefs and faith through the pastor's teachings.

Activity

Encouragement of children heading families and their siblings by the community members and relatives to attend church regularly.

5.5 Summary

Chapter five focused on the development of strategies to improve support for children heading families. The developed strategies were based on the challenges experienced by children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. Six strategies were developed from the brainstorming session. Chapter six focuses on the validation of the developed strategies.

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CHAPTER SIX

VALIDATION OF THE DEVELOPED STRATEGIES

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter concentrated on the development of strategies that would improve support for children heading families. This chapter outlined the validation of the strategies articulated to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province. The methodology for the e-Delphi technique, demographic profile of expert panelist, objectives of the e-Delphi, characteristics of the e-Delphi, strengths, and weaknesses of e-Delphi, e-Delphi technique process, data collection tool, Likert rating scale, data collection rounds, modified e-Delphi results, discussion of e-Delphi rounds, and findings, trustworthiness, ethical consideration, and summary are outlined in this chapter.

The e-Delphi technique is defined as a comparatively highly structured group communication process in which coarse facts are judged by experts about the uncertain and incomplete knowledge that exists (Naisola-Ruiter, 2022). According to Mete, Kellett, and Bacon (2021), the e-Delphi technique is important in evidence-based research as it enables experts to post their opinions. The e-Delphi technique was first developed in 1963 by Norman Dalkey and Olaf Helmer to gain reliable expert consensus. It is also a method of group decision-making and involves consulting a panel of experts and implementing systematic feedback rounds (Twin, 2023). The goal of the e-Delphi technique is to reach a consensus on a particular topic by gathering information from a panel of chosen experts on the subject through multiple rounds of questionnaires (Barrios, Guilera, and Nuño, 2021).

The e-Delphi technique is a group method that is administered by the researcher or research team that assembles a panel of experts, poses questions, synthesizes feedback, and guides the group toward common ground (Jantunen, Venäläinen, and Camargo, 2023). It is also a process to ascertain the degree to which experts agree about a given issue with each other and in areas where they disagree and achieve a consensus opinion (Romero-Collado, 2021). An interaction process took place between the members of the group e-Delphi panel and the researcher, with the researcher acting as a facilitator. Some variables, including the study's objective, which called for the opinions of subject-matter experts to make meaningful judgments and the requirement that an expert consensus be obtained affected the decision to use the e-Delphi technique (Harvey, Hand, and Weston, 2023). The e-Delphi technique was deemed suitable by the researcher to validate the developed strategies. By gathering feedback from a group of experts via multiple rounds of questions, the e-Delphi method—also referred to as the

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estimate-talk e-technique (ETE)—is a methodical and qualitative approach to forecasting (Santa Bárbara, 2022).

6.2 Methodology

The e-Delphi technique is an important data collection methodology for researchers eager to gather data from people who are immersed in topics of interest to provide real-world knowledge (Bacani and Pizarro, 2022). The methodology was discussed under the following headings: study planning, reaching consensus from the e-Delphi technique by the experts, e-Delphi method as a means of recruitment of the experts for the e-Delphi, and reaching consensus with the experts. Consequently, the researcher invited knowledgeable panelists with in-depth knowledge of the subject.

The main purpose of the e-Delphi method was to acquire the most reliable consensus of a group of experts' opinions by a series of intensive questions combined with controlled opinion feedback (Barkhordari Ahmadi, Esmaeeli, and Shariat Moghani, 2023). The e-Delphi technique can be understood as an anonymous iterative process of expert judgments on a specific issue, to collect consensus and dissent in the judgments and justifications (Toillier, Mathé, and Saley Moussa, 2022). The e-Delphi technique is characterized as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals to deal with a complex problem (Głuszek, 2021). To be able to arrive at a future forecast, the e-Delphi technique sought to integrate the expertise of multiple experts (Naisola-Ruiter, 2022).

Veugelers, Gaakeer, and Patka (2020) asserted that the panelists' backgrounds, knowledge, and experience all contribute to their proficiency with the e-Delphi approach. This was predicated on the idea that subject matter experts can provide insightful commentary about upcoming advancements (Jaiswal and Arun, 2021). Nonetheless, the e-Delphi approach was primarily employed as a multi-level qualitative technique that gathers data through several rounds of highly controlled group discussions. The e-Delphi method is often used when there is insufficient empirical data to make a valid prognosis (Taylor,2020).

The e-Delphi technique was used to systematically combine expert opinions to arrive at an informed group consensus on a complex problem. Anonymity encouraged participants to interact freely from the constraints of personality conflicts or status relations thereby reducing the risk for group dynamics to negatively influence outcomes.

6.3 Validation of the Developed Strategies

Strategy validation is a process of examining and verifying the assumptions and estimates made in a company's strategic plan (Hughes and Hodgkinson, 2021). It is an essential step to ensure that the plan is realistic and achievable (Driver, 2019). The validation of strategies was carried

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out in this study to ensure that the established methods were applicable and that any gaps in the study's findings could be corrected. The experts familiarized themselves with the content copies of the created strategies which were sent by the researcher and shared with the experts a week before the meeting. The strategies were set up by the researcher, and the experts were asked to select the relevant options and provide feedback on the actions related to the developed strategies. Experts were required to write their opinions in a designated section, freely expressing their thoughts, that could improve produced strategies.

6.3.1 Study population

The study population in the e-Delphi technique were experts who had knowledge and experience on the study subject (Romero-Collado, 2021). The experts were retired registered nurses, retired educators, curriculum advisers, psychologists, social workers, pastors, entrepreneurs, registered nurses, educators, and an ex-police officer in the districts of Vhembe and Mopani who were consulted to validate the developed strategies. The expert panelists were requested to voluntarily sign a consent form to participate in the study (**See Annexure J**).

Table 6.1 below summarizes the expert panelists by occupation, gender, years of experience, and levels of education.

Table 6.1: Demographic Profile of Experts Panelists Involved in the e-Delphi Technique

No. of Expert	Occupation	Gender	Years of Experience	Level of Education
1	Retired registered nurse	Female	40	Diploma in Nursing Science
2	Retired educator	Male	41	Diploma in Education
3	Curriculum adviser	Female	30	Honors degree in Education
4	Psychologist	Female	10	Master's degree
5	Social worker	Female	10	Honors degree
6	Pastor	Male	15	Degree in Theology
7	Director (Entrepreneur)	Male	12	MBA
8	Registered nurse	Female	30	Degree in Nursing Science
9	Educator	Male	20	Degree in education

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10	**Traditional leader ex-police officer**	**Male**	**43**	**Grade 12 SAQA accredited level 4**

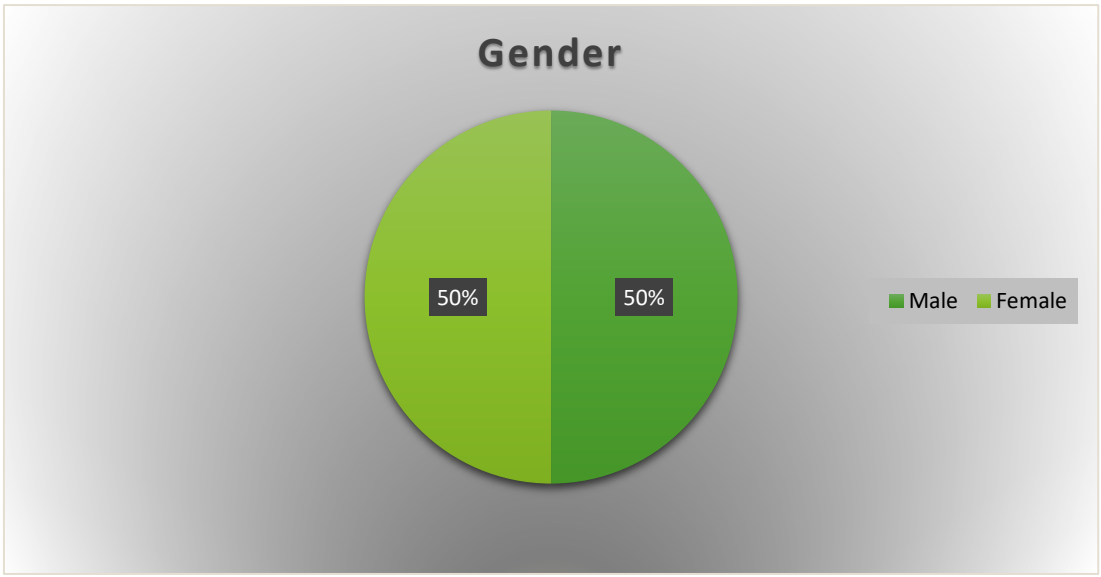

Figure 6.1: Expert Panelists According to Gender (Males=5) and (Females=5)

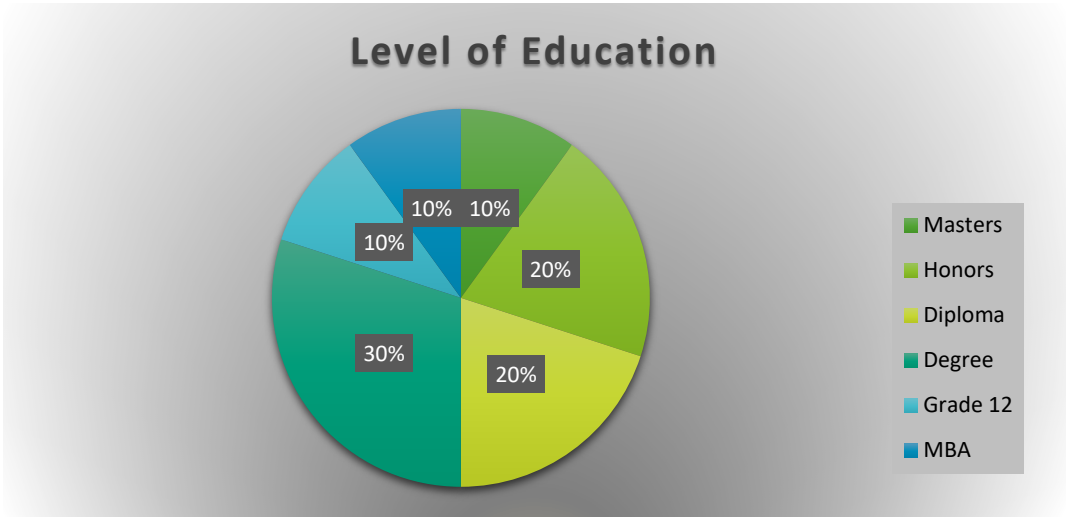

Figure 6.2. Expert Panelists according to Level of Education (Masters=1), (Honors=2), (Diploma=2), (Degree=3), (Grade 12=1) and (MBA=1)

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Figure 6.3: Expert Panelists according to Years of Experience (N=5;10 to 20) and (N=5;30 to 45)

6.4 Objectives of the e-Delphi Technique

In this study, the researcher was guided by the four objectives designed by Niederberger and Spranger (2020).

1. Gathering and condensing information from a team of specialists.

In this study, the researcher collected data from expert panelists and further referred to the experts for them to validate the strategies based on the study findings.

2. Reaching a decision or reaching an agreement on intricate issues when accurate data isn't available to support a future prediction.

The expert panelists shared their opinions on the validation of strategies. In this study, experts reached a consensus that could resolve intricate issues or carry out strategic choices.

3. The trustworthy and imaginative investigation of concepts

This study's trustworthiness was increased by providing a transparent "decision trail" that explains why the e-Delphi approach was suitable for the specific issue being investigated and the research techniques.

4. The development of relevant strategies to support crucial decision-making.

Developing appropriate strategies was essential to this study's validation of the strategies that would more effectively benefit children heading families.

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6.5 Characteristics of the e-Delphi Technique

The researcher in this study adhered to the e-Delphi technique's characteristics as noted by (Villegas, 2021).

