

Lived experiences of youth living in Sibling Headed Households in facing challenges affecting education.

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Abstract

Background Research has found that the number of Child Headed Households (CHHs) is growing. South African government does support children under 18 as well as children living in CHHs. However there are still families who are being headed by siblings although they have turned 18 already and officially are no CHH anymore. Literature shows numerous challenges that can be faced by family members of CHHs on a daily basis. These challenges also concern their education. To succeed in schooling is important to the children living in these kinds of families because they feel like it gives them the opportunity to improve their living circumstances. It is likely that Sibling Headed Households (SHHs), families without parents with children over and under 18 years of age are facing similar challenges. **Aim** The aim of this study is to identify challenges youth living in SHHs are facing which are affecting their education. In order to overcome these challenges this study aims to find out on what areas more support is needed. **Methodology** Three in depth case studies are conducted with families headed by youth. Both the caregivers as well as the younger siblings are interviewed. The younger siblings also compiled a collage and were also individually interviewed about their collage. The information gathered by all the interviews are analysed using thematic analysis. **Results** The most important challenges the participants experience are the following. Although they are receiving a grant and they are beneficiaries of an NGO when under 18

years of age they report a lack of finance which is challenging their schooling. Also challenging their education is the struggle to find appropriate space and support in getting their homework done. Schools could provide for this. Teachers tend to be supportive towards the children when they know about the living circumstances their students live in which is not always the case. Classmates are very often not aware of the living circumstances. Psychological problems these children face don't interfere with their schooling as they are most often happy being at school. This study however shows that children experience a variety of emotions like sadness and anger as a result of their living circumstances which they don't share with family members. **Conclusion** More support or counselling is needed concerning the challenges that were found to be present. Schools can play a part in providing for this support.

Introduction

Due to several reasons the number of orphans has been growing recently in South Africa. Amongst the causes of parental death, numerous illnesses have caused this increase, with one of them being HIV/Aids (Meintjes, Hall, Marera & Boulle, 2010). The growing number of orphans seems to be causing a growing number of Child Headed Households (CHHs). One definition for CHHs is given by the Department of Social Development (2005) in South Africa. It describes a CHH as: "when the parent or primary caregiver of the household is terminally ill or has died, no adult family member is available to provide care and support and where a child has assumed the role of primary caregiver in respect of a child or children in the household in terms of providing food, clothing, and psycho-social support." Although the death of a parent or of both parents is an important cause for CHHs to arise, other causes are possible (Mturi, 2012). Many children in CHHs still have living parents, but do form a CHH because the responsibility of care for the children isn't taken up by the parents. In this case parents are absent or not fully functioning in providing material, practical or emotional support for children and young people (Payne, 2012). Parents, for example, can be too ill to provide sufficiently in this support or they can be absent in the household because they moved somewhere else to find employment (Mturi, 2012). Death or illness of a parent is often caused by HIV/Aids, but can also be due to other causes (Mogotlane et al., 2010).

Different definitions of CHHs are used. Due to these differences various prevalence numbers are reported. Definitions often vary in age limits of the children living in these households. Usually CHHs by definition are under the age of 18, but sometimes a different age range is used (Mturi, 2012; Sloth-Nielson, 2004). Some studies also only look at child

only households, but this eliminates the households where a parent or another adult is living in the household but is not willing or able to take up the responsibility of care for the children (Mturi, 2012). Another possibility is that prevalence of CHHs is underestimated because of practical reasons, like only parents filling out survey forms of studies investigating types of households, which excludes the CHHs without parents present to fill out forms (Mturi, 2012). According to the General Household Survey in 2006 only 0,67% of all children in South Africa live in CHHs, this makes up 122000 of all children (Meintjes et al., 2010). But the actual prevalence of CHHs is because of afore mentioned reasons unknown.

The number of CHHs however seems to be growing and is expected to grow more in the future. One of the reasons why this is happening for example is that extended families are not able to keep up with being a safety net to all of the orphans in their family and are unable to offer them all a place to life by taking them into their family (Mturi, 2012). Also the extended families are experiencing the same challenges, like death, illness and poverty, as what got children to become orphans in the first place (Mogotlane, Chauke, Van Rensburg, Human, Kganakga, 2010). For this reason extended families are unable to provide care for more children than their own. The orphans then end up taking care of each other without another adult caregiver present. Therefore the number of CHHs is expected to grow more in the future (Mogotlane et al., 2010; Donald & Clacherty, 2009).

