

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF AN ABSENT FATHER  
ON THE IDENTITY FORMATION OF WOMEN**

A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of  
MSocSc by coursework and dissertation specialising in clinical social work

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**DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced according to the Harvard-UCT 2018 guidelines.

Signature:

Signed by candidate
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Date: 15 October 2019

**DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my father for all the dreams and hopes held and released at the time of his passing when I was a young child. I also dedicate this study to the male mentors in my life, to all daughters who the experience an absent father, and to my mother who was a strong woman.

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## ABSTRACT

This clinical study explored the significance of the experience of an absent father on the identity formation of women in an attempt to understand the psychological effect of father absence and the role this experience plays in terms of the daughter's, confidence, self esteem, social identity and intimate relationships. The influence on resiliency of the absent father experience is also a critical aspect of this research. The two theoretical frameworks that guide this clinical study are: the psychodynamic approach, more specifically, objects relations, and self psychology, and Bowens' family systems theory.

The research method is a qualitative design to develop an in-depth understanding of the sample population of twenty adult women who had grown up without a father and live in the geographical area of Cape Town. Data was collected using an in-depth, semi-structured interview, facilitated by open-ended questions contained in an interview guide.

A wide range of conditions affected participants in the study. Presence of a positive caregiver experience in early childhood appeared to play a role in the psychological well-being of the women. The quality of the women's relationships also appeared to be influenced by their early relational experiences. Poverty was the cause of hardship for many of the participants. Some of the women experienced shame and an internal poverty of worthlessness resulting from perceived rejection and abandonment by their fathers. These psychological experiences were found to influence social interactions and they were often less socially engaged than their peers. The women were generally resilient, at least to some degree and received a measure of support from others, however many felt they were their own most reliable resource.

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## CHAPTER ONE 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

In 2004 a South African study revealed that one out of every two fathers is an absent father. The study reflected that approximately 54% of men between the ages 15-49 were fathers and half of these fathers were not in regular contact with their children. Statistics gathered about children under 15 years living with a father are as follows: 30% African children, 53% coloured children, 83% white children and 85% Indian children. Recent data shows an increase in the number of absent fathers since the end of apartheid to the present day (Eddy, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013:7). The absence of fathers influences the lives of their children, including their daughters. However, little is known about how daughters are affected by this experience.

This research project explored how the experience of having an absent father influences the identity formation of women from a clinical perspective. The study included a focus on the psychological effect of an absent father on the development of the identity of women, such as their self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence. The implications for social interactions were also explored in the context of the identity formation of women. Human beings are social beings who desire to belong, be included and loved. To a large extent survival depends on effective relationships (Vanderheiden & Mayer, 2017). The focus on social interaction includes the role of peers, friendships and social engagement with others. The way an absent father may influence intimate relationships of their daughters and the role this plays in their identity was explored as well. Finally, the research examined how the absence of a father influences identity with regards to resiliency.

### 1.1. Statement of the problem

Family preservation is important for maintaining a functional and healthy society. Society is undergoing transformation regarding perceptions of what 'normal' families are, nonetheless people generally appear to regard commitment to relationships and family as the central source of happiness and fulfilment in their lives (Walsh, 2016a:22). The

family is a microcosm of society and in turn, each family member contributes to and impacts on the family unit. The White Paper on Families (2013) in South Africa lists the promotion of healthy family life as its first strategic priority, which includes encouraging fathers' involvement in their children's upbringing. Absence of fathers is a critical issue affecting families that challenges the goals of the White Paper and family functioning in general. It is important for service delivery organisations and social workers, to fully understand the magnitude and the specifics of this problem in order to gain clarity into what changes need to be implemented.

### **1.2. Rationale and significance of the study**

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of how the experience of an absent father influences the identity formation of women and to provide useful information to service delivery organisations to assist clinical interventions. It highlights areas of vulnerability and resilience of daughters that could provide guidelines for professionals working with women who experienced an absent father. The findings of this research project may be helpful in creating awareness of the significance the role of fathers in their daughter's life and thereby contribute to the existing knowledge required for effective family functioning in a healthy society.

### **1.3. Main research questions**

Abdulai and Owusu-Ansah (2014:5) mention that the research question forms the basis of the research aim and objectives for investigation. A research question fine tunes and narrows down the research process to a more specific area of interest or concern while also providing a guideline and boundary for the research proceedings (Evans, 2007). The research questions for this study are:

- a. What psychological effects does the experience of an absent father have on the identity formation of women?
- b. How does an absent father experience influence the social identity formation of women?
- c. How does an absent father experience influence the intimate relationships of

women?

- d. What influence on resiliency does an absent father experience have on the identity formation of women?

#### **1.4. Research objectives**

The aim of this study is to explore how the experience of an absent father influences the identity formation and resilience of women.

The objectives of this research project are:

- to understand the psychological effect of having an absent father on the identity formation of women.
- to examine how the experience of an absent father influences the social identity formation of women.
- to gain insight into the significance on intimate relationships of an absent father in the Identity Formation of women.
- to study the influence on resiliency of the absent father experience on the identity formation of women.

#### **1.5. Main assumptions**

The researcher assumes that women who have experienced an absent father may experience a sense of inner void that they will attempt to compensate for or repair in some way. She believes women who experience an absent father may experience feelings of abandonment and may struggle with intimate relationships. She also expects that women who have not experienced the role of a father in their lives to have less early experience of a patriarchal environment, which may result in more independence than their counterparts who grew up with a father. The researcher also has the assumption that a woman who had a present mother but an absent father may have more trusting friendships and social relationships with women rather than men. Finally, the researcher believes that women who had absent fathers during their childhood may be more prone to mental health problems due to an internalized experience of abandonment.

## 1.6. Clarification of terms

The key concepts used in this exploration of how the experience of an absent father influences the identity formation of women are as follows:

- Experience

Waite (2007) defines "experience" as "practical contact with and observation of facts or events", "knowledge or skill gained over time" and "an event which leaves an impression on one". Experience appears to be subjective and relative to the individual's reference system (Reber, 1985). The environment, such as social value systems, also colours and impacts on experience. This study focused on the following experiences in the context of having grown up with an absent father: psychological, social and intimate relationships, and resilience.

- Absent father

Fatherhood is generally associated with masculinity and usually seen as the social role men undertake as caregivers for their children (Morrell cited in Makofane, 2015). 'Absent' is not to be present, not to give attention or to stay away or leave (Soanes & Stevenson, 2004). East, Jackson and O'Brian (cited in Makofane, 2015:24) define absent fathers as "a father being absent from the family home because of parental relationship breakdown". An absent father can fall into any of the categories of absent and unknown; absent but known; absent and undisclosed or unknown deceased (Padi, Nduna, Khunou & Kholopane, 2014:50). In respect to women, Babul and Luise (2016) describe 'fatherlessness' as the loss of an emotional bond between a daughter and her father for any of following reasons: divorce or separation, emotional absence, death, desertion, substance use disorder, abuse, never having met their father, or incarceration. For the purposes of this of this study, the term 'absent father' refers to a father who was experienced by his daughter as physically absent from the child's home for some reason such as those mentioned above.