6.5.1 Use of Experts

The panel was comprised of ten carefully chosen experts. Nonetheless, group sizes are frequently kept relatively modest because the primary objective was to include specialists with the most expertise and experience in the topic that the researcher has an interest in researching.

6.5.2 Panel

The panel consisted of numerous carefully chosen professionals. However, group numbers were usually maintained relatively adequate because the primary objective was to include experts with the most knowledge and experience in the field being examined.

6.5.3 Anonymity

Anonymity was maintained in the sense that panelists did not know each other. As a result, the study on data analysis did not include the panelists' names (Krause et al., 2022). Anonymity was maintained since panelist names were not used but pseudonyms were used in the study.

6.5.4 Rounds

According to Naisola-Ruiter (2022), the e-Delphi technique is comprised of a series of rounds. In this study, a series of four rounds was conducted until a consensus was reached.

6.5.5 Rehearsal and Feedback

The purpose of feedback was to make sure that the expert opinions obtained using the e-Delphi technique were organized and systematic. Convergence of opinions and preservation of the integrity of the findings depends on this stage being administered appropriately. Opinions of experts were collected for analysis, and information about the validated strategies was forwarded to the panelists for their comments to serve as the basis for the next cycle.

A study conducted by Kondos et al., (2023) highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of e-Delphi studies as listed below. Table 6.2 shows the strengths and weaknesses of the e-Delphi technique.

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Table 6.2: Strengths and Weaknesses of the e-Delphi Technique

STRENGTH	WEAKNESSES
❖ Expert opinions on a particular topic can be gathered flexibly with the e-Delphi technique.	❖ e-Delphi can be difficult and time-consuming; participants commit about 30 to 45 days to complete the entire process.
❖ The anonymity of the expert groups that support e-Delphi studies encourages participants to be honest and lowers the possibility of the "halo effect," in which opinions from prominent or dominating group members are given more weight.	❖ The need for participants to finish numerous rounds may result in significant dropout rates, which could compromise the study's validity.
❖ e-Delphi studies provide those taking part with the opportunity to reflect and reconsider their position in response to additional information, which is an important part.	❖ e-Delphi studies can be criticized due to a lack of clarity on what is meant by ‘consensuses.
❖ The researchers should think about whether other methods (such as a systematic review of research evidence) are more suited or if their research topic can be answered by expert consensus.	❖ It's a bit of a double-edged sword since players can change their opinions at every round.
❖ The e-Delphi method is a tried-and-true method for finding a consensus opinion among experts in a field over a research question.	❖ This flexibility carries the risk of adding bias, as experts may change their answers to reflect what they perceive to be the majority opinion (a phenomenon known as the "bandwagon effect"
❖ It enables individuals to reflect, allowing them to refine and reevaluate their beliefs considering the anonymized thoughts of others.	❖ There will always be some degree of subjectivity in qualitative e-Delphi studies, which makes them susceptible to bias.

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❖ The researcher must make an effort to stop participants from just adopting the viewpoint of the majority.	❖ The e-Delphi method employs regulated feedback, participants do not openly exchange ideas.
❖ The e-Delphi studies allow access to a diverse group of experts with expertise in a wider range of fields as can be used globally to survey expert opinion around the world.	❖ The e-Delphi technique might not be as useful when opinions are strongly divided, and further research could be necessary.
❖ The e-Delphi technique is written only by experts with skills based on the research topic.	❖ The e-Delphi requires skill in written communication.

6.6 e-Delphi Technique Process

The process of the e-Delphi technique involves collecting viewpoints on a certain research question or specific topic to gain consensus. (Niederberger and Spranger 2020). It entails the following: Study planning, recruitment of the experts, and sampling.

6.6.1. Study Planning

Study planning is used to make decisions about complex issues based on individual opinions. The first step was to plan the study, which included designing a research tool and transforming the strategies into questions.

6.6.2 Recruitment of the Experts

During the interviews, the participants were recognized as subject matter experts in dealing with children's concerns, and some uncovered experts were known to the researcher. The individual experts received invitation letters describing e-Delphi's procedures, and consent forms requesting them to participate. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to a total number of 20 expert panelists who were contacted telephonically and via email and some were directly approached during August–September 2023 requesting them to form part of the expert panelists. Ten expert panelists with extensive experience working with children voluntarily signed and returned consent forms. The number of expert panelists was deemed appropriate, as the researcher needed more information on the topic and in-depth knowledge about children heading families and the support needed. In the invitation, potential experts were informed about the purpose and expectations of the study.

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6.6.3 Sampling of the e-Delphi Panelists

This study used purposive selective sampling to select expert panelists since the researcher wanted individuals to be knowledgeable about the significant topic. Experts were purposely sampled based on their area of expertise and years of experience. Głuszek (2021) highlighted that the sampling of experts should be considered carefully before commencing such a study. The panel of experts included professionals with a range of backgrounds and specialized experience.

6.7 Data Collection using the e-Delphi Technique

Given a particular research subject, researchers considered the e-Delphi method the most productive technique for acquiring maximum insight. The e-Delphi technique is a structured communication technique initially developed as a systematic, interactive focusing method, which relies on a panel of experts (Naisola-Ruiter, 2022). Krumrei-Mancuso and Rowatt (2023) developed the Likert rating scale. The Likert rating scale was deemed appropriate for use in the study by the researcher, who used it as a reference while drafting a statement with a checklist to gauge opinions, attitudes, and behavior

6.7.1. Phase 1: Preparatory Phase

In the preparatory phase, the researcher selected competent panelists and formulated the questions before the first round. In response to the questions, the expert panelists shared their thoughts or opinions.

6.8 Data collection tool

A standardized, self-administered questionnaire was created to rate the panelists to share their opinions and reach a consensus. The researcher used the e-Delphi technique as a forecasting process and structured communication framework based on the results of multiple rounds of questionnaires set to a panel of experts. The questionnaire was administered in four rounds using a five-point Likert scale. The comment section was designed to allow for further refinement based on the expert panelists' opinions.

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Table 6.3: The Likert Rating Scale with Statements Forwarded to Expert Panelists

The e-Delphi technique rates the statements based on their importance, appropriateness, relevancy, and feasibility. As a member of a panel of specialists, you have been selected to rank the following seven statements as follows:

In your own opinion please rank each statement in the questionnaire provided according to their importance, feasibility, and appropriateness using 5-point scale.

Likert Rating Scale:

1= Least applicable, relevant, effective, and important

5= Most applicable, relevant, effective, and important

If you have any other remarks or suggestions that aren't covered in the questionnaire, please add them.

Data Distribution	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**Comments**
Applicability: Are the strategies applicable to improve support for children heading families?						
Clarity: Are the strategies to improve support for children heading families clear, easily understandable, unambiguous, and logical?						
Relevance: Are the strategies to improve support relevant to children heading families?						
Comprehensiveness: Do the strategies indicate an extensive understanding of the						

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support for children heading families?						
Effectiveness: Will the strategies enable the children's relatives, community members, and various stakeholders to be able to provide effective and appropriate support?						
Flexibility: Will the strategies empower the children's relatives, community members, and various stakeholders to provide support to children heading families?						
Acceptability: Are the strategies to improve support for children heading families realistic and in line with the Children's Act 38 of 2005 of South Africa?						
Key: 5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3= neutral; 2= disagree; 1=strongly disagree						

The researcher made appointments with the experts and the date of the meeting was arranged with them. Before the set date of the meeting, the researcher provided every expert with the developed strategies a week before so that they could study and familiarize themselves with the contents. In this study, the researcher became the facilitator as she had a clear knowledge of how to conduct the study. The researcher informed the participants of the process and goals of the study at the onset. The researcher communicated with the expert panelist by posing an open-ended question that needed to share their opinions freely on how to validate the strategies that would improve support for children heading families. Depending on the number of research

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questions and available time to reach a consensus, the e-Delphi process included four rounds, to prevent exhaustion and attenuation (Hsu and Sandford, 2019).

6.7.1.2 Phase 2: Exploratory Phase

The goal of this stage was to generate ideas for the guidelines' purpose and range. This phase lasted for two months. The content of the questions which serve as guidelines for the support needed by children heading families, was subject to the experts' opinions and ideas.

6.7.1.3 Phase 3: Consensus Phase

The researcher drafted 6 strategies from the inputs and comments of the experts in the exploratory phase using the e-Delphi. The process was followed in this e-Delphi technique and only four rounds were used to reach consensus. After receiving the expert's responses, the researcher converted the collected information into a well-structured question used as the survey instrument for the second round of data collection.

- **Round 1**

To begin the first round of the e-Delphi method, the researcher distributed questions directly and through email to the expert panelists. Open-ended questions serve as the basis for in-depth inquiries concerning the topic at hand from the e-Delphi expert panelists.

6.7.1.4 Phase 4: Refinement of the draft strategies using the e-Delphi Technique

The experts provided constructive comments on how to rearrange and reconstruct the drafted strategies. The expert panelists evaluated the strategies in each round.

- **Round 2**

In the second round, each expert panelist received a second question and was asked to review the items summarized by the researcher based on the information provided in the first round. In this round, consensus began forming and the actual outcomes were presented among the experts' responses.

6.8 Reaching Consensus from e-Delphi Technique

After each round, the researcher reviewed and sorted through all answers with ideas shared them with other experts, and adjusted the answers according to the group's responses. The main purpose was to encourage the experts to settle on a mutual agreement and to establish a group consensus.

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- **Round 3**

In the third round, each expert panelist received a question that included the items and ratings summarized by the researcher in the previous round and was asked to revise their judgments. This round allowed panelists to make further clarifications of both the information and their judgments of the relative importance of the items. The expert panelists were given a Likert Rating Scale and were asked to score each statement's degree of agreement anonymously. The researcher then compiled and evaluated the panelists' comments to ascertain which claims gained consensus.

- **Round 4**

In the fourth and final round, a list of remaining items, their ratings, minority opinions, and items achieving consensus was distributed to the panelists. This round provided a final opportunity for experts to revise their judgments.

6.9 The Modified e-Delphi Results.

Previously acquired data was analyzed and experts' panelists were provided with evaluations, as per part four of the e-Delphi, the final evaluation took place. All expert panelists had extensive experience and knowledge in dealing with children, thus the researcher found them manageable and cooperative.

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Table 6.4: Ranking Agreement of Final Round 4

Agreement		Strategy 1		Strategy 2		Strategy 3		Strategy 4		Strategy 5		Strategy 6	
		%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.
	1= Strongly agree	80%	8	100%	10	80%	8	50%	5	70%	7	60%	6
	2= Agree	20%	2	0	0	20%	2	50%	5	30%	3	40%	4
	3= Neutral	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0
	4= Disagree	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0
	5= Strongly disagree	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0

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6.10 Discussion of e-Delphi Final Round Results

The Likert rating scale was used whereby the expert panelists were requested to rate the strategies according to their understanding. From their ratings, the researcher summarized the findings. Table 6.4 shows a summary of the rated findings.

- **Strategy One**

An overwhelming 80% of expert panelists rated this strategy as strongly agreed and 20% of respondents agreed. The proportion exceeded the usual threshold. There were no neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree ratings from any of the panel of experts, yielding a score of 0%.

- **Strategy Two**

On strategy two, all expert panelists (i.e., 100%) rated strongly agree, while the remaining 0% rated agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. This suggests that providing support to children heading families should be a top priority.

- **Strategy Three**

Twenty percent of respondents agreed with strategy three, while an overwhelming 80% of expert panelists ranked it as strongly agreed. The panel of experts did not provide any neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree assessments, resulting in a score of 0%. This suggested that children heading families require a large deal of social support.

- **Strategy Four**

A total of 50% of the expert panelists classified as strongly agree and agree, with no one rating as neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree.

- **Strategy Five**

Among the panel of experts, 70% of them rated this strategy as strongly agree, 30% agreed, and 0% rated it as neutral, disagree, or severely disagree.

- **Strategy Six**

Of the total number of expert panelists, 60% rated this strategy as strongly agreed, 40% rated it as agreed, and 0% rated it as neutral, strongly disagree, or disagree.