Policy

By South African law nowadays children abandoned by their parents or orphaned by death of their parents are to be taken care after. Children under 18 wouldn't be left to take care of themselves or their younger siblings without any support anymore in South Africa as has been stated in the Children's Act of 2005 (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2006). The Children's Act mentions certain groups of children who need to be identified as being in need of care and protection. One of these groups consists of children who have been abandoned or orphaned by parents and are living without support, but it also specifically mentions children living in Child Headed Households. These children need to be redirected to a social worker in order to have their living circumstances investigated. In court then will be decided whether the children will be taken care of in a foster home or a child and youth care centre. The children will not be left living on their own. The CHHs therefore should be disappearing.

Before 2005, when the Children's Act was introduced, the situation was different. The Child Care Act from 1983 did provide support for orphans but not when they were being

cared for by other children under 18. It also did not have a comprehensive protection system for children in especially difficult living circumstances like children living in CHHs (Sloth-Nielson, 2004). The South African government has made progress in caring for children who are being abandoned or orphaned.

As could be seen in the definition the Department of Social Development uses, families in which young adults from over the age of 18 are taking care of their siblings don't qualify for being a CHH. As these young adults are taking care of their siblings they can apply for a grant from the government to support their siblings. This Child Support Grant (CSG) can be applied for by any primary caregiver of children under 18 living with them residing in South Africa earning less than 3300 Rand (equals around 330 US Dollars) a month (Government of South Africa, 2014). This grant was first introduced in 1998 and has since then evolved in the grant as it is now. In the past years the CSG has had positive developmental outcomes on children in promoting nutritional, educational and health outcomes (DSD, SASSA and UNICEF, 2012).

Being Sibling Headed Households (SHHs) these families consist of a still young primary caregiver and their siblings. It is likely that the caregivers of these families are still facing challenges that are similar to caregivers younger than 18 years of age. After all, these caregivers also live without caregiving parents and are forced to take up the role of caregiver for their siblings. Besides this the caregivers don't get any financial support for themselves as they have exceeded the age range for the CSG. Also the younger siblings, although not living in a CHH, are possibly still experiencing similar challenges as children who do live in a CHH as their living situation is similar to children living in CHHs since they too have no caregiving parents. From literature it is known what challenges are being faced by children living in CHHs. This study looks into the challenges young adults and children face living in SHHs, which could possibly be similar to the challenges faced by children living in CHHs. The research question therefore will be: What are the lived experiences of youth living in Sibling Headed Households in facing challenges affecting their education?

Domestic challenges

A first challenge the children in CHHs face concerns domestic chores. This is especially challenging for the heads of the households. When children are orphaned or abandoned, one of the children has to take up the role of a caregiver of the family. The child heading the household is challenged in several ways. The heads of these households take up the responsibility of providing food, clothing, shelter, education and looking after the sick

family members. The caregivers are cleaning the house, washing clothes, preparing meals and helping siblings doing homework. These responsibilities they are forced to take up interferes with the schooling of the child and often the heads of CHHs are the first to drop out of school or they are not able to proceed studying after secondary education (Mogotlane et al., 2010; Evans, 2010). The pressure of having to take up this responsibility can already withhold these children from attending school (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007). Other reasons why caregivers often drop out of school is pregnancy and getting jobs that take up their time (Pillay & Nesengani, 2006). For caregivers over 18 years this could challenge furthering their education, if they have managed to finish their secondary education in the first place.

Financial challenges

In CHHs as households without an adult caregiver present the same things need to be done as in other families. Someone needs to work to support the siblings, to get food, clothing and shelter and someone needs to look after the emotional well-being of the family members (Sloth-Nielson, 2004). In doing so the CHHs are financially challenged. Children living in CHHs face difficulties in obtaining food and shelter and they experience a serious threat to their education because of poverty (Sloth-Nielson, 2004). Children living in CHHs more often live in poverty than children in other families do (Meintjes et al., 2010; Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007). This is partly due to a lack of family income (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007). Also these children often already had to spend a lot of money on medical care for their ill parents before they passed away or are still spending money on this if the parents are still alive but ill (Mogotlane et al., 2010). Living in poverty these households have less access to basic municipal goods like piped water (Meintjes et al., 2010). The financial challenges make these households dependent of donations from others and grants by the government (Mogotlane et al., 2010). There also is a possibility the family members of a CHH are struggling to get birth registration which is a prerequisite in procuring healthcare and social security benefits like the CSG (Sloth-Nielson, 2004). Lack of money is also a reason for failing to succeed in school when children are unable to purchase the supplies they need (Pillay, 2012; Pillay & Nesengani, 2006). Children in CHHs report not being able to keep up with their homework because they haven't got the textbooks they need (Pillay, 2012).