- Identity formation

Reber (1985) explains that identity formation refers to forming one's own identity. "Identity is our sense of who we are" and "is often consolidated during the teen years" (Cabaniss, Cherry, Douglas & Schwartz, 2017:29). Identity can be defined as "awareness of the self as a continuous and, usually, coherent entity that perceives, thinks, feels, decides, and acts. Conscious identity rests upon the belief structures of unconscious self-organization" (Horowitz, 2014). Identity is not entirely dependent on conscious awareness but is also affected or distorted by unconscious influences. Identity formation of women will be explored in this study in the psychological, social, intimate relations and resilience contexts relating to the experience of an absent father. The psychological effect of having an absent father on the identity formation of women are related to principles of psychological well-being such as self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence (Thapar, Pine, Leckman, Scott, Snowling and Taylor, 2015).

- Social identity

Identity is dependent upon the existence of others. The existence of others defines an individual's sense of self, whether by the individual distancing from, or integrating into society (Hood, 2012), therefore social identity is the relating of an individual to others – identity does not exist in isolation but is relative to other existing identities in the environment. This study examined how the experience of an absent father influences the social identity formation of women, for example, the role of peers, friendships, social isolation and social inclusion or exclusion.

- Intimate relationships

According to Miller (2015) the nature of intimate relationships differs from casual acquaintances based on levels of "knowledge, caring, interdependence, mutuality, trust, and commitment". The object relations approach maintains that interpersonal relationships are represented in the internal world of the subject (St Clair 2004 209). This view holds that the capacity for intimacy and attachment in an individual reflects the

early childhood bonding which took place between caregivers and child. Exploring intimate relationships in the identity formation of women will be an important aspect of this research.

- Resilience

"Resilience is the ability to withstand and rebound from crisis and prolonged adversity. Beyond coping or problem solving, resilience involves positive adaptation and can yield transformation and growth" (Walsh, 2016b:vi-vii). Resilience refers to the capacity of individuals to overcome adversity and is influenced by individual and environmental factors. Resilience includes the following traits and characteristics: "hardiness; the ability to draw on supportive networks and positive emotions in the face of adversity; reflexivity; and emotional insight" (East, Jackson, O'Brien & Peters, 2010). This research project sought to understand how the absence of a father has played out in the identity of women with regards to resiliency.

### **1.7. Ethical considerations**

Ethics are significant for the protection of both researcher and participants. Ethical principles of qualitative enquiry include informed consent, deception, prevention of harm or risk, respect, not breaching confidentiality and protection of anonymity (Schwandt, 2015). In addition de Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005:65) also mention the following ethical principles: actions and competence of the researcher, release of publication of findings and debriefing of respondents. These ethical considerations will be discussed below.

- Informed consent

Informed consent relates to the notion that "research subjects have the right to know they are being researched, the right to be fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research, as well as the right to know the risks and benefits of their participation, and the right to withdraw from participation at any time (Schwandt, 2015)". Given (2008) mentions that "consent should be both informed and voluntary" and that "researchers

must negotiate consent from all relevant people for all relevant matters". Informed consent is crucial because it removes any opacity surrounding the participant's role in the research project and assists with ensuring that participation is voluntary. The researcher provided an informed consent form which was explained to participants prior to participation in the research project. The form requested consent from the participant and explain the voluntary nature of participation, clarifying that the participant may withdraw from the project at any time if she wishes to do so. The form also clarified confidentiality, anonymity and the management of information.

- Prevention of harm or risk

Given (2008) indicates that "the first and most important consideration in gaining access to research participants in qualitative research is to do no harm". Cooperation with contributors requires avoiding misunderstandings which may arise and providing clarity that contributions of participants will be acknowledged (de Vos et al, 2005:58). Harm can be physical and/or emotional. Emotional harm to participants is less easy to predict than physical harm. A researcher should ensure that participants are well informed in advance of possible consequences of the research so that they have the option to withdraw. Researchers should attempt not to include people who are vulnerable in their research. Debriefing of participants, if required, and making referrals, provides the opportunity for participants to assimilate their experiences (de Vos et al, 2005:65). Given the sensitive nature of this inquiry which may trigger old emotional wounds, emotional harm to participants is more of a potential risk than physical harm. Participants were alerted to this potential. Participants were informed that they may withdraw from the project at any time if they wish to. Debriefing through emotional containment and processing challenging emotions was part of the process and participants were referred to appropriate services when required.

- Deception

Loewenberg and Dolgoff (in de Vos et al, 2005:60) describe deception of participants as "deliberately misrepresenting facts in order to make another person believe what is not

true, violat[ing] the respect to which every person is entitled". Corey (in de Vos et al, 2005:60) defines deception in the context of research as "withholding information, or offering incorrect information in order to ensure participation of subjects when they would otherwise possibly have refused it". Neuman (in de Vos et al, 2005:60) suggests that deception takes place "when the researcher intentionally misleads subjects by way of written or verbal instructions, the actions of other people, or certain aspects of the setting". There are numerous ways in which deception can take place in research process which ultimately undermines the outcome of the research. The purpose of the study was be outlined in the consent form. The researcher was open, transparent and provide information about the research project. The researcher verified with the participants that information was understood and provided clear explanations of all facets of the process.

- Not breaching confidentiality and protection of anonymity

Confidentiality means that "information shared with researchers will not be disclosed in a way that can publicly identify a participant or source (Given, 2008)". Given mentions that often confidentiality is "considered as fundamental to human dignity", which includes assurance of confidentiality to protect the privacy of research participants. The assurance of confidentiality may remove some feelings of vulnerability from participants regarding sharing intimate information.

Anonymity and confidentiality are closely related. The distinguishing factor is that in the case of confidentiality, the participant may be known to the researcher who then needs to take steps to protect the identity of the participant and ensure anonymity. Anonymity, as an aspect of ethical and professional codes of conduct, requires "that researchers protect participant privacy through strategies that safeguard anonymity and confidentiality, which implies that a research participant cannot be identified (Given, 2008)". Management of information is the collection and subsequent decisions regarding the placement of the collected information. Management of information includes the following: Confidentiality regarding participants' identities; their names, the names of organizations and places also applies to computer records, audio and videotapes (Yin,

2011:46). Yin adds that the use of pseudonyms contribute to the protection of the anonymity of participants. The researcher will ensure confidentiality regarding any identifying information regarding research participant. The researcher stored confidential material in a locked place. Audio material will be erased on completion of the project and all extra notes will be destroyed and disposed of.

- Actions and competence of the researcher

Actions and competence of the researcher are related to ethics as researchers should be competent and have the required skills to undertake the research project, for example when doing research which involves crossing cultural boundaries (de Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2005:64). The researcher applied the required skills as a qualified practitioner who was engaged in the process in a culturally sensitive manner and was supervised throughout the duration of the research project.

- Release of publication of findings

Release or publication of the findings necessitates that work is "accurate, objective, clear, unambiguous", comprehensive, objective, free of bias and plagiarism. Deficiencies and mistakes should be divulged (de Vos et al, 2005:66). The dissertation was lodged with the University of Cape Town on completion.

## **1.8. Outline of chapters**

Chapter One introduces the study, The problem is formulated, the rationale and significance of the study, research questions, objectives and main assumptions are outlined. The concepts are defined and the ethical considerations are discussed.

Chapter Two provides the literature review. The theoretical models applied to this research are the psychodynamic approach, specifically Object Relations and an offshoot, Self Psychology, which fall under the broad umbrella of psychodynamic approaches, and systems theory according to Murray Bowen. The experience of an

absent father on the identity formation of women is explored in reference to these two models.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology. This chapter delineates the details for the selection the qualitative research design, the trustworthiness of the design procedure, the data collection implementation and the method of data analysis according to Tesch (2013). The chapter includes a description of the applied ethics.