6.11 Data Analysis from the e-Delphi Technique

In this study, the process of data collection from the e-Delphi experts was conducted in subsequent rounds of two weeks until a consensus was reached. During each round, the e-Delphi panel experts were expected to read through the draft strategies, rate the strategies, and

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then write a comment outlining their opinions. Feedback was given by the researcher. A summary of each e-Delphi comment was read to the experts and were also given a chance to change their responses and agree with the views of the group or choose to stay with their opinions.

6.12 Measures to Ensure Trustworthiness in the e-Delphi Technique

The researcher ensured credibility by ongoing repetition and feedback from and to the experts, which according to Kennedy, Matyasic, and Schofield Clark (2020) was viewed as member checks. To ensure dependability, the researcher included a variety of experts from different professional backgrounds knowing the topic researched. Confirmability was assessed by maintaining a detailed description of the e-Delphi method and analysis processes. Transferability was established using verification of the applicability of e-Delphi findings.

6.13 Ethical Considerations in the e-Delphi Technique

During the selection phase, the information handout which had the relevant information about the e-Delphi process and informed consent was read to the experts as indicated under the sampling criteria. Participation in the e-Delphi was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential (Shi, Sun, and Meng, 2021).

6.14 Summary

The e-Delphi method is a multi-level qualitative technique that involves highly structured, anonymous group interactions with multiple rounds of data collecting. The e-Delphi technique was enlightening and made it easier to gather and assess a wide range of data that was necessary for important qualitative research. The outcome of the e-Delphi sequence was nothing but an opinion; the results of the sequence were only as valid as the opinions of the experts who made up the panel. The panel viewpoint was summarized statistically rather than in terms of a majority vote. It was very important to ensure an understanding of the aim of the e-Delphi exercise by all the participants. Otherwise, the panelists would answer inappropriately or become frustrated and lose interest in researchers who were keen to acquire data from people who are deeply involved in the issue of interest to provide real-world knowledge, The e-Delphi method was a crucial data-gathering methodology. The recommended validated strategies were adjusted by the researcher based on what the experts have suggested. Chapter Seven, which is the final chapter, will address the evaluation, justification, limitations, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the process of validation of strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. Chapter Seven focused on the summary of the study in terms of its ability to meet the objectives as set out in Chapter One. A summary of the study concerning originality in contributing to the body of knowledge was also described. Consideration was given to the summary, limitations, recommendations, and conclusions of the study, and was based on the findings with the support that children heading families may need.

The purpose of this study was to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. Focus group discussions, in-depth face-to-face interviews, observations, and field notes were combined with a qualitative method for data collection. Unstructured interviews were conducted with children heading families and their relatives. Focus group discussions were utilized to get information from community members about the support they provide and the approaches they take into consideration to enhance support for children heading families. The population included children heading families, children's relatives, and community members residing in the Vhembe and Mopani districts who meet the characteristics of the phenomenon under study. Purposive sampling was done to select ten children heading families from each of the two selected districts of Vhembe and Mopani between the ages of 13 and 18. The researcher intends to conduct 10 focus group discussions with the community members but, due to data saturation 8 focus group discussions were conducted from the two districts, Vhembe and Mopani in Limpopo province.

The purpose of this study was to develop strategies that will improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province. South Africa. Table 7.1 Indicates the summary of the study.

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7.2 Summary of the Study

Table 7.1: Summary of the Study Chapters

Chapter	Explanation
1	**Overview of the Study** This chapter introduced the study, discussed the background, problem statement, rationale of the study, significance of the study, purpose and objectives of the study, research questions, definitions of concepts, research structure of dissertation, and summary. The purpose of the study was to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. A qualitative approach using exploratory and descriptive design was used to explore the challenges experienced by children heading families and the support provided by relatives and community members. The objectives of this study were organized into three phases. The objectives of the study were to: **Phase 1**: **Explore and Describe:** • the challenges experienced by children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. • the support given to children heading families by their relatives and community members in Limpopo province, South Africa. **Phase 2: Development of Strategies:** • to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. **Phase 3: Validation of Strategies:** • to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. In summary, all objectives of the study were met.

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2	**Literature Review and Contextual Theoretical Framework** The literature review of studies conducted by different researchers on the same topic was presented in chapter two together with Betty Neuman's contextual theoretical framework as a model of support. The challenges experienced by children heading families were discussed. The challenges were listed as follows: educational challenges, lack of adult care and support, negative emotional impact, poverty and hunger, and negative psycho-social effects. The strategies to support children heading families were highlighted, namely: educational support, adult care support, poverty and hunger support, psychosocial support, and health and wellbeing support and summary.
3	**Research Methodology** Chapter three discussed the research methodology, qualitative research approach, study design, study settings, study population, target population, accessible population, sample and sampling, sample size, sample of districts, inclusion criteria of the three participant groups and exclusion criteria, data collection tool, central questions, in-depth face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions, data collection method, data collection, data management and analysis, pre-test, delimitations and limitations of the study, dissemination, and implementation of the study. In summary, attention was given to methods of ensuring trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.
4	**Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Discussions** The fourth chapter covered data analysis, interpretation, and discussions that concentrated on the demographic profile of children heading families, children's relatives, and community members. It underlined the themes, and sub-themes derived from the three groups of participants, which are listed below: Challenges experienced by children heading families whose both parents have passed on.

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The following themes and sub-themes emerged:

Psychological support challenges

- Parental absence
- Endless grieving and mourning
- Lack of love, care, and warmth

Financial support challenges

- Inadequate material resources
- Food insecurity
- Child support grant hindrances

Social support challenges

- A need for mentorship
- Overburden with home chores
- Discipline and nurturing
- Role adaptation

Health care, safe and secured environmental support challenges

- Poor housing conditions
- Health-related challenges

Educational support challenges

- Inadequate educational support
- Unavailability of scholar transportation

Spiritual and religious support challenges

- Spiritual and religious support

The following themes and sub-themes emerged:

Psychological support

- Encouragement for regular church attendance
- Development of a meaningful relationship with children heading families

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Financial support

- Minimal financial support
- Provision of food supply and other basic requirements
- Housing maintenance

Social support

- Transference of cultural values
- Guidance and supervision
- Assistance with household chores

Educational support

- Encouragement and motivation towards education
- Study assistance

Support Provided by Community Members to Children Heading Families.

The following themes and sub-themes emerged:

Psychological support

- Provision of comfort

Financial support

- Supply of vegetables

Social support

- Application of Ubuntu
- Neighbors serve as community watchdogs.
- Traditional leaders' involvement

Educational support

- Supply of school uniform

Strategies to improve support for children heading families.

The following themes and sub-themes emerged:

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	A need for psychological support strategies • Trauma counseling • Provision of drop-in care center services • Provision of love, guidance, and care **A need for financial support strategies** • Regular supply of food parcels • Establishment of fundraising organizations • Provision of a well-balanced diet • Reviewing of child support grant policies **A need for social support strategies** • Proper socialization and nurturing • Reinforcement of good moral values • Instilling an attitude of resilience **A need for educational support strategies** • Equipped educators with skills to support children heading families • Provision of various educational skills to children heading families • Establishment of man-to-man empowerment programs **A need for safety and security support strategies** • Provision of proper housing structures • Visibility of police officers and proactive participation of community policing forums • Neighborhood watchdogs Inadequate support provided by children's relatives and community members prompted the development of strategies by the community members to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.
5	**Development of Strategies to Improve Support for Children Heading Families**

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	Chapter Five focused on the development of strategies based on the themes and sub-themes that emerged from challenges experienced by children heading families and the support provided by children's relatives and community members. Following the brainstorming session, six key steps of effective brainstorming strategies that concentrated on objectives and associated activities were developed. The six steps of the brainstorming process are listed as follows: ✓ Step 1: Creation of a friendly and comfortable environment. ✓ Step 2: Identifying the problem. ✓ Step 3: Generate ideas. ✓ Step 4: Sharing ideas. ✓ Step 5: Narrowing the list of ideas. ✓ Step 6: Making an action plan. Six strategies to improve support for children heading families were developed: ➢ Psychological support strategies ➢ Financial support strategies ➢ Social support strategies ➢ Educational support strategies ➢ Health care, safety, and security support strategies ➢ Spiritual and religious support strategies In summary, chapter five focused on the development of strategies to improve support for children heading families. The developed strategies were based on the challenges experienced by children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.
6	**Validation of the Developed Strategies**

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	Chapter Six validated the strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province using the e-Delphi technique. The following headings were taken into consideration when validating strategies, namely: Methodology, validation of the developed strategies, study population, sampling of the district, objectives of the e-Delphi technique, characteristics of the e-Delphi technique, e-Delphi technique process, data collection in the e-Delphi technique, reaching consensus, data analysis measures to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations modified e-Delphi results, and discussion of e-Delphi final round results and summary. Formulated questions sent to the expert panelists as listed are: **Applicability**: Are the strategies applicable to improve support for children heading families? **Clarity:** Are the strategies to improve support for children heading families clear, easily understandable, unambiguous, and logical? **Relevance:** Are the strategies to improve support relevant to children heading families? **Comprehensiveness:** Do the strategies indicate an extensive understanding of the support for children heading families? **Effectiveness:** Will the strategies enable the children's relatives, community members, and various stakeholders to be able to provide effective and appropriate support? **Flexibility:** Will the strategies empower the children's relatives, community members, and various stakeholders to provide support to children heading families? **Acceptability:** Are the strategies to improve support for children heading families realistic and in line with the Children's Act 38 of 2005 of South Africa?
7	**Summary, limitations, recommendations, and conclusions** Chapter Seven discussed the study's summary of how the study was able to accomplish the objectives stated in Chapter One. The purpose of the study, conclusions of the study, the strength of the study, delimitations and limitations of the study, the unique contribution of the study, recommendations of the study, plan for dissemination of the study, and summary of the study were stated clearly.

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7.3 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to envision the development of strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. The challenges experienced by children heading families were explored and described, supported by relevant literature and this provided the basis for the theoretical framework of Betty Neuman's.

7.4 Conclusions of the Study

The study was evaluated based on the rationale, purpose, and objectives of the study and how the objectives were reached as described in Chapter One.

7.5 Conclusions Related to the Study Objectives

The objective is referred to as something that one's efforts and actions are intended to attain or accomplish (Collins English Dictionary, 2023). The rationale of this study was to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. The researcher managed to bring to the fore the support needed by children heading families namely: Psychological support, financial support, social support, educational support, health care, safety and security support, and spiritual and religious support. Numerous studies were conducted regarding challenges experienced by children heading families, but little has been researched on the development of strategies to improve support for them. The findings of this study may contribute to the body of knowledge in the support of children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa

The objectives as set out in Chapter One were evaluated separately as follows.

The objectives of the study were comprised of three phases.

- **Phase 1**

❖ To explore and describe the challenges experienced by children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

❖ To explore and describe the support provided by children's relatives and community members to children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

7.6 Challenges Experienced by Children Heading Families whose Both Parents have Passed on.

Children heading families face a range of difficulties that have an impact on their academic performance and cause some of them to drop out of school. It has been shown that some children heading families were resilient because they started to think that eventually, God would deliver them from their suffering. Getting enough support from their relatives and community

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members was difficult for them because of their financial limitations and unemployment. Phase 1 was in line with the first and the second objectives of the study.

7.7 Support Provided by Relatives to Children-Heading Families.

A few of the relatives of the children are eager to support households headed by children, but they are unable to do so since they are both jobless and insecure financially in addition to having their children. Most of the children's relatives live quite far away from the sites where children heading families stay because they must use public transportation, which makes it challenging for them to visit them regularly and provide continuous support. The third objective aligned with Phase 2, which saw the completion of support strategy development.

7.8 Support Provided by Community Members to Children Heading Families

Community members are unable to provide adequate psychological, financial, social and educational support to children heading families. In phase 3, community members developed the support strategies through focus group discussions.