Facing negative attitudes

Because of the financial challenges which result in material needs, such as lack of money to pay the school fees and school supplies, and other challenges the children also face

possible discrimination by their teachers (Sloth-Nielson, 2004). They face the problem of teachers not understanding the situation they are in. The teachers tend to not recognize the problems the CHHs are facing. The lack of background information the teachers have can result in disciplinary actions while the problems they get disciplined for are caused by the children not having or being able to do anything they need to have or do for school (Pillay & Nesengani, 2006). For example teachers tend to punish them for being late and not finishing their homework and other things without considering the reason for this behaviour. This results in the children performing even less in schoolwork (Evans, 2010; Dalen et al., 2009). Besides the teachers, the children also face peers who are unsupportive having a negative attitude against them. Children in CHHs seem to get teased and mocked at by peers for the poor circumstances they are in. Some other learners treat them badly by hitting them for example (Pillay, 2012).

Children living in CHHs like to keep their living situation a secret because of the possible rejection they face when for example peers know about their living situation. The absence of adults in the households gives these children a vulnerable position which results in the risk of property grabbing. Without the parents around who can protect them and teach them about life they are also at risk of experiencing abuse by others and other risks in having to settle for dangerous jobs (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007). The children also face the risk of ending up in child prostitution or child labour in trying to provide for the family (Sloth-Nielson, 2004). For this reason children in CHHs often prefer to keep their living circumstances, living without an adult present in the household, a secret for this makes them feel safer (Pillay, 2012).

Psychological challenges

Children living in CHHs also encounter psychological problems. Children living in CHHs for example more often have experienced an extremely distressed and disrupted life which results in a higher degree of hurtful and unresolved emotions. A considerable amount of these emotions go unexpressed and stay pent up within the child. Also children in CHHs often lack realistic long term goals as they haven't given it much thought due to the focus on their living conditions in the present. Besides this the children living in CHHs often display a poor sense of self-worth or believe in themselves and a poor sense of an internal locus of control (Donald & Clacherty, 2009).

If they are in school children living in CHHs may have difficulties with their academic achievement. This often as a result of poor concentration, failure to complete tasks and tests

and a low self-esteem (Pillay & Nesengani, 2006). They find it hard to concentrate on their schoolwork because of fatigue and worries (Pillay & Nesengani, 2006; Evans, 2010). They also struggle keeping up with their homework and they are often in school late (Evans, 2010).

Education

The challenges the children in CHHs face are affecting their education. The kind of challenges the children would be eager to overcome as they feel like schooling is the way to get a better life for themselves and for their siblings. With proper education they hope to get out of the life they are living now and they want to become someone in life with education. This motivates them to go to school and to succeed in school (Dalen, Nakitende & Musisi, 2009; Pillay, 2012). Without succeeding and finishing their school it is more difficult for the children to find employment. That in turn makes it harder for the caregivers for example to earn enough money to enable their siblings to get proper education (Evans, 2010). Children in CHHs are also positive about the food and clothing they get from school, or from church at school. Another positive aspect concerns the friends they made in school (Pillay, 2012). This seems to be important to them. Friends are important to the support system surrounding CHHs (Donald & Clacherty, 2009). Going to school also seems to have a positive effect on their emotions and psychological self. When they are in school the children appear to feel happier and more confident (Pillay, 2012). They also seem to be feeling safe when they are in school (Pillay, 2012).

Like the prevalence of CHHs the numbers on school attendance by children in CHHs also vary. Meintjes and colleagues (2010) claim that nearly all children in CHHs attend school. However, Mogotlane and colleagues (2010) claim that not even half of them manage to do so. Lack of money is an important reason why children in CHHs are more likely to be unable to attend school. They often are not capable of paying school fees and other necessary supplies (Dalen et al., 2009). As mentioned earlier, the caregiver in the CHH is likely to first drop out of school (Mogotlane et al., 2010). The responsibilities of taking care of their siblings is interfering with their school attendance and school work (Mogotlane et al., 2010; Evans, 2010).

Support

The children in CHHs do experience some support from people other than their siblings. Some adults in their community can provide the CHHs with the material and emotional support they need. Where children in households headed by adults often are not in

touch with an adult person outside the home who provides support, the children in CHHs do have some adult support from outside the family (Donald & Clacherty, 2009). These adults usually are living in their neighbourhood, or they know them from school, like teachers, or from church (Donald & Clacherty, 2009). Pastoral care from pastors and other church members can not only provide in material care but also look after the emotional well-being of children in CHHs (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007). Another very important part of the support systems CHHs know are their peers. Peers can help with homework and are also very important to talk to. Children in CHHs find their peers to be of support in emotional well-being (Donald & Clacherty, 2009). The support for the emotional well-being is of importance because children living in CHHs could also be traumatized by experiencing the illness and death of parents (Sloth-Nielson, 2004). However, peers in the neighbourhood can also be of negative influence when they are not accepting and supporting the CHH but excluding them. When this happens cases of conflict and disharmony can occur (Payne, 2012).