Chapter Four presents the analysis of the research data. It commences with the demographic information followed by the Framework for Analysis. Data is presented as four themes: the psychological effect of having an absent father on the identity formation of women; how the experience of an absent father influences the social identity formation of women; the significance on intimate relationships of an absent father in the Identity Formation of women; and the influence on resiliency of the absent father experience on the identity formation of women.

Chapter Five presents the conclusions drawn from Chapter Four. Recommendations to role players are included.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter includes relevant literature to the topic. This study is approached from a psychodynamic perspective, specifically, Object Relations and Self Psychology, and also the systems theory approach according to Murray Bowen. Where possible literature refers to local studies, however due to limited availability of information and the problem of father absence not being unique to south Africa, the researcher has also drawn from studies outside of South Africa.

- Phenomenon of absent fathers

South African children are typically parented by mothers in single-parent households (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Research in 2004 revealed that half of fathers are absent parents (Eddy et al, 2013:7). According to Kamau and Davies (2018) a report on fatherhood in South Africa states that about thirty-six percent of children reside in the same home as their biological father. They added that in 2014, sixty-four percent of the registered births bore no information about a father. Research in Soweto and Johannesburg showed that 20% of unmarried fathers remained in contact with their children by the time they turned 11 years old (Holborn & Eddy, 2011).

The problem of absent fathers is not unique to South Africa. In a research study in Tanzania, it was found that approximately one third of children under the age of 15 years experienced an absent father. Reasons for absence were death (6%), Divorce and separation (approximately 24%), polygyny where fathers usually live with their first wife, and employment opportunities (Lawson, Schaffnit, Hassan, Ngadaya, Ngowi & Mfinanga, 2017). Children with absent fathers were found to be living in "poor/food insecure households" in comparison with children where both biological parents were present (Lawson et al, 2017). In an ethnographic study in Botswana it was found that absence of a father was not the cause of disadvantage, rather children were disadvantaged because they belonged "to a household without access to the social position, labour, and financial support that is provided by men" (Holborn & Eddy, 2011).

In the US, the Census Bureau published that 80 percent of single-parent households were father-absent in 2012. According to Babul and Luise (2016:31) in 2016 the US Census Bureau found that one out of every three children live in a household which experiences an absent father. A research study of participants between the ages of 15 and 80 from diverse backgrounds and cultures revealed that 50% of the women identified as experiencing an absent father (Babul & Luise, 2016). According to Nielson (2012), daughters in this era are generally unlikely to experience a present father throughout their childhood, largely due to parental divorce or mothers being single parents.

There appears to be a range of reasons why a father may be absent in the life of his daughter in South Africa. Impediments to men meeting their role of father in society include: poverty, the legacy of apartheid, inequality in post-apartheid South Africa, unemployment, gender inequality, HIV/AIDS and death caused by violence (Hunter, Mfecane & Wilson cited in Ratele, Shefer & Clowes, 2012:555, 560-561). In an African context, statistics in Kenya indicate a range of problems linked to the absence of a father, including 63% of youth suicides being from homes with an absent father (Kimani & Kombo, 2010:14). Nichols (2017:20) mentions that reasons for father-absent households in African American families include substance abuse, death due to hazardous jobs, delays in seeking healthcare, military service, homicide and prison.

- Historical context of families in South Africa

The historical context of families of black family systems in South Africa was ruptured by colonisation and then by the migrant labour system of apartheid, resulting in many single female-headed households. The structure of the economy, labour migration and urbanization have played a role in disrupting families, at times causing prolonged absence of fathers (Nsamenang in Lamb, 2010). It is concerning that there is an increase of absent fathers since the years of apartheid. According to Holborn and Eddy (2011) research into the impact of pass laws and the migratory labour system on family life reveals that although the laws establishing the migrant labour system have been repealed, migrancy still exists and there are long-term effects of the migrant labour

system. Nsamenang (in Lamb, 2010) adds that in South Africa, since the end of apartheid, there was loss of human capital which resulted in an increase in the old migrant labour system where men have to leave their families and are therefore unavailable to play a role in the care and nurturance of their children.

Reflecting on the example of Kenya, Nsamenang (in Lamb, 2010) mentions that traditional means of livelihood in Kenya have been augmented by wage related labour activities, affecting about half of fathers. This introduction of modernization has also meant that fundamental tasks performed by the family are increasingly assigned to social institutions such as schools or day care centres, which has negatively affected the family as an institution.

Traditionally in polygynous societies "the wives maintained geographically separate households, fathers were present in the lives of their young children only intermittently". However the traditional ways in some African communities have been changed by "a trend toward urban employment and migrant labour for men, while most women and children stay at home" or mothers are employed (Nsamenang in Lamb, 2010).

Holborn and Eddy (2011) mentioned that approximately 8% of South African children live in "skip-generation households with grandparents or great aunts or uncles". However to fully understand these circumstances more research needs to be done regarding the effects on children who grow up with extended family parenting. Another study showed that children raised by grandparents rather than a single parent appeared to fare better in the areas of health, behaviour and academic progress (Solomon & Marx cited in Makofane, 2015:28). The presence of a father is not crucial in a child's upbringing, as long as a stable environment is provided by responsible adult according to Silverstein and Auerbach (cited in Makofane, 2015).

Responding to the increasing trends of absent fathers in South Africa, Holborn and Eddy (2011) suggest that complicated issues relating to parental responsibility, monogamy and commitment to relationships need to be widely addressed.

This research takes place within the context of South Africa in the aftermath of apartheid, a period where the racial divides are still strongly evident. "Apartheid was a potent socio-political expression of splitting and projective identification, polarizing people along racial lines while justifying the denigration and oppression of black people who seemed to embody the antithesis of white Western" beliefs and values (Smith, Lobban & O'Loughlin, 2013: 165). Bousin (in Johnson, 2004:1) links race awareness with cultural shame. Object relations theorists identified the "tendency to (mis)use devalued racial groups as "containers" for disavowed and unwanted aspects of the self".

- Cultural perspectives of fatherhood

Nsamenang (in Lamb, 2010) wrote that fatherhood in the context of indigenous African cultures is "the legitimate way to procreate and have socially integrated children is through marriage". He added that "without children, marriage in principle loses its significance". The author clarifies that from a cultural perspective, becoming a father means being immortalised because "a child is the only remedy against [complete] death", therefore "most Africans prefer to die in poverty and be survived by offspring than to die rich but childless". A child is a means of becoming an ancestor and thereby surviving annihilation of death.

In a study of experiences of African women from families with absent fathers, participants expressed concern about not having shared history with their fathers (Makofane, 2015). Makofane explains that a child should be formally introduced to her father's family or ancestors, and not doing so will bring about ill fortune for the duration of her life. In Xhosa culture a ceremony named *imbeleko* takes place after the birth of a child where a family elder "calls upon the ancestors to bless and protect the child" (Ramphela & Richter cited in Makofane 2015:33). According to Makofane (2015) Africans believe that a daughter who experiences an absent father will be incapable of long-term relationships with men.

According to Nsamenang (in Lamb, 2010) Western families "privilege adults with child care", while African communities situate child care training as a familial commitment, a communal "management, caretaking and socially distributed support of the family".