7.9 Strategies to Improve Support for Children-Heading Families.

Different community members, traditional leaders, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders have developed various strategies to support children heading families. Expert panelists validated the strategies through a succession of rounds till the fourth round concluded with validation finalized. Phase 3's fourth round saw the process end.

7.10 Summary of the Findings of Phase 1

These objectives were met during the first phase of the study wherein the challenges experienced by children heading families were explored and described through in-depth interviews. The interviews were initiated by asking one central question which directed the structure of the interview and more questions that emanated from the discussion were explored through probing.

Children heading families revealed that they experience numerous challenges in their lives. They further stated that they have no one to share their pain with anyone and this harms their psychological well-being. Unstructured interviews were conducted with the children's relatives who revealed that they are unable to provide support to children heading families as they are also struggling with their children and are unemployed. However, they have identified various support that children heading families need. Focus group discussions were conducted by the community members.

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7.11 Summary of the Findings of Phase 2

7.11.1 The Objective of Phase 2

To develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

7.12 Summary of the Findings of Phase 3

Phase 2 addressed the second objective which was to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. Data was collected from eight (8) focus group discussions which were comprised of (18) eighteen females and (12) twelve males holding different positions in their respective communities. Focus group discussions were conducted in Mopani and Vhembe district municipalities. Phase 2 focused on what community members provide to children heading families and the development of strategies to improve support for children heading families in the Limpopo province of South Africa. The results of the refinement were qualitatively analyzed and presented in chapter 6. Strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province were developed as a fulfillment of objective 2 of the study were finally developed.

7.12.1 The Objective of Phase 3

To Validate the developed strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa, using the e-Delphi technique.

7.13 Summary of the Findings in Phase 3 Using e-Delphi Technique

The developed strategies were validated using the e-Delphi technique which consisted of four rounds of both written oral and questions that allowed expert panelists to give their opinions freely. Triangulation was accomplished by using different expert panelists with different professional backgrounds. The support strategies were refined and validated following the criteria of validity, reliability, applicability, clarity, relevance, comprehensiveness, flexibility, and acceptability.

7.14 Strength of the Study

To reach a consensus, triangulation was carried out using a variety of data collection techniques, including the e-Delphi approach. To create a thorough understanding of phenomena, triangulation is the use of numerous methods or data sources in qualitative research. According to Babbie and Mouton (2020), triangulation enhances the credibility of qualitative research: ensuring compatibility between the constructed reality of respondents and the attributes

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assigned to them by the researcher. It enables the researchers to strive to be objective and do justice to the object of study.

7.15 Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Delimitations are the boundaries imposed by the researcher to restrict the focus of the study through carefully considered parameters and research boundaries (Theofanidis and Fountouki, 2018). Delimitations help to narrow down the study and make it more manageable and relevant to the research goal (Jansen, 2022). The study focused on districts Mopani and Vhembe and the rural areas within the two districts. Limitations reflect the shortcomings of the study, based on practical or theoretical constraints that the research faced. The researcher focused on children heading families between the age of 13-18 years and excluded those above that age group. In this study the researcher only included children whose parents died and are heading families, residing at the Mopani and Vhembe district. Orphans who are staying with extended families were not included in the study. The researcher excluded other districts in another province as a limitation to help narrow down the study and make it more manageable and relevant to the research goal.

7.16 Unique Contribution of the Study

Phase 1: Children heading families would have the opportunity to share their challenging experiences. Children's relatives would be able to provide adequate support to children heading families. The study discovered that children's relatives are unable to provide adequate support to children heading families

Phase 2: Community members would be able to explore the support they provide to children heading families. Once community members identified the needs of children heading families, community members would be able to develop strategies that would improve support to children heading families. The study discovered that community members do not adequately provide support to children heading families.

Phase 3: The expert panelists validated the developed strategies using the e-Delphi technique.

7.17 Recommendations of the Study

7.17.1 Psychological Support

- The mental stability of learners from children heading families is very crucial, schools should have psychological support programs including trauma counseling sessions and should be monitored by the Government to guarantee.
- implementation and perfect psychological stability of children heading families.

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7.17.2 Department of Social Development

- Community members monitor events and serve as watchdogs to protect children heading families from dangerous situations.
- Members of the community should exhibit love, trust, compassion, empathy, and care for the children heading families living in their local areas.
- The traditional leaders play a crucial role in the communities and should be more involved in matters involving children heading families in their villages, and ought to have more authority over their roles and responsibilities.
- More encouragement should be given to children's relatives so that they would form strong, lasting bonds with the children's heading families and not abandon them to fend for themselves.

7.17.3 Department of Education

- More focus should be placed on empowering educators to deal with students from children heading families.
- Teachers should be able to recognize children heading families who are exhibiting psychological difficulties, and they should be referred to the appropriate place for help on time.
- Children-heading families should not be charged for tertiary institution registration or application costs, and there should be a sign stating that the application forms were submitted by children-heading families.
- Children heading families should be given a platform within civic and parliamentary space to participate in decision-making processes and articulate issues that directly affect them.
- The government should provide financial aid to secondary school pupils from child-headed backgrounds and those pursuing higher education.
- Libraries and availability of wi-fi services to be provided by the municipality in rural villages, as it is costly and unaffordable for children heading families to go to libraries that are far from their communities.
- Motivational and inspirational programs in schools for learners will encourage learning and understanding as this may give hope to children heading families,
- The selling of drugs and other harmful substances to learners at the school gates should be monitored strictly by the police as children from child-headed backgrounds do not have adults who provide supervision.

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- Children heading families walk long distances to and from school, scholar transportation needs to be accessible and regularly checked for both functionality and safety and where the service is not available it should be in progress and made known to children.
- Supplementary stationery such as school bags, calculators, and dictionaries are to be provided to children heading families by the government.
- The Department of Education should collaborate with community members, traditional leaders, NGOs, and other government departments in assisting child-headed children.
- The Department of Education should attempt to address the needs required and set clear policies which will provide a distinction between orphaned vulnerable children and child-headed children.
- Initiatives that provide children heading families with the skills they need to succeed in a range of areas, such as budgeting, fundamental personal hygiene, physical development, teen pregnancies, and other social ills.
- Traditional leaders should be included in the school governing body (SGB) to help principals and teachers maintain discipline among children heading families' students as well as the other students in the classroom.

7.17.4 Department of Social Development

- The Department of Social Development should evaluate its child support grant policies and come up with ways to ensure that families headed by children are not treated unfairly when they apply for child support grants.
- The Department of Social Development (DSD) ought to think about providing households with children with free basic power.
- Social workers are to visit the homes of children's heading families regularly to constantly monitor the challenges faced by children.

7.17.5 Department of Agriculture

- Children should be taught gardening and other farming-related skills by the Department of Agriculture.
- The Department of Agriculture should conduct soil analyses in the residences of families with children to help with planting decisions and provide seeds and adequate water supply.
- The Department of Agriculture should collaborate with civic, and traditional leaders, community members, and various stakeholders on how to help children heading families to overcome poverty using introducing farming skills.

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7.17.6 Recommendation related to the Department of Sports and Recreational (DSR) Support

- Improved planning and oversight of programs that assist children, especially those who are heads of families, since this will improve their mental health and reduce stress.
- Participation of NGOs, residents, civic leaders, and youth in the planning of events for their communities

7.17.7 Recommendations Related to Health Care, Safety, and Security Support

- Children heading families should be made known by the police and the community policing forum of where they reside so that protection can always be provided.
- Protecting the safety of children heading families should be the Government's top priority and responsibility, especially in villages.
- The political commitment to consistently placing the health and education of learners as a priority on the national agenda cannot be over-emphasized.
- School health services should be looked at so that learners in schools should get an opportunity to be assessed regularly by health professionals and those who needed further referrals to the appropriate institution be done promptly.

7.17.8 Recommendations Related to Further Research

The focus of this research was to explore and describe the challenges experienced by children heading families and explore the support provided by the relatives and community members to develop strategies to improve support for children heading families.

- Future researchers can widen the scope and conduct the study in other provinces, rural, and urban areas to explore the trends that it might take concerning the intensity and kind of support that children heading families may need.

7.18 Plan for Dissemination of the Results

Articles will be published in accredited journals and will be presented at conferences, workshops, and seminars through oral presentations. The copies of the thesis will be submitted to the University of Venda Library and other various Government Departments, such as DoH, DoE, and DSD in the two districts of Vhembe and Mopani that policy developers make references when reviewing their existing policies relating to strategies to improve support for children heading families. The findings of this study will be presented to the traditional leaders and the community members in the two districts Mopani and Vhembe rural villages where the

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research was conducted to make them aware of the support that children heading families are desperately in need of.

7.19 Summary

Chapter seven provides the conclusion of the study. The emphasis of the chapter was to reflect on the study to see if the anticipated objectives were certainly achieved. This was done by looking into the aim of the study and the rationale. Limitations, justifications of the study, and recommendations were also provided. In all the phases of the study, the researcher has well-maintained the procedures and ethical standards of the research. In conclusion, the researcher can say the study aroused some sad memories, especially when children heading families shared the pain of living a life with no parents or any adult caregiver for the rest of their lives. It is believed that the implementation of the developed support strategies will greatly benefit not only child-headed children from Vhembe and Mopani district Municipalities but throughout the whole Limpopo province in broad.

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ANNEXURE A: Ethical Clearance Certificate

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Ms. PAS Makhado

STUDENT NO:
17023766

PROJECT TITLE: **Strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.**

ETHICAL CLEARENCE NO: **FHS/22/PDC/07/1907**

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr. ND Ndou	UNIVEN, Advanced Nursing Science	Supervisor
Prof. NH Shilubane	UNIVEN, Advanced Nursing Science	Co- Supervisor
Dr. JL Mafumo	UNIVEN, Advanced Nursing Science	Co- Supervisor
Ms. PAS Makhado	University of Venda	Investigator – Student

Type: **Doctoral Research**
Risk: **Minimal risk to humans, animals, or environment (Category 2)**
Approval Period: **July 2022 – July 2024**

The Human and Clinical Trails Research Ethics Committee (HCTREC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and 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 upon completion of the project
  - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
  - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as submitted 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 of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or 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 completion of 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 international conventions deem it necessary

ISSUED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Date Considered: May 2022

Name of the HCTREC Chairperson of the Committee: Prof MS Maputle

Signature MSMaputle

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
2022 -08- 18
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University of Venda
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ANNEXURE B: Consent Form

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

UNIVEN INFORMED CONSENT

Letter of information

Title of the Research Study: Strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

Principal Investigator/s/ researcher: Makhado Princess Anne Sheilah
Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Prof N.D. Ndou.

: Prof N.H. Shilubane

: Dr. L.J. Mafumo

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: Challenges affecting children heading families is a phenomenon that has now reached a point that cannot be overlooked as parents and families are key to the well-being of children. The phenomenon is increasing at a fast rate and is experienced both nationally and internationally. A lack of adequate support and social structures within families, schools, and communities often characterize the negative life experiences of OVC (Pillay, 2020). The researcher during her studies for a master's degree in 2018-2019 in Makhado Municipality, Vhembe District identified that children heading families experience numerous challenges and there is nonexistence support to address their needs.

Outline of the Procedures: The researcher will make appointments with participants in advance to set the date, time, and venue for the interviews. Before the commencement of the interview, the researcher will explain the purpose, and ethical issues regarding their participation in the research, then the participants choose to sign or not to sign the consent/assent form. The researcher will also ask the interviewees for permission to record the interview proceedings as a tape record will be used. The researcher will collect data through unstructured in-depth face-to-face interviews and focus interviews with community members. This will allow children-heading families, relatives, and community members to narrate and explain the challenges and strategies to improve support for children-heading families. An interview guide with one central question will be used for all participants. Then probing questions will be asked, determined by

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the response from the participants. An interview session will last for 30-45 minutes for individual interviews, focus group will take 60 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: Participants who want to withdraw during the interview will be allowed to do so and no longer form part of the study.