This overview of literature gives an insight in what challenges are being experienced by children in CHHs and what support they are getting. For families headed by youth older than 18 years old, SHHs, their experiences could be similar. Since these families officially are no Child Headed Households the challenges they experience are unknown. This study is therefore looking into what the lived experiences are of youth living in Sibling Headed Households in facing challenges affecting their education.

Methodology

This study tries to answer the question what the lived experiences are of youth living in Sibling Headed Households in facing challenges affecting their education. To answer the research question a phenomenological study has been done. A phenomenological study is needed to look into lived experience since this type of research is concerned with looking at phenomenon from the perspective of the people involved (Groenewald, 2004). With looking at a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants the researcher gets an insight in how the participants experience a phenomenon. (Merriam, 2002).

Sample

Participants are Sibling Headed Households (SHH) consisting of youth being the caregiver as well as some of their siblings. These children are living in households with no effective caregiving adult present in the household. The caregiver must have taken up the role of primary caretaker of themselves and their siblings. The caregivers that are interviewed are

aged between 23 and 27 years old. Their interviewed younger siblings are aged between 13 and 17 years. The SHHs that are studied for this research all are inhabitants of Soweto, Johannesburg. Soweto is an abbreviation for South Western Townships, consists of 87 townships and is situated South West of Johannesburg. During and before the Apartheid system black labourers were forced to move to these areas. Nowadays the population of Soweto is still predominantly black. Most areas in Soweto account for the poorest in Johannesburg partly due to the Apartheid system which greatly restricted economic development in Soweto.

Participants in this research were found through purposive sampling to make sure that the participants represent the phenomenon that is being researched (Durrheim, 2006). The participants were accessed through a Non-Governmental Organisation called Ikageng Itireleng which is situated in Soweto. This NGO offers support and services for children who are affected by HIV/AIDS. With the holistic approach the NGO is using, Ikageng Itireleng provides in food, clothing, school fees, health care, life-skills training, transportation and psychosocial support. Many of the children they support are living in SHHs. All participants in this research have agreed to participate in this research, and they have given the researcher their permission to use the information they present in this research and to record all interviews with them that have taken place by giving informed consent.

Three families have been interviewed each consisting of four siblings. The first family was cared after by the eldest sister, aged 27, who is unemployed, didn't finish secondary school and is currently not involved in any education. Second there is a brother who is over 18 years of age, is also unemployed but is not involved in this study. The third child, a school-going girl of 17, was interviewed as well as the youngest sister aged 15, who is also going to school. Also living in the household is the daughter of the eldest sister. These siblings have been on their own ever since their father died 11 years ago. Of this sample this family was living in the most descent living conditions. They live in a modest one story house with three bedrooms and sufficient furniture.

The second family also consists of four siblings. The eldest sister is 23 years old and is the main caregiver of the family even though the father is also present in this household. Much of the responsibilities are left for the sister to be taken up because the father cannot provide in the care for his children and the household due to personal problems. The sister herself did not finish secondary school and she currently has a low paid job. The second sibling is a boy of 17 who is going to school and is also being interviewed as well as their school-going sister of 13 years old. Also living in the household are the youngest sister and

the daughter of the eldest sister. Since their mother died 2 years ago the eldest sister has become the main caregiver. The family has poor living conditions. The family lives in a small shack in an informal settlement without a sanitation system.

The third family that has been interviewed is living in a small house and they have been living without parents since their father died 2 years ago. After their father died they no longer stayed with their abusive stepmother. The eldest sister is taking up the role of caregiver and is 23 years old. She didn't finish secondary school and is currently unemployed and not involved in any form of education. Also interviewed was the third child, a school-going girl, aged 16. Also present in this household were the eldest sister's daughter and the younger sister's son. The two sisters and their children are living in a small one story house. The house consists of one small living and kitchen area, a small bathroom and one bedroom and has insufficient space and furniture. The second child, a boy aged over 18 is living independently. The youngest sister is living with her aunt and her children since this is closer to the school she goes to.

Analysis

The research uses a qualitative design. The data collection methods that have been used are individual semi structured interviews and collages. These methods are used because they give an in depth insight in the lived experiences of participants. In conducting individual interviews the participants are given the freedom to speak their mind with only the interviewer present. In individual interviews they could come up with more sensitive information because they feel more at ease (Michell, 1999). The younger siblings have also been asked to compile a collage by themselves about their experiences living in a SHH and how this is related to their education. They were also asked to talk about their collage and explain it to the interviewer in another short individual interview. The younger siblings hence were interviewed twice. The information gathered by the interviews can be enhanced by having the participants do a creative activity in which they can express themselves such as making collages (Vaughn et al., 1996). For some participants this can be very helpful in expressing themselves as some people are more able of expressing themselves in a nonverbal way (Vaughn et al., 1996) It also gives the researcher a more creative way of interviewing that is responsive to the meanings and associations of the participants themselves so it could elicit different responses from the participants in explaining the collage than they give in the other interviews (Bagnoli, 2009).