Developmental learning also takes place within peer child-to-child caregiving. Consequently children develop "a sense of group membership" which includes a responsibility to acquire skills applicable to parenting. Adoption of the "traditional Anglo-American model of family and fatherhood", despite the lack of information, leads to pathologising African ways of fatherhood and family life. Nsamenang adds that African fathers do take an interest in their children and that measuring father involvement with their children in terms of physical co-residence is an inaccurate analysis because it does not reflect paternal involvement over the entire span of the child's life. Nsamenang perhaps attempts to justify father absence when he presents his view that in most African cultures, a child remains a 'child' whilst parents are alive and that measures of paternal availability need to include "non co-resident, but socially or psychically connected fathers and should take account of children's life course experience of connection to, or search for their fathers". The cultural perspective, 'social fathering' will be discussed below.

- Social fathering

The implication of "social fathering" is that absence of the biological father is not equated with "absence of paternal functioning" (Kamau & Davies, 2018:15-16). The South African term "social fathering" describes the various ways in which adult males may fulfil a paternal function in a child's life. Lamb (2010) mentions that "paternal non-residence may be harmful not because a sex role model is absent, but because many paternal roles—economic, social, emotional—are inadequately filled in these families". Research has shown that a "social father" may adequately compensate for an absent father. Social fathers may include grandfathers, uncles, teachers, priests, older brothers and a mother's partner, who "singly or collectively provide for children's livelihood and education and give them paternal love and guidance", potentially mitigating negative outcomes of the absence of a biological father.

Social fathering was found to be successful in a study by Makofane (2015:24) where a number of participants stated that they "did not miss the physical and emotional presence of their father". In another research study, Kamau and Davies (2018:43) found

that a key theme that emerged in their study was that social fathering was not experienced as a replacement of the father-daughter relationship, although daughters sometimes minimised their experience of loss as a defence against pain.

- The role of a father

According to Swartz and Bhana (2009:11) there is sparse South African literature available on fatherhood as a core identity of men. Mavungu (cited in Makofane, 2015) asserts that little is known about how African men relate to the role of fatherhood or how they perceive absent fathers. The high statistics of father absence indicate the relevance for research regarding daughters who experience an absent father. Kamau and Davies (2018) mention that in comparison to discussions on absent father-son, absent father-daughter information is more limited. Available literature on father absence focuses on the identity of South African males or the identity of non-South African females (Zulu, 2014). Although there is literature available internationally about the identity formation of women in the context of an absent father, there appears to be a general lack of research data in this field.

Research has established that African fathers are a crucial resource for children (Nsamenang in Lamb, 2010). Traditionally, fathers are viewed as providers, protectors of their wives and children (Makofane, 2015). According to Lamb (2010) "evidence suggests that recognition of the father's multiple roles as breadwinner, parent, and emotional partner is essential for understanding how fathers influence children's development". Nsamenang (in Lamb, 2010) describes the father's role is "as socializers of infants and young children". Nsamenang adds that the actions of a father, both positive and negative, have an effect on their children's learning. Supportive caregivers are important for the wellbeing of children.

Nielson (2012) posed a research question, "are fathers necessary?" and findings included that besides financial contributions, fathers play a crucial role in their children's "social, cognitive, physical and psychological health". Nielson concluded that the role of fathers is equal in significance to that of mothers regarding their children's "academic

and vocational success, mental health, sexual behaviour, antisocial and delinquent behaviour, self-confidence, social maturity and relationships with the other sex". A key factor is that a sufficient amount of quality time is required to be spent by fathers with their children.

In most cultures and subcultures, there are simultaneously both overlapping and distinct role expectations for mothers and fathers (Palkovitz, Sherif, Trask & Adamsons, 2014:411). Nielson (2012:72) maintains that differences in parenting styles between mothers and fathers are overstated, however she asserts that a father who engages with his baby and toddler, may affect his child's capacity to "take calculated risks" and be more courageous and adventurous in ways which further physical, cognitive and social development.

Researchers, Palkovitz, Sherif, Trask and Adamsons (2014:416-417), hold that the crux of parenting is different for mothers and fathers. The authors maintain that from the start, complex political, social, and institutional contexts influence men to approach parenting differently from women, and "their experiences and trajectories diverge in many additional ways over time". Therefore the processes and meanings of fathering are distinct from those of mothering, resulting in different cognitive and affective experiences in their children interacting with fathers and mothers. Mothers and fathers perceive and prioritise care of family and children's needs differently. Research found that fathers believed that good parenting implies participating in family life and spending time with their children. Men described the fathering role as "helping and supporting mothers rather than viewing parenting as a primary responsibility". It was found that fathers generally thought of time after work as an opportunity for childcare, contrasting with mothers who tended to experience time at work as a reduction of time with their children. Mothers and fathers are likely to parent differently and sex and gender also "interact in multiple ways to influence parents perceptions of interactions with their children" (Palkovitz, Sherif, Trask & Adamsons, 2014:411).

From a clinical perspective, historically the cultural and psychoanalytic function of the father has been of "bringing order through establishing boundaries and curbing the

narcissistic omnipotence of the infant by setting limits to what can happen" (Baradon, 2019:xiv). Bernstein (cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018:19) adds that fathers of daughters feature as "libidinal objects, as protectors and rescuers from the mother" and unlike a relationship with a same-sex child, fathers are not "objects of identification for their daughters". According to Davies (2014: 24-25) the four key functions from a psychoanalytic perspective, which will be discussed further in this research study, regarding the role a father plays in the life of his infant are:

**1) A separating third.** The father plays a role in drawing the infant out from the symbiotic mother-infant dyad, and introduces the infant to a wider world. Lack of the father playing a separating function may result in an infant remaining unhealthily enmeshed with her mother.

"Thirdness" and "triadification" is distinguishable from the term "triangulation" used in family-systems theory which refers to a dysfunctional process which usually involves the parents drawing in a third person, usually their child, to manage their conflict (Baradon, 2019). Triangling is a process where a third person enters a dyadic relationship in order to bring stability to the system. In Bowen theory, a triangle refers to a three-person system and is seen as the smallest stable unit in the context of human interaction (Wetchler & Hecker, 2015).

According to the analyst, Britton (cited in Flaskas, 2012), thirdness is about thinking and relating to the self and the other, and refers to "a triadic relationship in which one person has a relationship with each of two other people, while any twosome in that triangle also have a relationship that is separate and apart from the third person. This triangular space provides the possibility of being a participant in a relationship and observed by a third person as well as being an observer of a relationship between two people" The experience of the self is thus as both subject and object. Baradon (2019:xv, 23) expands on this "psychic triangular space", noting that there's a range of potential complex constellations involving absence and presence of nurturing objects and satisfaction and dissatisfaction of needs. Experiences include differences between each parent, their ways of relating and responding to their child's needs, which enable their child to

"experience herself in the mirror of the object and find herself in a relationship with differing objects". Integrating the third, supports children's processes of development such as individuation, symbolisation and mentalisation. "The third" involves an alignment in relating that "can only be maintained paradoxically, by tolerating the inevitable interactive shifts from alignment to misalignment and back" (Benjamin cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018:5). The infant's experience of the initial mother-child dyad thus becomes more complex in a constellation where two parents are role players in their world.