Benefits: Children heading family lives will be improved through collaboration with community members, relatives, and various stakeholders.

Reasons why the Participant may be withdrawn from the Study: The participant has the right to withdraw at any stage of the research if they wish to do so. There is no harm or threats expected in participating in the study or to withdraw from the study.

Remuneration: No remunerations will be offered.

Costs of the Study: Participants will not be expected to pay anything towards the study.

Confidentiality: To ensure confidentiality, the Interview will take place in a quiet private place.

The anonymity will also be safeguarded by using code numbers or pseudonyms throughout the study. No information will be linked to your name.

Research-related Injury: In case of research-related injury, the researcher will withdraw the participant from the study, refer to the Doctor, and report the event to the managers of the supervisors at Univen for assistance. No compensation is available.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

Please contact the researcher Makhado P.A.S. at (0763556296) my promoter Prof N.D. Ndou at (tel no.060 613 5281) or the University Research Ethics Committee Secretariat on 015 962 9058. Complaints can be reported to the Director: of Research and Innovation, Prof GE Ekosse on 015 962 8313 or Georges Ivo.Ekosse@univen.ac.za

General:

Potential participants must be assured that participation is voluntary and the approximate number of participants to be included should be disclosed. A copy of the information letter should be issued to participants. The information letter and consent form must be translated and provided in the primary spoken language of the research population

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Consent

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, (*name of researcher*), about the nature, conduct, benefits, and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number……
- I have also received, read, and understood the above-written information (*Participant Letter of Information*) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials, and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- Given the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerized system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had enough opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Signature: _____

I, _____

(*Name of researcher*) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully

Informed about the nature, conduct, and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Signature: _____

Full Name of Witness (If applicable): _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Signature: _____

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable): _____

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Date: _____ Time: _____ Signature: _____

Please note the following:

Research details must be provided in a clear, simple, and culturally appropriate manner and prospective participants should be helped to arrive at an informed decision by use of appropriate language (grade 10 level- use Flesch Reading Ease Scores on Microsoft Word), selecting a non-threatening environment for interaction and the availability of peer counseling (Department of Health, 2004)

If the potential participant is unable to read/illiterate, then a right thumb print is required, and an impartial witness, who is literate and knows the participant e.g. parent, sibling, friend, pastor, etc. should verify in writing, duly signed that informed verbal consent was obtained (Department of Health, 2004).

If anyone makes a mistake completing this document e.g. a wrong date or spelling mistake, a new document has to be completed. The incomplete original document has to be kept in the participant's file and not thrown away, and copies thereof must be issued to the participant.

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ANNEXURE C: Information Sheet

TITLE: Strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

I am a PhD student at the University of Venda in the School of Health Sciences. I am presently conducting a research study on the above-mentioned topic. Therefore, I am requesting you to participate in the study. However, the purpose of the study is to explore challenges experienced by children heading families and develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province of South Africa.

There will be no harm inflicted, or threats exerted to you while participating in the study. We will only meet during an interview session. The interview will last from 30-45 minutes with individual interviews and 60 minutes with focus group interviews. All the information that you will be giving will be treated confidentially.

In case you decide to participate, you choose voluntarily with the full understanding that if you no longer wish to continue before or during the interview you may withdraw without any penalty. A voice recorder will be used for voice recording during an interview and all the answers that you provide will not be attached or be consistently linked with your name as codes will be used. The researcher will continually and tentatively analyze data to determine what is important or not. Records such as field notes jotted notes and diaries will be used during the interview. All data collected will be kept safe under lock and key only the researcher and the supervisor will have access.

The above information concerning the research study will be explained to the participants and the participant fully understands the benefits, risks, and obligations involved when participating in the study. In case you have any inquiries about the study, you are free to call me on 076 355 6296.

Researcher's name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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ANNEXURE D: Assent form

Consent for Participation in Research.

I, _____, voluntarily participate in the study on strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without coercion or penalty.

Signature of the participant: _____ Date: _____

Researcher signature: _____ Date: _____

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ANNEXURE E: Letter to ask Permission from the Traditional Leaders

Eng: Makhado P.A.S

P.O. BOX 1462

Louis Trichardt

0920

Contact No. +27766401280

The Community Traditional Leader

Dear Sir/Madam

Request for permission to conduct research.

I hereby wish to request permission to conduct a research study in your village. I am presently a PhD degree student at the University of Venda under the School of Health Sciences. The University requires that a student should conduct a research study in Limpopo province. The study will be conducted from children heading families, relatives, and community members.

The results may assist the communities in understanding the challenges and strategies to improve support for children heading families. Participation in the study is voluntary as participants will not be forced to take part. All information regarding the study will be given to the participants. Aspects regarding ethical consideration will be adhered to. Participants who may decide to withdraw during the study will not be penalized or threatened. All information collected will be kept confidential. For more inquiry contact Ms. Princess Anne-Sheileh Makhado, with the Student contact number: 0783553286.

Thanking you in advanced

Yours Sincerely

Research Name: P.A.S Makhado

Date: 12/09/2022

DEPARTMENT OF COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE
INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT & TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS
MPHEZA TRADITIONAL COUNCIL
2022 -09- 12
MOPANI DISTRICT SUPPORT CENTRE

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ANNEXURE F: Letter to ask Permission from the Traditional Leaders

Enq: Makhado P.A.S

P.O. BOX 1462
Louis Trichardt
0920

Contact No. +27766401260

The Community Traditional Leader

Dear Sir/Madam

Request for permission to conduct research.

I hereby wish to request permission to conduct a research study in your village. I am presently a PhD degree student at the University of Venda under the School of Health Sciences. The University requires that a student should conduct a research study in Limpopo province. The study will be conducted from children heading families, relatives, and community members.

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Thank you in advanced

Yours Sincerely

Research Name: Makhado Date: 14/09/2022

KHOSI RADZILANI N.O.
(ZWORUNDAVHALALA)
2022 -09- 14
Vhulaudzi Village, 0926
Cell: 079 533 2070
Sign:

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ANNEXURE G: Central Question for Children Heading Families.

May you kindly share with me challenges that you experience as a child heading a family?

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ANNEXURE H: Central Question for Children's Relatives

May you kindly share with the support you provide as a relative to children heading families who are related to you?

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ANNEXURE I: Central Questions for Community Members

May you kindly as community members share with me the support provides to children heading families?

May you kindly share with me the strategies to improve support of children heading families?

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ANNEXURE J: Letter Of Invitation to Experts Participating in the Outlining of the Instruction, Study Objectives, Summary of the Findings.

Dear expert participants

Invitation to participate in the study of the development of strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province.

I am a PhD STUDENT AT THE University of Venda, Department of advanced nursing science, conducting a study on the **development of strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province** under the supervision of Professor N.D. Ndou Professor N.H Shilubane and Dr. D.L. Mafumo

The specific objectives that formed the basis of this study are the following according to the three phases:

Phase 1

- Explore and describe the challenges experienced by children heading families in Limpopo Province, South Africa.
- Explore and describe the support given to children heading families in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Phase 2

- To develop strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Phase 3

- To validate strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa.

The study is conducted in phases.

Phase 1: Face-to-face in-depth interview of children heading families.

Phase 1: Face-to-face in-depth interviews of children's relatives.

Phase 2: Focus group discussions with community members developing strategies.

Phase 3: Delphi technique by the expert panelists validating strategies.

Signature of the Expert……. Date…….

Researcher's Signature……. Date…….

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ANNEXURE K: Confirmation by Independent Coder

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

PROF AH MAVHANDU-MUDZUSI HAS CO-CODED THE QUALITATIVE DATA

FOR

MAKHADO PAS STUDENT NUMBER: *17023766*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

TITLE OF THE STUDY: ***STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN HEADING FAMILIES IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA***

I declare that the candidate and I have reached a consensus on the themes reflected by the data. I further declare that adequate data saturation was achieved as evidenced by repeating themes.

INDEPENDENT CODING BY:

Signature: *Date: 2023/ 06/ 04*

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ANNEXURE L: Confirmation by Language Editor

F&M Editing Services
"Your Success, Our Priority"

Proof of editing

Date: 29 February 2024

This is to certify that I have edited a doctoral Dissertation for the following candidate

Name: Makhado PAS
Student number: *17023766*

Title: STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN HEADING FAMILIES IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

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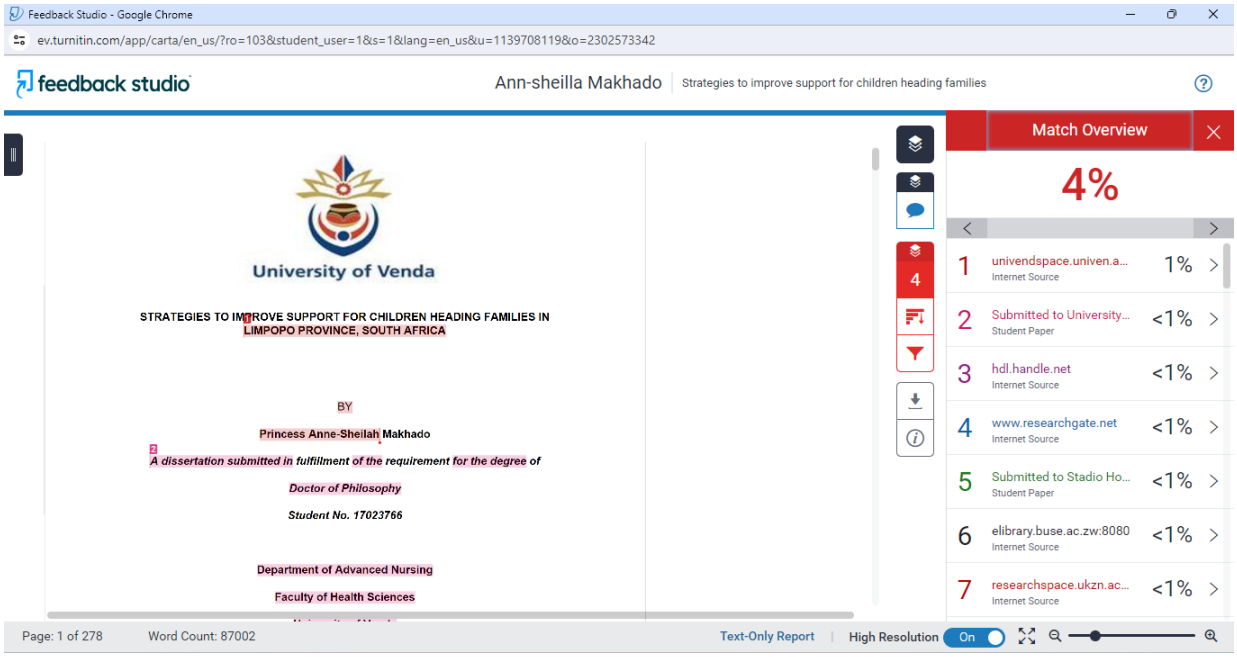
ANNEXURE M: Turnitin Report