Several challenges that the CHHs are facing have been identified to guide the interviews with the participants living in SHHs. The questions that were asked in the interviews are based on these challenges. All participants were also asked what resources of support they experience in facing these challenges in order to identify on which areas more support is needed. The challenges are derived from the used literature on this matter presented in the introduction. The literature describes the following challenges that will be used in the interviews:

- *Financial challenges:* First of all is mentioned that CHHs are in need of financial support. As discussed in the introduction lack of money is an important reason for CHHs why they are unable to attend or succeed in school for without money they can't pay school fees and school supplies (Dalen et al., 2009; Pillay, 2012; Pillay & Nesengani, 2006). An example of a question that was asked to the caregivers: How can you provide for finances for your siblings to go to school?
- *Domestic challenges:* Another reason why these children are not capable of attending or succeeding in school is the amount of time and energy these children spend on domestic chores, running a household and take care of their siblings. These things tend to interfere with the childrens' school performance (Evans, 2010; Dalen et al., 2009). An example of a question asked to the younger siblings: Do you sometimes help out with housework or caring for your younger siblings?
- *Psychological challenges:* Children in CHHs are reported to worry a lot in school which is interfering with the attention children can spend on their school work (Dalen et al., 2009). Also children in CHHs experience hurtful and unresolved emotions as a result of their distressed and disrupted lives. These emotions often go unexpressed and stay pent up (Donald & Clacherty, 2009). Therefore this could also increase their worrying at school and affect their schoolwork in that way. An example of a question asked to the caregivers: What do you do when your siblings are not feeling happy?
- *Facing negative attitudes:* Children of CHHs often encounter teachers or other learners with negative attitudes. Other learners can bully them because of the situation they are in (Pillay, 2012). Teachers often don't understand their situation which results in the students getting disciplined for things their living circumstances force them to (Pillay & Nesengani, 2006). An example of a question asked to the younger siblings: How do you feel your teachers are treating you?

In conducting the interviews with the participants the themes, based on the literature were discussed as well as other themes that are likely to be important to the participants in

their experience of living in a Sibling Headed Household. First the individual interviews were conducted with all the participants. Second the younger siblings were asked to compile a collage and to discuss this collage in another individual interview. To have multiple methods of data collection showed to be of value in the additional information that was retrieved from the interviews. To see the younger siblings twice showed the importance of the themes for the participants as they were or were not identified as problems again. Also in the second interviews other information concerning their background and their experiences came up as the participants now were more acquainted with the interviewer.

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The collages were discussed in another short interview to make sure the younger siblings themselves give the interpretation and meaning to the collages they themselves have compiled. These short interviews were also recorded and then transcribed. All the data was analysed through thematic analysis. This is considered to be the most appropriate method of analysis for research using interpretations. Using thematic analysis the researcher can identify themes that reoccur within the whole data retrieved from all the interviews (Alhojailan, 2012). Both deductive and inductive analysis was used by starting with the themes that were identified in the literature and adding other themes that solely came up in the collected data. When using several instruments in collecting data, thematic analysis will present the data more clearly as the themes are reoccurring in the different methods as well as in the data from different participants (Alhojailan, 2012).

Results

Financial challenges

Almost all participants involved in this research are reporting financial or material shortcomings. The participants reported not getting enough finances because the caregiving siblings were either unemployed or earned a too low salary. Although the government grant and the support from Ikageng Itireleng are important resources for most participants, they still feel like they are lacking financial resources. In the collages this also was the main theme of most of the collages. Many of the younger siblings chose pictures of things they want to have or want to do when they have the money for it as they were not satisfied with their living standard as it is now. One family was also not able to get the government grant because of not having adequate identification papers. The family was struggling to get these which makes some things impossible for them.

Some basic things are mentioned as material challenges resulting from a lack of finance like getting food. Other issues concerning finance results in challenges for the

participants' education, although the schools the younger siblings go to mostly don't require school fees. It is possible for the younger siblings to be forced to be absent from school because of a lack of finance for transport to school or lack of finance for day-care for their own child. Other financial issues that challenge education concern the supplies the younger siblings need to go to school. This challenges things like getting school uniforms, shoes and stationary. The NGO tries to provide for this, but they are not always able to do so. This for example can result in children forced to wear school uniforms that have grown too small for them. This is a concern not only for all the caregivers, but also for some of the younger siblings. The caregivers in the families find themselves not able to provide for the things their siblings need which makes them feel bad. As one of the caregivers (aged 23) tells the interviewer in an individual interview how she feels about her responsibility for the living conditions of her siblings:

"Mmm, it's not good."