According to Kamau and Davies (2018:16), a psychodynamic perspective of paternal functions are traditionally seen as essential for healthy psychic development. The father plays the role of separating the mother-infant dyad and in so doing, re-establishes the parent's relationship with each other and establishes the father-daughter relationship. The internal triangular structure is necessary "for the optimal development of the capacity to mentalise" which plays a role in successful relating. Kamau and Davies (2018:17) add that the concept of a "port of psychic safety" represents an alternate attachment figure to whom to flee physically or psychically for comfort of safety and support when the mother-child relationship is experienced as turbulent. The paternal object "can also be used as a receptacle into which all the badness of the mother-daughter relationship can be projected", which keeps the "mother-daughter relationship psychically safe".

Samuels (cited in Kamau & Davies 2018:17) focussed on thirdness rather than gender, referring to the concept of "the good enough father of whatever sex". On the other hand, Rottman (in Kamau & Davies 2018) held a different view, that thirdness may not be essential for the "separating function where both the healthy mother and baby are both biologically wired to separate out and seek relationships additional to the mother-infant dyad".

Tessman (in Cath, Gurwitt & Ross, 2009) takes a psychoanalytic approach and is perhaps referring to aspects of thirdness when describing two kinds of excitement which are aroused in a daughter in response to her father and which plays a role in their relationship and also in her development: endeavour excitement and erotic excitement.

Endeavour excitement is linked to individuation from the mother around two years of age. Garfield (in Akhtar & Parens, 2004:40) adds the daughter discovers different ways of engaging in the world in the context of "a mutually curious and affectionate relationship" with her father. According to an analytic approach, erotic excitement begins around three to four years. If her father responds with an appreciation of her as a growing person, this may assist her to decontextualize the relationship and motivate her transform the excitement into a less threatening form of companionship (Tessman in Cath, Gurwitt & Ross, 2009).

The father is associated "with the exciting outside world beyond maternal power", is symbolically linked "with the recognition of independence, and the recognition of the child as a subject of desire" (Benjamin cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018:20). Benjamin adds that "penis envy" can be interpreted as a symbolic expression of a daughter's "father hunger", her yearning for him as a figure with which she can identify and "in which she can locate her recognition of her own independence and autonomy".

**2) A facilitator of mental structure and the capacity to think.** "Exposure to an external triadic structure encourages the development of an internal three dimensional space" which helps develop "the capacity for symbolisation and reflection". The father brings in a third to create a triangle "which opens up internal space and stimulates complexity in thinking" beyond the closed world mother-infant symbiotic relationship.

**3) A facilitator of affect management.** Differences in roles played by parents in the infant's life impact on affect regulation. It is thought that fathers interact with infants differently in ways which create "a level of arousal beyond that experienced in interactions" with the mother, who is likely to focus on "decreasing anxiety and soothing". The non-threatening increase of positive and negative affect "is more easily stirred and tolerated by the paternal functionary, and this encourages the development of increased affect regulation in the infant".

**4) A provider of psychic safety.** "This function refers to the provision of a safe refuge for the infant during times of persecutory anxiety in the mother-infant relationship", either by being an alternative container of the baby's hostile projections "so that these

projections are not directed towards the mother", or being a non threatening, safe object for the baby when the mother "is the target of the infant's hostility".

### **2.1.1 The psychological effect**

Research confirms that father absence affects children's social-emotional development adversely. Effects continue into adolescence, increasing risky behaviour. The psychological harm continues throughout life (McLanahan, Tach & Schneider, 2013). Daughters of absent fathers are more likely to experience "teen pregnancy, earlier onset of sexual activity, decreased self-esteem and behavioural problems (Strauss 2013). According to Rosenthal (2010) an absent father is a harmful experience that affects the identity, self-esteem and relationships of his daughter into adulthood. According to Babul and Luise (2016:160) a study done with a sample of over 5,000 women who experience an absent father showed that 60 percent of daughters who experienced an absent father resorted to alcohol and other drugs, food, sex, isolating, avoidance or self-harm as coping mechanisms to attempt to escape pain.

According to Makofane (2015:31) the experience of an absent father may result in daughters feeling emotionally wounded, lost, unloved, hurt, rejected and betrayed. Carr (2016:56-57) maintains that absent fathers are associated with conduct disorders in their children which may be due to less available parenting resources and also because children may be drawn into "problem-maintaining triangulation" when the parents emotional system is unstable and their child is brought into the conflict. Quantity and quality time spent with a father results in better "overall adjustment in the long term" and "greater instrumental and interpersonal competence and higher self-esteem".

Gobbi (in Babul & Luise, 2016:161-162) conducted a study on female mice which experienced an absent father, that correlates with behaviour of human daughters who had also experienced an absent father. Results displayed "significant developmental differences in the prefrontal cortex which is related to cognitive and social activity. Neural pathways may not develop normally in daughters who experience an absent father, who "are less able to analyse, react and emote in the same ways fathered

daughters are". Daughters who experience an absent father are more likely to experience anxiety and insecurity in emotionally stressful situations than daughters who have a father, and she is also likely to hide or bury these feelings. Babul & Luise point out that feelings of rejection register in the brain as physical pain, which is triggered repeatedly throughout life, causing physical symptoms such as headaches, gastrointestinal problems and exhaustion.

Langlois (2018) observe that the crucial stage of a daughter's relationship with her father takes place from the age of 2 through to 4 years old and the outcomes plays out for the rest of her life. Babul & Luise (2016) outline the effects of the loss of a father in a daughter's life across her lifespan of childhood into adulthood. During infancy, insecurity, mistrust and fear may manifest into emotional instability, suspicion of others, withdrawal and lack of self-confidence. As a toddler, absence of a father's approval and support is likely to be an internalised void. Learning about male-female communication is impacted by father absence. A father impacts on the emotional and cognitive experience at the preschool stage and she is likely to believe she is responsible for the absence of her father at this age which may result in regressive behaviour. Loss of her father can affect her future reproductive maturity and sexual activity, such as an earlier onset of puberty, premature sexual activity and precarious adult relationships. During the school going age father absence may negatively affect academic performance. During puberty a child who experiences an absent father may act out in negative ways. Lack of father's feedback and support during adolescence can detrimentally affect his daughter's self-image. A father models appropriate boundaries with the opposite sex and his absence may put her at risk and affect her confidence. If her grief is not worked through, loss of her father may result in problems such as risky behaviour, substance misuse, relationship problems and even suicidal thoughts. As a young adult, her father misses her important milestone events and loss of a father as a resource, at a stage when her relationships are likely to deepen, may lower her level of personal self-mastery and psychological awareness.

- The type and timing of the absenteeism

According to research there is a direct link between the circumstances that caused a father to leave their home and the consequences that play out in the lives of daughters who experience an absent father (Babul and Luise, 2016:32). Babul and Luise list the following ways in which a father may leave: divorce, death, sudden loss, violent death, suicide, incarceration, emotional absence, substance use disorder, abuse or dissertation.

The cause of absence of a father plays a role in a daughter's understanding of him. According to Krampe and Newton (in Brown, 2018) if her father dies, her attitude towards her father tends to be more positive while absence due to divorce results in a more unfavourable view of him. Nielson (2012) argues that daughters are less likely to feel they were "voluntarily abandoned" if their father dies than if there is a divorce. Young daughters may feel responsible for their father's death and also for divorce. As a daughter grows older, the meaning of her father's death deepens for her. If her father committed suicide, she may question why he "chose to leave her". Wakerman (2015) suggests that amongst the various causes of absence, parental divorce may produce a bold, more self-assured outlook in the daughter than those affected by the permanence of death. Babul & Luise (2016:196) point out that father's day or other memory days on the calendar related to their father may bring up sadness and grief for daughters who experience an absent father.