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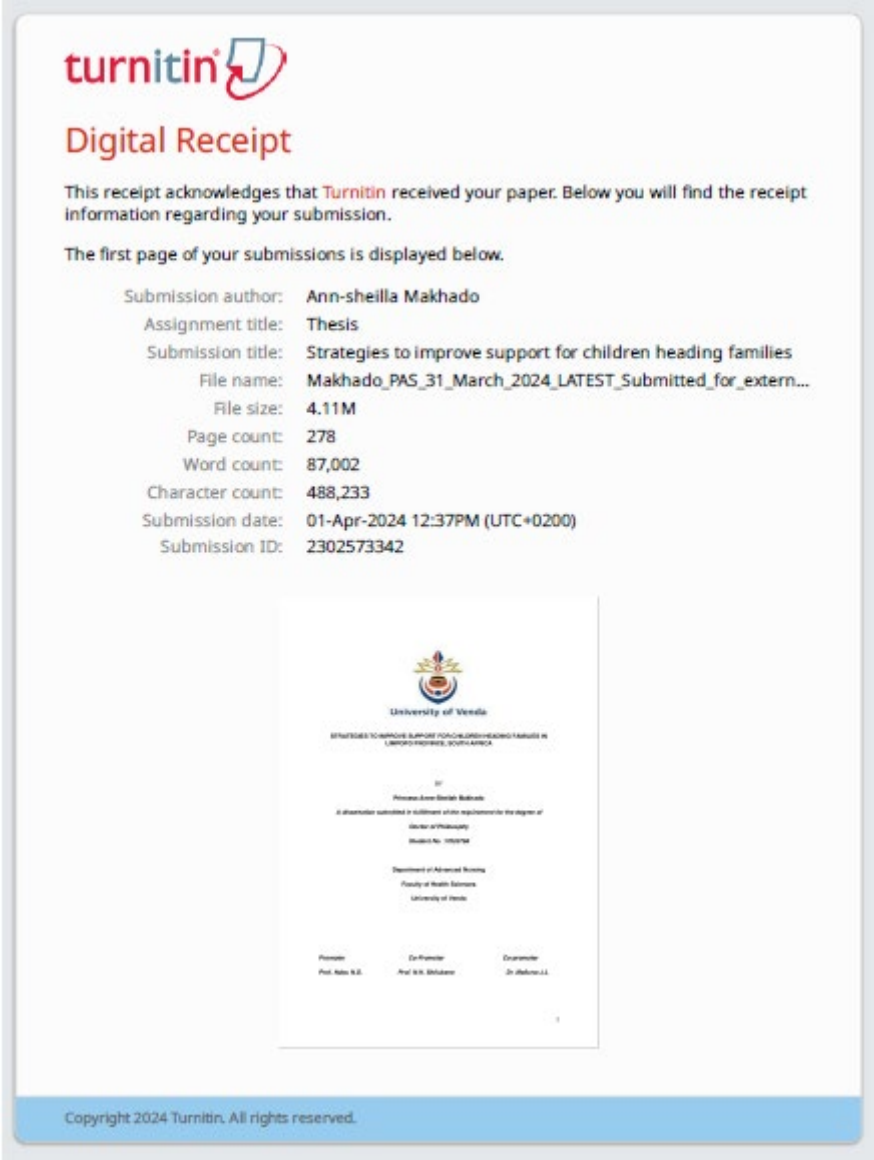
ANNEXURE N: Turnitin Digital Receipt



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ANNEXURE O: Interview Transcripts

Interview Transcripts from Children Heading Families

All questions asked by the researcher were posed to every child with further probing.

R-Researcher **C**- Child (Participant)

(Every child was greeted, and they responded)

R: "Presently I am a student registered for a doctoral degree with the University of Venda. I have chosen a topic: Strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province, South Africa. The purpose of my study is to explore the challenges experienced by children heading families and develop strategies to improve support for them in Limpopo province. I hope you recall that we met at the chief's kraal last time to arrange for today's interview. Do you allow me to start with the interview?"

(Every child agreed to participate willingly).

(The researcher informed all participants about the importance of the assent form and the reason for signing it prior commencement of the interview).

R: "I will request you to sign an assent form as evidence that you have given the concern to participate, but you can still withdraw anytime you feel like without any penalty. The information that you will share with me will be treated confidentially as pseudonyms will be used. The information related to the interview will only be accessible to me and the promoters. Recorded information will be erased on the completion of transcribing the tape. This is a tape recorder I will audio tape the interviews so that I may not omit anything that will be said as all information should be captured. Do you allow me to use the audio tape recorder?"

(All participants agreed).

R: "Do you have any questions before we start?"

(No participant had any questions before starting with the interview).

R: "Kindly share with me the challenges you experience as a child heading a family."

C1: "Heading a family as a child is very difficult because I am still too young to take this role as I must look after my two siblings and schooling. The role that has been done by my mother now I have to do it and become a brother to my siblings. Here at home, there is no longer somebody to give us warmth, advise us as young people. I am forever missing and longing for my mother. Lack of food, clothing, and someone with whom you can share the pain that you come across

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in life. Sometimes I don't know what to do when facing the challenges of not having enough food, and not being able to guide my siblings, not having enough money to buy basic items, such as electricity, data, and airtime. There is no water we have to buy water from those people who have boreholes in their yards. Many times, during the night I get afraid because if someone attacks us, we can be killed, and no one will ever know what happened to us as you can see there is no adult in the house."

C4: "There is no water in our yard or nearby. The only place we can find water is when we purchase it from neighbors who have boreholes in their yards. It is really challenging because we need water for cooking, cleaning, and occasional laundry and we do not have enough money to buy water."

R: "Kindly share with me if is there anyone whom you can talk to whenever you face some challenges."

C2: "No, there is no one to talk to since the death of my mother. I have never found anyone to talk to."

C7: "The community members do not visit us so that we feel supported. We experience fear whenever we want to approach them because we do not know what they will say, they are aware that we are living alone."

C8: "Even our closest relatives are unable to help us in any way. Even though they are aware that we are raising ourselves without our parents, the community does nothing to help us. We are alive thanks to God's kindness."

C9: "I do all the household chores, like cooking, sweeping, laundry, fetching wood from the field, and drawing some water without any rest. It becomes very hard to do all these chores and concentrate on my studies."

C2: "If ever there was someone, we could talk to in case we run short of urgent needs such as food, toiletry, school items, electricity, and bread it would make our lives much better. We have a great need for mentorship in our daily lives, as we are still children."

R: "Please kindly share with me how you cope as you say there is no one to talk to."

C1: "Sometimes I don't sleep when thinking about our situation and this is preventing me from concentrating in class."

C14: "We need adult figures to teach us good morals as we don't have parents. There is no one to discipline us whenever we are doing wrong things."

R: "Please share with me how the death of your mother affected you"

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C4: “Eshhhhhhh, why did God take my mother hi hi hi I am thinking of my mother. No one to talk to us. Life is tough, I better die and follow my mother, it’s very painful to live a life without a mother. I miss my mother every day and always admire other children with their mothers whenever I see them. Why me?”

C6: "I'm thinking of my mother, who, why did God take her away? Nobody to converse with. Life is hard; I should die and go with my mother since being without a mother is incredibly awful. Every day, I long for my mother, and I always find myself admiring other youngsters who are with their mothers. Life is really hard without a parent."

C2: "I am in grade 9. I recall my mother's death on October 10, 2016, quite clearly. While my mother was giving birth, both the baby and my mother died. This came to me as a shock as I was expecting my mother to come home with the new-born baby but, that never happened and when I was told that she was no more I became confused as the pain was unbearable, and even now that pain has never vanished. I sometimes fail to concentrate in class, and this is affecting my school performance, I haven’t shared this with anyone.”

C12: "Playing the role of a parent is incredibly challenging because you can't correct your siblings when they act inappropriately. I don't want any youngster to be in a situation where they have to head the family without an adult to help them."

R: Kindly share with me how you cope with schoolwork and taking care of your siblings.”

C5: “I am not coping at all. I am 18 years old and doing grade 11 which I am repeating due to my mother’s death. I even thought of dropping out from school since I had lost hope. My mother died when I was 16 years doing grade 10 and my performance was quite satisfactory. The year that she passed on I failed because I couldn’t concentrate as I was always thinking and longing for her. Looking after my two siblings is also a challenge as they are still young, a boy coming after me is 13 years, and my little sister is 9 years old. The 13 years is doing grade 7 and the 9 years is doing grade 3.”

C7: "Growing up without parents is not a nice situation for me. I am supposed to take care of my siblings. I am compelled to take off my siblings and need parental guidance and advice. To make matters worse, I’m forced to discipline my siblings, who occasionally disobey me.”

C9: “I am 17 years old doing grade 9 which I am repeating as did not pass due to my mother’s death. I used to perform well in class. My mother died when I was 16 years old, and that year I failed because I was always thinking about her. My younger sister is nine years old, and my younger brother is a thirteen-years old. While the 9-year-old is in grade 3, the 13-year-old is in grade 7.”

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R: “Kindly share with me what are the challenges you face concerning your education.”

C1: “Sometimes my classmates complain that I exhaust their data since I don’t make any contribution. Purchasing data is challenging since I occasionally have to enlist the help of a few of my classmates to conduct mobile internet searches for information.”

C2: “Although some teachers are understanding, it is difficult to talk to them and express my concerns owing to a lack of privacy. When I talk to my educator about what I am going through, it is not just a straightforward exchange. Some of the educators don’t understand us since they show no empathy.”

C3: “There is no library within the distance of 5 kilometers. The one I am aware of is a bit too far from our area, and getting there to-and-fro will cost money. If one has some money for transportation, at least occasionally one could go and do some research, especially when the teachers give assignments and when preparing for tests and exams.”

C5: "With the difficulties we encounter daily and the inability to meet our basic needs, which is made worse by the abundance of household chores, this severely affects our educational performance and forces us to drop out of school."

C6: “It is difficult to buy data because sometimes I am forced to ask some of my classmates to get information from the internet using their cell phones. This makes me feel so small. There is no library close by that one could sometimes go and search for information especially when the teachers give us homework and when preparing for exam.”

C7: “The school that I attend is far and I walk daily to and fro and most of the time I arrive at school tired. It’s even worse when it’s raining. I would wish to take public transport, but money is a challenge. Since I commute by foot and don't carry an umbrella on rainy days, my books and I arrive at school wet.”

C9: "With the difficulties we encounter on a daily basis and the inability to meet our basic needs, which is made worse by the abundance of household chores, this severely affects our educational performance and forces us to drop out of school."

C10: "Neither my school nor our community have a library. Finding information is difficult for children and can be discouraging. Because of the stressful atmosphere I live in, I also find it difficult to concentrate in class or when trying to complete homework. However, having a library close by would be incredibly beneficial.”

C11: “Travelling to school is a big problem, if I had enough money, I would prefer taking public transport because walking a long distance makes me feel exhausted and when arriving at school, one feels in need of rest before school starts.”

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C14: “We Walk to school since no money to pay for public transportation there and back. It is even not safe do walk to school as we hear a lot of girl children being raped and killed, so we feel unsafe walking to and fro to school. We don't have umbrellas to use on rainy days, so our books get wet, and we arrive at school being soaked.”

R: “May you kindly share with me if there is anyone giving you support and did you receive any counseling following your mother’s death?”

C7: “We receive support from my aunt who stays far away from us and has her own children that she looks after and is unemployed. She does not have any source of income. We have never seen anyone visiting us, either the community members or other relatives.”

R: “Will you mind if I can write you a letter and refer you to the social worker who I think will be able to help you?”

C8: “I will be more than willing to go and see a social worker, perhaps they will help me since sometimes I don’t sleep because of thinking a lot and that affect me from concentrating in the class.”

C9: "Basic necessities including mealie-meal, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, water, electricity, winter and summer clothing, school uniforms, blankets, beds and beddings, furniture, and curtains are always in short supply. It is not comfortable for my brother and I to sleep on the grass mats on the floor. I wish I had a bed so I could precisely arrange my blankets.”

R: “I heard you saying you buy water can you please share with me how you live without water?”

C10: “There is no tap water in our yard or nearer where we can draw water, the only place where we find water is when we buy from those people who have boreholes in their yards. It is very difficult because a tin of 25 litres charges us R1.00, we need water for cooking, cleaning and doing some washing. Most of the time we don’t have money neither to buy food.”

R: “I heard you talking about money to buy electricity, can you please share with me about that?”

C13 “Although it is extremely risky to enter the forest due to reports of attacks and fatalities happenings, we utilize electricity for lighting and some of the wood that we collect for cooking. We only go there because we have no other choice, even if it is not safe. Even though some villagers sell wood, we are unable to afford.”

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R: “Kindly share with me whether you receive child support grant as you said you struggle in buying the basic needs.”