"No? Why?"

"Because when they want food they call me, when they want something they call me and I, I don't have money then to buy anything that they want. And I don't have money to buy food, any food, the thing that they want for the school, I don't have money to buy it."

Domestic challenges

Concerning domestic challenges the interviews show that not only the caregiver of the family is responsible for domestic chores but the younger siblings usually help out with things like cleaning the house, doing the dishes and cooking. In most cases it seems that the chores are being taken up by all of the family members. The younger siblings don't seem to mind doing this and in one case the participant is actually satisfied with the opportunity to learn housekeeping in this way as this girl (aged 13) displayed in her collage the experience of cooking which was pleasing to her. In the interview she also states:

"It makes me to feel good, because one day I will be in my house. You know, I don't want to be somebody who doesn't want to work. Yes. I don't want a cleaner in my house, I want to do everything on my own, yes."

Doing the chores doesn't seem to interfere with the younger siblings' education. Although for some of the younger siblings the chores they need to do is stretching their schedule, overall the younger siblings are positive about the amount of time they have left for their homework. The amount of the responsibility they get for the domestic chores is not big enough to

interfere with their school work. Mostly they are capable of combining the tasks they have as becomes clear of the description of the school day activities of this girl (aged 15):

“From, when I get back from school, half past two, I eat and then I have all the time to study and write my homework. And then, at 7 I eat, at 8 I wash the dishes.”

Psychological challenges

The participants all reported experiencing feelings of sadness or anger or other feelings alike at some moments. These feelings are often present as a result of thinking of the living situation they are in or having memories about their parents and things that happened to them. These moments occur for example after dreaming about the lost parents or having thoughts like how things would have been better if their mother would still be around. This girl (aged 16) thinks about that:

“Some other days I wish that if my mother was around ... some other things will, maybe they are not going to happened. Like having a child in a young age. Yah, because of my mother was going to guide me, but she wasn't there. So I feel like I was alone. Sitting in the dark.”

Often the younger siblings report not having anyone to turn to at the moment or rather being alone with their unhappy feelings. All younger siblings state that their family is very important to them. However this apparently doesn't always result in sharing their emotions with other family members as they rather want to be alone or mention not being comfortable with sharing their problems with their siblings. In all of the collages however it became obvious that family means a lot to them as they are all they have. But this apparently doesn't get them to open up to the caregiving siblings. For the caregivers this turns out to be a concern for them in some cases as they don't always know how to make their siblings opening up to them. This caregiver (a girl aged 23) is unsure why their siblings are not talking to her:

“The problem is, they don't open to me. Yah, they don't talk. I don't know, maybe they're shy or what. Or they think I'm going to shout at them, or what, I don't know.”

As their younger siblings don't always turn to them this hinders them to be fully aware of what really is going on with their siblings, even if they do want to be more involved. Caregivers obviously struggle with being of psychological support for their siblings. They themselves also have emotions that they cannot share with their younger siblings and that they are struggling with. This might also result in the participants not opening up emotionally to one another. One of the caregivers made clear that she is struggling to learn how to be a mother, a father and a sister to her siblings all at the same time. Her siblings also struggle to

open up to her and telling her about their feelings as her siblings sometimes need a mother to talk to and at other times are in need of talking to their older sister and they are unsure about the position they should see their older sister in.

At school the younger siblings don't seem to struggle with emotions. At school they are happy and doing what they like. They also report having friends there which makes them happy. Another reason why school makes them happy is because school and education is very important to them. They consider doing good in school and finishing their education to be the way to get out of the situation they are in at the moment. The caregivers also want their siblings to succeed in school. They are especially keen on their siblings getting education since they want them to end up in a better position than they did themselves as all of the caregivers dropped out of school and ended up unemployed or working a low paid job.

Facing negative attitudes at school

Concerning facing negative attitudes at school the younger siblings don't report experiencing this in the interviews. Also in the collage this did not come up. Not being judged and facing the negative experiences by classmates could be a result of classmates not knowing about the situation the participants are in. Some of the participants reported not feeling comfortable telling their peers at school what they were living like so they rather keep it a secret. This boy (aged 17) is telling the interviewer how he doesn't tell his classmates about his living circumstances:

"No, I don't tell them."

"Why not?"

"I can't because the next thing we can fight here with your friend. You can't tell everyone how do you live, you see. I can't tell them my secret."