Nielson (2012) mentions that when a divorce occurs, the father-daughter relationship is generally harder hit than a father-son relationship. Factors that contribute to this may be the historic quality of the father-daughter relationship, societal attitudes toward divorced fathers, mother's attitudes and behaviour, financial problems, remarriage and legal system bias against fathers.

Daughters benefit less than sons from having a stepfather and are more at risk for anxiety, depression and suicidal feelings (Nielson, 2012:260-261). Daughters are more likely to be close to their mothers and resent the addition of a stepfather to their family. Stepdaughters are also more at risk of sexual abuse (Nielson, 2012). Kamau and Davies

(2018:18) mention that due to alarmingly high rates of abuse of children by men, perhaps a paternal presence is not necessarily always favourable for children.

The type and timing of the absenteeism of a father has a range of repercussions on different areas of a daughter's development throughout her life cycles (La Guardia, Nelson & Lertora, 2014: 340). These repercussions and other psychological effects will be explored in this research in terms of how the identity of daughters is influenced.

- Longing

The experience of absence is often met with longing. Nielson (2012:55) defines "father hunger" as "the emotional and psychological longing for a father who has been physically, emotionally, or psychologically distant". Elise (cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018) explains that a daughter "may register this absence of the object as an internal, bodily sense of being empty". Father hunger can be expressed as "idealisation of her father and other men, and/or in contempt and denigration of men in general" (Garfield in Kamau & Davies, 2018:19).

Kristeva (cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018:20) describes the father's cathexis or "recognition function" as "loving his daughter into existence" by recognising her as a unique autonomous human being, rather than an extension of her mother. Kamau and Davies (2018:20) point out that absence of the experience of a father's love means that a crucial experience fails to unfold in the child's psyche, which results in father hunger.

Research shows that daughters of absent fathers are more likely to build emotional barriers which hinder their capacity to establish connections with others (Strauss 2013). The expectations an individual has of others are influenced by their sense of self. The sense of self is in turn formed by experience. Loss of a father in early childhood is likely to be interpreted as rejection, which is carried through into adulthood (Wakerman, 2015). Babul and Luise (2016) claim that women who experience an absent father are more likely to struggle with intimate relationships and fear abandonment. The role of a father in his daughter's life is said to critically impact on her ability to trust, have regard for, or

relate well to other males in her life (Erikson & Erikson, Flouri & Leonard cited in La Guardia, Nelson & Lertora, 2014:340). Women who experience an absent father are more likely to develop detrimental relationships due to profound feelings of neediness (Babul & Luise, 2016).

According to Kohut, the grandiose self is an aspect of self that "wants to feel special and full of well-being" and needs to be mirrored by "people who will reflect and identify its unique capacities, talents, and characteristics" (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011:169). A daughter who experiences an absent father would miss out on the opportunity of affirming, constructive feedback, in the form of mirroring, from their fathers.

Babul and Luise (2016:162) are perhaps referring to the absence of mirroring when they refer to a daughter who experiences an absent father as being "put on life's stage without having the chance to review the script, practice the scenes and get comfortable with a live audience" which results in the likelihood of compromised self-confidence, coping skills, feelings of competency and ability to form long term fulfilling relationships. Babul and Luise go on to say that these daughters who experience an absent father are likely to overcompensate but without having been given the required tools, she feels different to other people and struggles "to find ways to fill the voids in her life".

Wakerman (2015) mentions that an insecure self image is seen is typical in female adolescence, which is also a period of increasing interest in boys. During adolescent years the father is a mirror of his daughter's developing sexuality, providing a reflection of her progress. With abandonment there is a loss of mirroring (Bradshaw in Garfield-Kabbara, 2014). For the adolescent who experiences an absent father, these experiences are a fundamental cause of anxiety (Wakerman, 2015).

Finally, Kohut's concept of twinship which he defined as "a sense of essential likeness" and, a feeling "that one is a human being among other human beings" (Togashi & Kottler, 2015:7), is also significant in the context of this research. Twinship, in the context of this research, is about a daughter's need to experience her father as similar in order to have the comfort of recognising herself in him. An absence of twinship may lead

to a sense of having to cope alone and may lead to difficulties in attaining a sense of connectedness with others (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011).

- An idealised internal father

Mahler and Abelin (in Strauss, 2013) point out that the father is the first other significant relationship "outside of the symbiotic relationship between mother and child". According to Baradon (2019:xiv) a child develops an internal father, based on their interactions, however an absent father also exists "as an internal psychic presence". Internalised parents contribute to the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of a child and as an adult, may influence her choice in sexual partners (Baradon, 2019:52).

Kohut indicated that there is a need for an "idealised parent imago", which is an aspect of the self fulfilling "the need to have someone strong, calm, and wonderful to idealize and merge with in order to feel safe and complete within the self" (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011:171-172). In the case of an absent father, when the daughter is unable to self-soothe, the father is perhaps imagined as someone who could have been soothing and pacifying had he been present.

A psychoanalytic perspective holds that an absent father is likely to occupy considerable space within the psyche that influences the course of his daughter's development. Strauss (2013) suggested that an intrapsychic representation of a relationship with a fantasy father may be distorted by idealisation. In contrast, "daddy's girls" according to Freud, as an "Antigone complex", where plays out as a daughter who is a favoured child, who is devoted to her father at the expense of her own identity. The father's role is narcissistic, in that he experiences his daughter only as a reflection and extension of himself (Nielsen, 2012). There appears to be some similarity with a daughter who experiences an absent father if an idealised internal relationship eclipses and obstructs potential constructive relationships in her life.

Daughters who idealise their father's memory, may develop unrealistic expectations of their partners in the future or themselves (Nielsen 2012). Nielsen (2012:110) includes the "de-idealisation" of parents as a prerequisite for adolescents to develop emotional

autonomy. Nielson explains that cognitive maturity involves adolescents evaluating their parents more realistically and recognising both their strengths and their flaws.

According to Berscheid and Walster, (in Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell & Overall, 2013) it can happen that intense "passion is aroused – not by real-life love objects – but by partners who are barely known ... or who exist only in imagination". Wakerman (2015:225) refers to "the ghostly lover" as a metaphor for the internal absent father which she sees as functioning for women who experience an absent father causing them to "pursue, then repel, male attention". The implication seems to be that a daughter who experiences an absent father may have an internalised "phantom father" who has never become a real but ordinary human being with flaws and strengths, but remains a phantom which may fluctuate between being a nightmarish villain or a dashing hero at the slightest trigger. According to Strauss (2013) if "splitting" is resorted to as a defence mechanism, the daughter's fear and rage may remain unacknowledged. Because the daughter has no real relationship to refer to, the distorted fantasies may impair her ability to form fulfilling relationships in her social context. However, fantasies of the absent father may provide a satisfactory alternative, which aids the daughter to "create an internalisation of a triangular structure".

The varying views by the authors seem to suggest, on the one hand, idealisation may play a healthy and supporting role, and on the other hand, may be a distorting and obstructing factor. This study will further explore the implications an absent father experience on social and intimate relationships in the identity formation of women.

This research study also reflects how an absent father may negatively affect social and intimate adult relationships.