C1: "I do receive a child support grant, but it doesn't cover all the necessary needs. I would also like to attend Saturday after-class sessions because I struggle with mathematics. However, I am unable to pay R350 per month, due to financial challenges I am unable to attend.”

C2: “I went to the nearest clinic with my aunt to apply of the grant but the social worker that we saw stated that I am not eligible for a child support grant since the social worker needed a copy of my father's identification of I which I don’t have. I was told my application would not be processed though I had my mother's death certificate and my birth certificate in possession.”

C3: “We usually do not have food to eat at home and most of the time we go to school hungry. Most of the days we sleep hungry, and this makes us unable to focus in class.”

C5: "Since I won't have enough money to pay for trips I've decided not to participate in any school-related activities Due to the cat that I am struggling to receive child support grant."

C5: "I was told by the social worker that I don't qualify for child support grants since they demanded my father's Identification copy. I therefore asked my uncle, if he knew my father, unfortunately he doesn't either, therefore I don't know who my father is. I have a birth certificate and my mother's death certificate in my possession, but the Department of Social Development could not approve my application as my grandmother accompanied me.”

C9: “When a student in grade 11 applies to colleges and universities, there is no money available to submit application forms. After completing grade 12, one once more faces difficulty, such as how to pay for future study.”

C10: “My grandmother is the one who receives our child support grant but, it is so minimal, it cannot be used to purchase more basic needs, she can only afford the little food that she can afford from the child support grant received, of which doesn’t last for a month.”

C11: "I used to receive a child support grant, although it has long since it has been discontinued for my younger brother. I can't meet all the basic needs with the money I receive. I tried to make a follow-up from the social worker’s office but up to now we haven’t received it.”

C12: “My brother and I receive a child support grant, but my little sister does not anymore. The matter has been reported to the social worker. The money we receive cannot cover all our needs for the entire month. Many times, we eat at school since we don’t have enough food in the house.”

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C14: “There is no food as we don’t eat breakfast and supper, we eat at school. Hunger makes us lose concentration in class and contributes to our school performances.”

C15: “Although my brother and I receive a child support grant, it is not enough to cover even our most basic needs.”

R: “I heard you saying you are afraid as you feel you are not safe, especially during the night, please, share with me what makes you afraid.”

C5: "There is no fence nor gate surrounding the yard, we cannot close the gate during the day when we are at school or at night while we are sleeping, it is simple for anyone who wants to harm us. Since there are no burglar bars on the windows or doors to protect us, it is simple for someone to break in.”

C6: "We require police assistance because we don't feel secure, particularly at night. Since the streets are always dark at night, we feel unsafe, and load shedding has made it worse. We use pit toilets; thus, it can be hazardous to use them when we need to. In the summer and during extremely hot weather, snakes are more frequently seen.”

C13: “It is easy for anyone who wants to do something bad to us because there is no fence around the yard nor gate that we can lock during the day when we go to school or at night when we sleep. It is easy to break in as there are no burglars on the windows and doors to secure our safety.”

C15: “We feel unsafe staying alone as people know that we are all by ourselves. It is very easy for anyone to enter our yard since we don’t have a fence with a gate where we can lock especially during the night.”

R: “Can you please share with me what you use when the lights are gone due to load shedding?”

C14: “We were given candles and matches by our neighbor which we use sparely for studying as we don’t have money to buy, for cooking we use wood.”

R: “Please share with me the relationship you have with your neighbors and relatives.”

C15: “Our neighbors are friendly people, but the husband works in Johannesburg. most of the time is his wife with her three children. She locks her gate in the evening, so we cannot enter her yard during the night if something is happening to us, therefore we are so scared.”

R: “May you kindly share with me what support you think you need as children heading families?”

C3: “We need support when we celebrate our birthdays and Christmas like other children. We need support when it comes to our education as we want to be educated a live a better life since

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we will be able to find jobs, we need better houses, blankets, TV sets, beds and beddings furniture, we need some recreational facilities as there are a lot of taverns around our village which young people are forced to go and socialize, and this exposes us to take alcohol."

C2: "We desperately need mentors whom we can freely talk to especially when we feel frustrated. We want to be educated and have a better future."

C12: "My mother died when I was 8 years, I am 18 and I have never talked about the pain of losing a parent with anyone except today when I am talking to you. I am always depressed though I pretend as if I am happy, truly speaking I am not. I wish if at schools we can have people with whom we can talk to or mentors that we children heading families may be able to share our pain and frustrations that we are experiencing daily. Though educators are very friendly, but you cannot say your problems in front of other learners."

R: "Tell me, how did the death of your parents affect you?"

C3: "Sincerely, I'm having a lot of trouble; I can't stop thinking about my parents. When my parents used to call, especially on the weekends and in the evenings when they weren't at work, I would always think about them. I was 14 years old when my parents passed away. I often think of my mother and wish she were still here because I know she would support me and be there for me to talk to when I face difficulties as a young girl."

C6: "The proper socialization of children is positively impacted by the presence of loving and caring parents in the home. Quite frankly, children aren't meant to live on their own without a parent or other caring adult in their lives. Without our parents, our house is no longer a home. The warmth we used to feel from our parents has faded over time."

C7 "Following the death of our mother, we remained with our father and life was fine. Later my father died, and following the death of my father there was no one to satisfy our needs, life became very miserable, every day I miss the love of my parents. There is no one to love us, parental love is so special. I will forever miss my parents."

C8: "Here at home there is no longer somebody to give us warmth, advise us as young people. I am forever missing and longing for my mother."

C10: "There is no one to show us love and warmth. I am forever feeling lonely and yearning for the love of my mother. I will forever miss her love."

C12: "We need parents who will love us and take care of us. To be honest, children are not supposed to live alone without a parent or other adult who will provide love. Our

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house is no longer a home without parents. Our parents no longer radiate the warmth we used to receive as children."

C15: "The home where our parents used to provide warmth and affection is no longer there. We are all independent; nevertheless, as a child, I require parental support and direction to manage the household. I have to see to it that my siblings are fed. I don't even know what to do most of the time."

R: "May you kindly share with me how your local churches support you?"

C3: "Prayer is my everyday life; I think things will get better eventually. We frequently go to church because I trust God will provide us with comfort and spiritual health."

C4*:* "Pastors and other church members encourage us; we like attending church every Sunday as we participate in church choir. We are thankful for the support and love we receive from the church as we feel comforted. We believe that God will help us overcome the difficulties we are facing."

C12: "Since prayer is my everyday life, I think things will get better eventually. We frequently go to church because I trust God will provide us with comfort and spiritual health."

C8: "We receive religious support and a sense of belonging from pastors and church members, we love their presence. They give us a sense of optimism, self-worth, and comfort."

C13: "Pastors and other church members encourages us; we like attending church every Sunday as we participate in church choir. We are thankful for the support and love we receive from the church as we feel comforted. We believe that God will help us overcome the difficulties we are facing."

C15: "I believe that one day our situation will improve because we have confidence in God that I will get education and help my siblings. I am confident that God will help us get through this difficult period."

R: "May you kindly share with me as to whether there are relatives that support you in carrying household duties?"

C1: "I'm not coping at all. I am unable to manage my duties since I have too much to do, which has a bad influence on my academic performance. I'm now in grade 10, but my goal is to enter grade 12 within the next two years. The problem is that I'm constantly

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stressed and worn out. I worry about my future, which sometimes keeps me awake during the night thinking about my situation."

C3: "Assuming the role and responsibilities of a parent when I am young it is very hard as I struggle to take care of my siblings. Managing all the responsibilities is not simple. I am not coping at all. I find it difficult to fall asleep most of the time when I think of our situation, which affects my ability to concentrate in class and lowers my academic performance."

C5: "Heading a family as a child is very difficult because I am still too young to take this role as I have to look after my two siblings and schooling. The role that has been done by my mother such as budgeting, managing a family, looking after us and now I have to do it."

C11: "Managing all these challenges that I've listed is just too much. Surely, I am not coping at all. When I think about our circumstances, I have a hard time falling asleep most of the time, which makes it difficult for me to focus in class and lessens my school performance."

R: "Kindly share with what are the challenges you face concerning health."

C4: "No one to take care of us when we are not well as we stay by ourselves. We also don't have the knowledge of how serious certain signs and symptoms of other diseases are."

C6: "It becomes a challenge when my siblings or myself being sick as I am compelled to take care of them. This result in absenting myself from attending school. Travelling to the clinic needs public transport as we can't walk such a distance and cost for travelling, we unable afford it."

C13: "I am bound to stay away from school and look after my sick sibling at the same time I am left behind with schoolwork."

C11: "I wish if there was someone elderly who comes and check us especially when we are not well, as I am still young to realize that my siblings are seriously not well and have to seek medical help on time."

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TRANSCRIPT FOR CHILDREN HEADING FAMILIES'S RELATIVES

Researcher**: R**

Participant: **P**

R: "How are you doing this afternoon?"

(Every participant was greeted and responded.)

R: "Thanks, I'm doing fine, too. My name is Muriel Maboko."

R: "Currently I have registered for doctoral degree with the University of Venda. I've selected a topic: Strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province of South Africa. The purpose of the study is to improve support for children heading families in the Limpopo province. The study aims to investigate the difficulties faced by children heading families and propose solutions to address these concerns. I hope you remember that we first met at the chief's kraal to set up today's interview. Do you allow me to begin the interview now?"

(Every participant agreed)

R: "I outlined the significance of an assent form and the justification for signing it before the commencement of the interview. Please complete the consent form to show that you have agreed to participate, however you are free to change your mind at any moment without incurring any penalties. The information you give me will be kept private because I'll be using pseudonyms. Only I and the promoters will have access to the interview-related information. The audio voice recorder used in the interviews will only be accessible to the researcher. The voice recordings will be deleted once the data collected has been fully transcribed. May I use the voice recorder, please?"

(All participants agreed)

R: "Could you please share with me how you as relatives provide support to children heading families?"

P1: "Every Sunday, I accompany them to church as I realized that the church members and pastors are able to comfort them."

P2: "I am not able talk to them regarding the pain that they are experiencing of losing their parents. I noticed that pastors could help them deal with the grief and pain and give them a sense of hope."

P3: "My relationship with my late sister's children is very limited because they seem to be too quiet and often, I don't find comforting words."

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P4: "Because they are always alone, children who live without their parents face several challenges. The challenges clearly show their social marginalization and the painful experiences that have hampered their academic growth."

R: "Kindly share with me as children's relatives, how you support children heading families as they experience many needs.?"

P13: "I assist them in cooking and cleaning the house once I visit them at the end of the month after receiving my social grant."

P6 "It is challenging for someone like me to provide financial assistance to children heading families since they have so many needs. I am unable to provide needs like food, toiletries, clothing, school uniforms, and other necessities."

P8: "I am only able to provide him a bit of help, since I am unemployed and struggling financially, it is quite challenging for me to satisfy some of his expectations. I try to gather the wood for him because it scares young people to go and gather it in the forest alone. Every time I locate a piece job, I stock up on some essentials."

P9: "I took my grandson to the social worker to apply for a child support grant he told me he does not qualify for child support grants as he did have a copy of his father's ID. He has attempted to schedule multiple meetings with the social worker and myself, but they have not yet been authorized."

P10: "I am their grandmother, I do talk to my grandchildren always, and we have a very good trusting relationship."

P11: "Since I don't have a job and have five children, it's difficult for me to buy them food and other necessities. I only pay them a visit occasionally to cook for them and enquire whether they are going to school regularly. I am a single parent, providing for my own children's requirements, thus I cannot even guarantee that I will be able to support them financially."

P12: "I try many times whenever I find a piece job and buy some food as I am their uncle. I am sometimes unemployed resulting inability to buy them food monthly."

P13: "I am an aunt to my late brother's children, I sell food, vegetables, fruits and other smaller items like sweets and simba's to learners in the nearby school. I sometimes supply them with what I can afford."