Another younger sibling reported wanting to keep her school environment separate from the environment she lives in. As her peers at school don't live in her neighbourhood so will not get to see her living situation there was no need for telling them what her situation was like. One participant tried telling his peers at school about his situation and his living conditions, but they refused to believe what he was telling them. The participants therefore don't experience rejection at school so much. One participant mentions having friends at school who don't judge her for just living with her sister. These friends however only know about her living with her siblings and not about the living conditions and her situation like her having a baby at the age of 16.

The same participant however does report feelings of rejection by peers in her neighbourhood. She did report feeling judged by other people and feeling like people talk behind their backs and thinking she is stupid for the situation she is in and blame it on the lack of guidance from her sister. Whenever asking for support with anything peers in her neighbourhood would come up with excuses why they cannot be of support right now.

Teachers don't seem to be very judgmental concerning the living conditions of their students according to the participants. Mostly the younger siblings reported being treated by their teachers like any of their classmates. Although mostly the younger siblings were satisfied with how their teachers were treating them there was only one case where the participant got excluded from an activity. For this school activity a parent needed to sign a paper which in her case was not possible as her mother passed away and her father wasn't around and is illiterate. As the teacher heard the paper was signed by herself the teacher excluded her from the activity probably without knowing her situation.

However when teachers are aware of the situation the students are in, the participants reported that they are mostly quite supportive. For instance one of the younger siblings mentioned getting lunch from her teacher when there was no food at home. Another younger sibling reported her teacher being a role model to her. As the teacher had similar living conditions growing up the participant got motivated by her teacher. Younger siblings also reported getting motivated by their teachers as they are encouraging them and believe in them which is very valuable to most of them since then they have someone to believe in their educational capabilities.

Homework

Another issue besides the challenges that were retrieved from literature that came up in this research was the issue of homework. Many of the younger siblings reported needing support with doing their homework while the support wasn't always available. In many cases the siblings who are being the caregiver of the family didn't manage to finish their school since they were starting to take care of their younger siblings at a young age. The caregivers therefore don't always have the knowledge to assist their siblings in doing their homework. Knowing that their older siblings didn't finish school, the younger siblings are also hesitant to ask their older siblings for their support with their homework for they don't expect their older siblings to be able to help them. Besides the caregiving siblings the younger siblings often don't know who to turn to for support. One of the younger siblings mentions not doing her homework at all at home, partly because of a lack of support with her homework. Because she

doesn't get the support and her homework is too difficult to get it done without support she would rather hang out with her friends. The younger siblings are in need of support with their homework in order to overcome this challenge.

The younger siblings do report having enough time to get their homework done. However, they also report not having an appropriate space to do their homework. Living in small houses with a limited number of rooms and space the room they have needs to be shared with multiple people. With other people around, the younger siblings couldn't always focus on their homework enough as they got disturbed regularly. A girl (aged 13) says the following about the place where she does her homework:

"Sometimes they are playing, running here, I can't concentrate. I want a place where it is quiet, peaceful, so that I can understand the question."

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper tries to find an answer to the question: What are the lived experiences of youth living in Sibling Headed Households in facing challenges affecting their education? In literature and interviews several themes were identified. The first challenge these children face concerns finance. This study found that children living in Sibling Headed Households seem to have a lack of financial resources despite getting a grant and not having to pay school fees. Employment of the older siblings couldn't provide for the financial needs as they are either unemployed or work for a too small salary. This is consistent with earlier research that states it is difficult for youth who haven't finished or proceeded education to find proper employment (Evans, 2010). It is found that for the education of the younger siblings this can be a challenge in a lack of finance for transport, school uniforms and other school supplies. As shown in other research this indeed makes them dependent on donations (Mogotlane et al., 2010). The support from Ikageng Itireleng, the NGO as well as the government grant made up an important part of the financial resources of the family. To get the grant however identification papers are needed. As one family in this research experienced and is also mentioned by Sloth-Nielson (2004) children living in Siblings Headed Households can struggle getting the papers they need to make use of social services by the government. But even with getting the grant the participants felt like the resources were not sufficient in providing for their family. Therefore more support is needed to find these resources for example in getting the grants they qualify for as well as support for the heads of the households in finding proper employment.

Secondly there are domestic challenges identified in this study possibly forming a challenge for youth living in SHH concerning their education. In the SHHs domestic chores are shared between all siblings. For the younger siblings however this doesn't appear to be interfering with their education. Besides the chores they do enough time is left to make sure their homework is done. This however is possibly explained by the caregivers more taking up the responsibility of domestic chores. The caregivers were unable to finish their school or to continue studying. For them the looking after the households did interfere with their education. The domestic responsibilities therefor seem to only be a challenge for the youth who takes up the role of caregivers then for their younger siblings (Mogotlane et al., 2010).