### **2.1.2 Intimate and social relationships**

According to Makofane (2015) daughter's responses to absence of fathers may include emotional detachment, denial, deep-seated hurt and pain which if not attended to is likely to obstruct intimate relationships. Nielson (2012:149) mentions that internationally, statistics indicate that daughters of absent fathers are more likely to: fall pregnant; have

sex at an earlier age; have bad grades at school; drop out of school; not attend institutions of higher learning; break the law; lack confidence; abuse substances; have emotional and psychological problems; suffer from depression; have eating disorders; have poor health; stress related illness; have unstable romantic relationships; have difficulty trusting and being emotionally intimate with men; struggle with communication in their intimate relationships with men; have difficulty with negotiating, compromising, controlling emotions and calming anger with men; and be more likely to have unsuccessful marriages. Distress, anger, and self-doubt arising from an absent-father experience may contribute to problematic relationships with peers, such as bullying behaviour (Nsamenang in Lamb, 2010).

Research conducted in Nigeria shows that absent fathers result in academic underachievement and childhood psychopathology (Nsamenang in Lamb, 2010). On the other hand, a research study by Makofane (2015) found that participants emerged from their experience of an absent father "as strong and independent women", however "their distrust of men remains a concern". A child who internalises an absent father may grow up to anticipate abandonment and betrayal in her adult relationships.

A feedback loop, or "self-fulfilling prophesy", relates to how the environment "echoes" back to a person what they have acted out in it (Simson, 2002). The environment affects an individual, whilst at the same time the individual affects the environment and the way in which a person affects the environment is likely to reinforce the original pattern. This points to re-enactment of cycles and likelihood of repeating unresolved psychodynamics (Simson, 2002). This behaviour contributes to themes and patterns that play out in a person's life. A daughter may act out the absence of a father by, for example, repeatedly leaving relationships or contributing to circumstances where she may be left, thereby re-creating the abandonment she experienced of her father. Baradon (2019) mentions that a therapeutic relationship with a male therapist presents the transformational potential for her to experience a male who is available to her and who offers containment of her destructiveness without abandonment.

Poverty is a serious social problem which will be discussed below.

- Poverty

Nielson (2012) explains the feedback loop created by poverty: Poverty gives rise to financial stress which may cause tension in parents relationship with each another, giving rise to conflict and unhappiness which affects the quality of their parenting. Poor parenting in turn results in their children being disturbed and acting out their disturbances. Father's appear to disengage from their children when their relationship with their wife is strained. Studies have found that father's detachment in low-income groups correlated to their inability to meet financial demands (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016).

In a research study of young men who became fathers as teenagers and also experienced poverty, almost two thirds of the participants had experienced an absent father (Swartz & Bhana, 2009).

Fathers absence causes stress for mothers because they parent alone, and may have fewer resources which negatively impacts on children therefore there is need for involvement of "African fathers in the lives of their children—through caring, providing financially and supporting their children's learning" (Nsamenang in Lamb, 2010).

### **2.1.3 Resiliency**

A study of resilience as a psychoanalytic concept found that resilience extends "beyond simple adaptation" and is "the ability to survive, related to intra-psycho capabilities and early emotional experiences" and social context of a person (Margarim, Santana, Machado, Bastos & Freitas, 2018:206).

Resilience of daughters who experience an absent father was explored by Babul and Luise (2016), whose research findings indicate that the daughters are likely to resort to effective coping mechanisms and mature at an early age, presenting as self-reliant, persevering and with leadership qualities. Daughters of absent fathers are likely to fill in missing parts of the story for themselves (Rosenthal, 2010). Constructive family structures can also compensate for the adverse effects of an absent father (Brown, 2018). Ninety percent of women who experienced an absent father in a sample of 2000

participants mentioned they experienced support from friends, relatives, mentors, therapists or a father figure as a strategy for coping (Babul & Luise, 2016).

Babul and Luise (2016) mention that a daughter who experienced an absent father may be a role model for her own daughter, "instilling in her the self-confidence and wisdom to go into the world knowing how to love and be loved in a healthy way" and as a mother to a son, she may be a teacher, raising him "to love others, respect women, and balance strength with emotion".

Nielson (2012) mentions that despite the disturbance and lengthy period of grieving when there is death of a father, daughters are likely to find ways to continue their sense of father-daughter relationship in ways that will bring comfort to them all through their lives.

Studies have found that there is great importance given to achievement of higher grades for school going girls who experience an absent father, "echoing the importance they place on responsible performance at home, these daughter's very self-esteem relied on their higher grades. When this factor was removed, self-esteem notably decreased" (Wakerman, 2015). Zulu (2014) found that the participants in a study involving female students who experienced an absent father were generally academic overachievers. In a study on daughter's relational communication, Jackson (2010) found that daughters who experienced an absent father generally scored higher on self-disclosure, expressed themselves with less effort and were less likely to restrict self-expression than daughters with present fathers.

## **2.2 Theoretical framework**

- Psychodynamic model

'Psychodynamic' is a broad term that refers to approaches which involve unconscious processes (Howard, 2011:7). The psychodynamic models originated with Freud and have evolved since the time of it's origins. 'Object relations' is a psychodynamic approach that focuses on interpersonal relationships that are represented in the internal

world of a person (St Clair, 2004:209). According to psychodynamic approaches, parents as caregivers are key relationships formed in early childhood. The psychodynamic approach is relevant to this study because it stresses the significance of early relationships and the formative role they play in people's lives (Simson, 2002).

Psychodynamic theory holds that the patterns played out in later life stem from childhood experience. 'Transference' describes the playing out in current relationships of a deep patterning of the past (Corey, 2009:71). Freud discovered that people do not remember what has been repressed, they do however act it out, and unknowingly repeat it (Malcolm, 1997:28). Transference is significant in the context of this research because as Howard (2017) points out, it is about 'the child' within the adult which plays out in current life situations. The past replays in the present but is unconscious and therefore a "return of the repressed" and "a distortion of reality" (Solms, 2018). In the context of this research, the implications are that an absent father experience is likely to be transferred into relationships throughout a daughter's life. Freud drew attention to "repetition compulsion", the tendency people have of repeating unresolved psycho-dynamics again and again until there is "re-remembering", or healing (Simson, 2002). Kamau and Davies (2018) mention that there is little information available around absent fathers and their daughters from a psychoanalytic perspective. This research project will focus on Object Relations and an offshoot, Self Psychology, which falls under the broad umbrella of psychodynamic approaches, focusing on the development of a sense of self. Some influential psychodynamic analysts include Melanie Klein, Ronald Fairbairn, Donald Winnicott, Margaret Mahler, John Bowlby, and group analysts, Wilfred Bion and Siegmund Fuchs. Self Psychology was formulated by Heinz Kohut.

Stamenova and Hinshelwood (2019:44) refer to the "metaphor of the mycelium", which describes the "unconscious matrix", while also describing people as social beings in an interconnected group. A psychodynamic approach may assist this project to plumb down vertical depths, while a systems approach, which is discussed below, may expand the project horizontally.

- Bowens's family systems theory

Family systems theory according to Bowen is a holistic approach that maintains that an individual cannot be understood outside of the multigenerational system which they are part of because family members are seen as being interconnected. In the system any one person affects the whole system (Davies, 2013:488). Family systems are also comprised of subsystems, which include the parent dyad, sibling associations, and parent-child duos. Each subsystem affects the experience of all family members (Palkovitz, Sherif, Trask & Adamsons, 2014:411). The context is also taken into consideration because a systemic approach looks at people within their environment bearing in mind that families do not live in a vacuum (Nichols, 2017).