P14 "Unfortunately, I am a widow without a job who is struggling to provide for my own four children. It's very difficult for me to provide them with their needs even if I loved to do so."

R: "Kindly share with me how do you relate with the children as a relative?"

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P5: “I relate well with my grandchildren, and they so much depend on me as I am always there for them. I wish God can give me good health that I may find time to take care of them properly.”

P8: "Four of my children died and left behind their offspring. I try to visit my grandchildren who are alone in their home. Providing for your grandchildren when their parents are more is difficult. I often wish that their parents were still alive. Though I adore my grandchildren, I'm not sure how long I'll survive.”

P12: "I usually give myself time to talk to my grandchildren regarding normal behavior. As the grandmother, I try and supervise what is happening in their home but sometimes I am not available which makes it difficult for me to know what is exactly happening.”

P2: “I am the oldest of my siblings, and I live with the man who impregnated me. I stay a little bit far away from my siblings, which makes it harder to supervise them, but we have a good relationship. I fell pregnant at a very young age since I didn't have an adult caregiver to provide guidance. I am worried that my 15-year-old sister will experience a similar problem. I wish if there was someone who can guide my siblings."

P6: "My late sister's daughter is now 18 years old, and I believe that some of the advice I offer as a man she feels are inappropriate for her. I believe she needs a female advisor of which I am trying to look for someone who will be able to give guidance. With so many of our loved ones having passed away, I am the only member of their immediate family who is still alive. I have two nieces and nephews who belong to my sister.”

P10: "As an opposite sex, it’s quite difficult to handle adolescent girls’ issues. Transferring female’s cultural values to me seems difficult as a man."

P1: “I sometimes pay them a visit though I am unable to frequently visit since I stay a bit far whereby travelling its quite expensive. Upbringing children needs constant supervision and teaching of good morals.”

P9: "I am employed in two part-time jobs. On weekends, I discovered that I have a lot of house chores, so on Sundays after church, I make time to visit them, though it's not always every Sunday, which results in providing direct support very inconsistent.”

R: “Please share with me how can you as a relative assist child heading families in improving their homes.”

P3: "I'm their grandmother; all other five of my children are no more. I stay with some of my other grandchildren, the ones who stay alone in their mother’s late houses typically needs assistance in improving the homes. I can't assist because I only receive a grant which is very little.”

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P6: "I visit them rarely because I live far away, but when I do, I try my best to help out fix some other household issues, as an uncle. It is quite hard since a lot of maintenance is needed and also costly."

P7: "I am a direct family member to my late elder sister, and I wish to be available most of the time as children need an adult figure on a daily basis and be able to provide proper support, but when it comes to providing consistent support, I am unable to do so."

R: "Please share with me as children's relatives how do you provide educational support to children heading families?"

P12: "I am not able to support them with their educational material needs. As I stay far it is difficult to supervise them when doing their studies or when writing their homework. I am not sure whether they are attending school regularly as failure to attend school may lead to loss of educational focus."

P7: "I cannot afford to support children heading families with their educational materials, since I have my own children whom I am also struggling to meet all their educational needs."

R: "Please let me know if you know if the children receive any child support grant."

P5: "What I know is that two amongst the three children receives a child support grant, which they claim does not fully meet their basic needs. Most of the time, they lack the necessities."

P11: "Child-headed children find difficulties buying basic necessities like food, school supplies, toiletries, and other essentials because the child support grant is insufficient."

P6: "According to the social worker, the child support grant could not be successful due to the unavailability of the father's ID copy."

R: "What are the needs of children heading families living without parents or adult caregiver, based on your observations?"

P7: "From what I've observed, child-headed children struggle with their sense of self because some of them have never even seen their fathers. Some believe that if they had known their real father, they would have wanted to have a relationship with him after their mothers passing. If they had, they might have felt more at ease and confident concerning their identity."

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P10: “According to what I've discovered, children who are in charge of families face a variety of challenges that we could talk about all day. To be properly grown and mature into an adult, every child requires a parent throughout their entire life. Parents have a key role in their children's social skill development. Without parents to guide, watch over, and provide guidance, children were left alone. Children have no one to watch over them if their parents are not there.”

P12: “Children in homes did not always have access to many of the essentials that parents provide for them, such as food, a suitable place to live, safety and security, and educational needs.”

P13: “I am their grandmother and find it quite difficult to support children heading families and their siblings following the death of their parents. I can't even enjoy my pension. With the little money that I receive I try to buy them a few things they desperately need. My overthinking causes me to occasionally have difficulties falling asleep, which is detrimental to my health. Every time I visit the clinic for a check-up once a month, nurses discover that my blood pressure and sugar levels are extremely high. I don't know what would happen to them when I am no more.”

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TRANSCRIPT ON FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Number of focus group discussions: 8

Key

FGD-Focus Group Discussion

R- Researcher

Composition: Community members

R: Good day and how is everyone doing?

FGD: We are all doing well and how are you?

R: "Thanks, I'm doing fine, too. My name is Muriel Maboko."

FGD: "We are grateful to have met you, thank you."

R: "Currently I have registered for a doctoral degree with the University of Venda. I've selected a topic: Strategies to improve support for children heading families in Limpopo province of South Africa. The purpose of the study is to improve support for children heading families in the Limpopo province. The study aims to investigate the difficulties faced by children heading families and propose solutions to address these concerns. I hope you remember that we first met at the chief's kraal to set up today's interview. Do you all allow me to begin the interview now?"

FGD: "Yes, we do."

R: "I outlined the significance of an assent form and the justification for signing it before the commencement of the focus group discussions. Please complete the consent form to show that you have agreed to participate, however, you are free to change your mind at any moment without incurring any penalties. The information you give me will be kept private because I'll be using pseudonyms. Only the I and the promoters will have access to the interview-related information. The audio voice recorder used in these discussions will only be listened to by the researcher."

(Every focus group participant briefly described their positions held in their community).

R: "Please tell me about the challenges faced by children heading families in your village."

FGD1: "Children heading families, who are living without their parents, lack warmth and love in their homes, according to what we have seen. This led to a display of animosity toward other children and acting out in the neighborhood and at school."

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FGD2: "Children coming from child-headed homes are exposed to criminal activity, especially when they join a group that is already there. It is extremely simple for them to follow that path since they have never known love and guidance."

FGD3: "Children coming from child-headed families sometimes portray their behavior through their actions."

FGD4: "A majority of children heading families are subjected to child sexual abuse as a result of other elder people in the society abusing them and are forced into child labour with low pay."

FGD5: "They are subjected to prostitution and sexual abuse, especially of girls, to earn money to support themselves and their siblings. The worst thing about them is that even people who are older than they are use them. This may lead to teenage pregnancies, the spread of HIV/AIDS, and other infectious diseases, all of which may worsen their predicament."

FGD6: "Children in charge of families are also bullied by other kids or become bullies themselves to defend themselves."

FGD1: "Families headed by children often struggle to keep their homes in good condition because they lack the funds to fix damaged windows and doors."

R: "Please tell me about the support measures needed based on the difficulties faced by children in child-headed families."

FGD1: "They require specialized help since some children heading families suffer negative effects on their emotional and psychological well-being due to overburden of household chores and also taking care of their siblings."

FGD2: "Children heading families require assistance from the community members, such as providing them with produce from farmers or people with gardens, to name just one example of community involvement."

FGD3: "Children who are heading families need spiritual assistance, and pastors from various churches may become engaged by paying them regular visits and inviting them to church."

FGD4: "The community should establish a non-governmental organization where children in child-headed families can meet, get help with their homework, and also receive advice from community mentors. One approach to do this is to find a facility where vulnerable children can be kept after school."

FGD5: "Traditional leaders, parliamentarians, business forums, volunteers, and diverse professionals should work together to meet the requirements of children heading families."

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FGD8: "The construction of recreational facilities will give vulnerable children a place for recreation and prevent them from just going to the local pub and indulging in drinking alcohol at a tender age due to lack of adults in providing supervision and guidance."

R: "Please tell me about the challenges faced by children heading families in your village."

FGD1: "Children heading families are responsible in providing support for themselves and their siblings and most challenging without the necessary basic needs such as food, clothing, electricity, and school uniforms and many other needs."

FGD2: "Child-headed children are vulnerable to child trafficking because they lack a parent to support them, and criminals know this and use it to their advantage when looking for easy targets."

FGD3:" Children from child-headed homes experience scholastic difficulties, low performance, increased rates of school dropouts, and exposure to drug usage as a way of forging their own identity."

FGD4: "Some of the children in homes who are heads of families never knew their biological fathers."

FGD4: "Monthly supply of basic essentials like mealie meal, fish oil, meat, vegetables, sugar, tea bags, salt, toiletries, candles, should be provided to families with children heading families as this may ease the challenges experienced by children heading families and their siblings."

FGD5: "Child-headed children find difficulties buying necessities like food, school supplies, toiletries, and other essentials because the child support grant is insufficient."

FGD7: "Since the child support grant is insufficient to cover the cost of necessities like food, school supplies, toiletries, and other essentials, children heading families are faced with financial hardships."

FGD8: "As there is no parent to take care of them, child-headed families struggle to find the necessities like food, clothing, uniforms, and many other things."

R: "Please share with me about the support strategies needed to enhance the numerous challenges experienced by children heading families."

FGD1: "Children in child-headed families need a lot of support from the community members since any deviant behavior has a negative impact on the community at large."

FGD1 "There is a pressing need for assistance in fostering moral principles in children heading families in the absence of their parents."

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FGD2: “Children heading families need some community members to volunteer to mentor them and form part of their educational support which will be able to form a relationship between them and their teachers.”

FGD2: “As they live in yards without fences, gates, locked doors, or burglar-proof doors, children living with families require some protection for their safety through neighborhood watchdogs and whistle-blowers.”

FGD2: “Traditional leaders should work hand in hand with the schools in helping children heading families and other children in fostering discipline in schools and teaching children the accepted good moral values of society.”

FGD3: “Children heading families need the provision of cell phones which easily allows them to contact police to ensure their safety and security in case of emergencies.”

FGD3: “Village libraries must be established immediately for underprivileged and child-headed children to find the learning resource easily accessible and not find it difficult given that they deal with several budgetary concerns.”

FGD 4 “To be able to have a meaningful identity, father figures are necessary for children leading families.”

FGD4: "There should be an establishment of man-to-man discussions as a way to prepare men and male youth for their responsibilities and the role played by fathers towards their children in the chief’s kraal during their traditional meeting (Imbizo) as this can be conducted by traditional leaders."

FGD5: “Children heading families need sustainable support from the traditional leaders and various stakeholders in the community.”

FGD5: “Pastoral support from different churches is greatly needed by child-headed families, as they can assist by visiting them in their homes regularly. Additionally, schools should have a designated pastor who collaborates with principals and educators to support children from child-headed families."

FGD6: “A sustainable relationship between local businesses and schools is needed to supply children heading families and those who are vulnerable with food parcels and school uniform on a regular basis.”

FGD6: “Children who are heads of families need to be motivated and encouraged to have fulfilling lives so they can realize their potential.”

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FGD6: "After their parents die, children in households lose their sense of self-worth and the meaning of life; as a result, counseling is crucial."

FGD7: "Children heading families should be assisted with better living conditions such as improving their homes to restore their dignity."

FGD7: "Children heading families require educational assistance as they struggle financially to further their studies."

FGD7:" Initiation of programs that help children heading families spiritually and socially through churches, psychologists, counselors, and social workers in the communities and consistently monitored of the effectiveness."

FGD8: "Some of the children heading families do not possess all the relevant documents required to apply for child support grant; the Department of Social Development has to find other means of assisting them."

FGD8: "Libraries in their neighborhood would be ideal because orphans and children in child-headed families often struggle to find information relating to their studies."

FGD8: "A need for the Department of Social Development to review policies that will not disadvantage children heading families from receiving child support grants due to unavailability of their father's ID copies when needed."

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