Another challenge the SHHs experience are psychological challenges. The psychological issues in this study don't really seem to challenge their education. This is contradicting earlier research which found that the negative emotions they experience keep them from concentrating on their schoolwork and keep them from completing their tasks and tests (Pillay & Nesengani, 2006). In this study the younger participants seem to be able to leave their worries at home. Going to school actually makes the children happy partly because of education being of great importance to them. As has been pointed out in earlier research children living in SHHs see education as the way to improve their situation which makes them very motivated to go to school and to succeed in school (Dalen, Nakitende & Musisi, 2009; Pillay, 2012).

There are however psychological challenges found in negative feelings the youth experience and don't communicate about. Unhappy feelings often occur after having memories of their parents or of earlier experiences. Within the family, although partly having the same experiences, so possibly experiencing the same emotions, these emotions are not always shared easily. The younger siblings rather keep this to themselves as they feel they don't have anyone to turn to. This is consistent with the finding of Donald and Clacherty (2009) that these children tend to pent up their feelings and don't express them. The caregivers researched here struggle in making their siblings opening up to them which is a concern for them as they want to be there for their siblings. In terms of communication, specifically concerning experienced emotions, therefor SHHs could very well benefit from having counselling and support on this matter. Also more research should be conducted on the matter of communication and emotions in SHHs to get a clearer insight in this matter.

Children living in SHHs are expected to risk facing negative attitudes at school according to literature. However this study shows that usually classmates of the children are not aware of the situation the children live in. The children rather not tell their classmates

about their situation and keep their living environment and school environment separate. Possibly the children are ashamed of the situation they are in. Whether this originates from living without parents or living in poverty didn't become very clear in this research. More research should be conducted on this matter to get a clearer insight. For children living in the neighbourhood the living conditions are no secret as they can see what they are living like and whom they are living with and in some cases neighbours seem to be rejecting the youth living in SHHs because of their living situation. Earlier research of Payne (2012) also showed peers living in the neighbourhood rejecting the children living in SHHs and excluding them. More research could be done on why this rejection occurs in order to possibly make the peers in the neighbourhood more understanding and supportive of the children in SHH's.

Teachers in this study are also not always aware of the situation their students are in. Sometimes this can result in disciplinary consequences when students are forced to do things differently because of their situation. This confirms the literature that was found on this matter (Pillay & Nesengani, 2006). However when the teachers are aware of the situation the children live in teachers actually turn out to be quite supportive in sharing food with the children and motivating them educationally as the children in this research report. Therefore it seems important that teachers and schools put more effort in gaining knowledge about the situation their students live in to make them more understanding. They could also be of support in making the classmates aware of their living conditions in a positive way and stimulate them to be supportive towards the students living in SHHs.

The last challenge in following and succeeding in education that came up in the interviews concerns homework. Despite the domestic chores, the children in SHHs are responsible for, enough time seems to be left to get their homework done. There is not appropriate space however to get their homework done. Children need a space where they can concentrate on making their homework. As in CHHs many children need to share a bedroom (Mogotlane et al., 2010), they don't have their own space and often don't have their own desk to work on (Pillay, 2012).

Even more became evident that children living in SHHs lack the support to do their homework sufficiently. As their older siblings dropped out of school the children are hesitant to ask them for support and don't have other people to turn to. Also the caregiving siblings sometimes don't have the resources to support their siblings in doing their homework. Where in earlier research Donald and Clacherty (2009) mention peers can help out in doing homework, this research pointed out the peers in the neighbourhood are reluctant to do this as they reject the children for living in the situation they live in. When asked for support the

peers often come up with excuses why they are too busy to provide support for example. More services should be made available to make support with homework more within reach for these children. When services are made available outside the family home this could also provide in a quiet space to do their homework where the children can concentrate and possibly have their own desk to work on. Schools could possibly be providing these services.

This research provides an insight in what the experiences are of youth living in SHH concerning facing challenges that could affect their education. This insight was retrieved by using multiple methods of data collection. Using the collages the children were given a considerable amount of freedom to give information they thought were important in their situation. This is a valuable addition to the information gathered in the semi-structured individual interviews. Also having multiple methods of data collection pointed out the importance of the information provided by the participants when this information was or wasn't repeated. In following research it is also recommendable to have multiple meetings with participants of young age because it helps the participants to get more acquainted with the researcher which makes them opening up a little bit more. Weakness of this research is the small sample size that is being used. This might restrict generalizability of the results of this study. Another weakness of the research is the limited time frame the actual research had to be conducted in. Due to organizational challenges the time frame was more limited than it was intended to be. If this wasn't the case more research could have been done like having a focus group with the participants in order to reach triangulation and to gain more insight in the experiences of children living in SHHs. It would also have given the opportunity to ask the participants about unexpected issues that came up in the research more thoroughly if the participants could have been interviewed more times. Issues like communication and emotions within SHHs now remain unclear.

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