The family systems approach indicates that an absent parent plays some role in a symptom and therefore a missing parent should be included in a hypothesis about a problem in a family system (Morawetz & Walker, 1984:93). It can be assumed that an absent father in a family system will have an impact on all the family members, including that of his daughter. Further, the systems approach indicates that effects will have a multi-generational outcome. The absent father can be seen as a missing part of the system. If there is a hole in the system, a daughter's work may be to fill it or find a means of coping.

### **2.3 Policy and legislation**

South African policy regarding parenting is outlined in The Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) which explains that a parent "has both the right and the responsibility to care for, maintain contact with, act as guardian for and contribute to the maintenance of the child". The White Paper on Families in South Africa of 2012 promotes healthy family life, family strengthening and family preservation. The White Paper on Families is significant to this study because it stresses that absent fathers are a crucial issue affecting families in South Africa. Both the South African government and non-governmental organisations have determined that absent fathers present "a key developmental challenge in communities and a source of multiple social challenges" (Eddy et al, 2013). This study

seeks to throw light on the impact of father absence on the lives on their daughters which is perhaps a hitherto neglected aspect of this subject.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter explored available literature related to the experience of an absent father on the identity formation of women. In comparison with the body of knowledge available on the mother-child relationship, there is considerably less material available on the father-child relationship (Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2005:30). Available literature indicates some influences of the role of a father in the lives of their daughters and the outcomes of the absence of a father. Although there has been some research on this subject, it does not appear to be extensive and there is a need to fill in the knowledge gap regarding daughters who experience an absent father.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology and design which were applied in the study: population and sampling, data collection, analysis and verification, limitations of the study and concludes with considering the reflexivity of the researcher.

### 3.1. Research design

Yin (2011:75) explains that a research design is a "logical blueprint" which provides a coherent plan of action. A research design can be described as the translation of an idea into a process of action. Qualitative research is "an inquiry process of comprehending a social or human problem based on building a complex holistic picture formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants and is conducted in a natural setting (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014:9)". Qualitative researchers seek to examine and draw data from real life experiences and interactions. The distinctive qualities of qualitative research according to Yin (2011:8) are that it gains insight into people's lives in natural settings, presents people's perspectives, allows for peoples contexts, contributes "insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behaviour" and strives to draw from a range of "sources of evidence". Yin makes the observation that contrary to other social science methods, any "real-world happening can become the subject of a qualitative study". The researcher was referred to a non-profit organisation, Soil for Life based in Cape Town, which facilitates holistic training programmes focussed on people growing their own food, health and well being. The organisation gave permission for participants to be accessed and snowball sampling was also applied to increase the number of participants.

This research study employed a qualitative research methodology. The philosophical underpinnings of the qualitative research approach start with the goals, which are to explore meaning, themes, conflicts and paradoxes in the experiences of human beings. Because the researchers play a central role in the process, there is need to be aware and reflexive of their own perspectives, assumptions and bias. Qualitative research is

characteristically interpretive and as much as the subjectivity of the researcher plays a role in research, there is need for checks and balances to ensure reliability and validity which is discussed in under the section, "data verification". Generally qualitative research is informed by the constructivist paradigm that the "reality" of human beings and social groups is a subjective construct (Jaye, 2002).

The complexity, range and sensitivity of information required makes the qualitative approach a suitable research method for this project. The researcher conducted a research project following a qualitative approach to develop an in-depth understanding of the sample population in order to gain insight into their experiences of how an absent father influences their identity.

## **3.2. Population and sampling**

### **3.2.1 Sampling technique**

A population in a research project refers to every individual who fits the criteria which the researcher has laid out for research participants (Given 2008, sv "population"). Abdulai and Owusu-Ansah (2014:11) explain that data is collected from a sample population which selected from a "target total population (sampling frame) and surveyed". In this research the population comprises adult women who grew up without a father and lived in the Cape Town. A sample of twenty women from varying cultural backgrounds and circumstances was drawn from the population for this study.

Purposive and snowball sampling design was used in this research project. Purposive sampling grows out of the objectives and interests that characterize qualitative research (Given, 2008). Yin (2011:88) mentions that "in qualitative research, the samples are likely to be chosen in a deliberate manner known as purposive sampling". The term "purposive", reflects the purposeful intention involved in sample selection which directs and guides the process. The researcher applied purposive sampling because she relied on her own judgment when selecting participants for the study. Schwandt (2015) explains that a snowball sampling technique takes place when the initial "interviewees are used to recruit additional respondents". The snowball sampling technique is an

accumulative process which starts off with a small group and grows due to participants including other potential participants whom they know into the process. This sampling technique was helpful to the researcher when it was difficult to find participants.

### **3.2.2 Sampling procedure**

A sample of adult women who had grown up without a father and who lived in the geographical area of Cape Town participated in this study. The researcher made contact with Soil for Life, a non-profit organisation based in Cape Town that helps people learn to grow organic food using low-cost and environmentally-friendly methods. Soil for Life gave permission to the researcher to initially identify participants. Snowball sampling was then applied to increase the number of participants. A therapist also referred a small number of participants.

### **3.2.3 Sample characteristics**

20 women were approached to participate from a range of backgrounds who grew up without a father and reside in the geographical area of Cape Town. Exclusion was applied when potential participants did not meet the required criteria of growing up in a home where the father was absent. Thus women whose father was absent for a temporary period were excluded. Children also did not meet the required criteria because the project focused on adult women.

## **3.3. Data collection**

Data collection serves the purpose of the research project and is the means of gathering information. Interviews and observation are principal methods of data collection (Babbie & Mouton 2001). Data collection took the form of in-depth, semi-structured interviews which were facilitated by open-ended questions contained in an interview guide (Given, 2008). Semi-structured interviews suited this research because they were structured in such a way that the participant was enabled to bring her story to the question in an expansive manner. Schwandt (2015) explains that in-depth interviews aim "to elicit stories of experience". An in-depth interview benefitted this research project as it goes

beyond a series of questions which needed to be answered and included observation of activity to gain more in-depth insights. Interview sessions lasted approximately an hour per interviewee. Interviews were recorded as audio files to ensure accuracy, following which they were transcribed verbatim in preparation for data analysis.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

Data analysis is fundamental in qualitative research which creates "an essential stepping-stone toward both gathering data and linking one's findings with higher order concepts" (Given, 2008). According to Schwandt (2015) data analysis is the process of "making sense of, interpreting, and theorising data. The researcher uses a range of "analytic strategies that involve sorting, organising, and reducing the data to something manageable and then exploring ways to reassemble the data in order to interpret them (Schwandt, 2015). Data analysis could be described as a process of sifting through, organising, extracting and ordering a large volume of data to create a feasible database to draw from. The method according to Tesch (2013) was utilized for coding and analysing data which includes the following process: The transcript was read carefully, themes were identified, and material from the literature review was reviewed. Themes were listed as topics and topics were coded, given titles and descriptions. Applicable data was placed under each relevant theme and the researcher interpreted the research findings.

### **3.5. Data verification**

The researcher verified data to ensure accuracy. Yin (2011:170) mentions the following examples of data verification: "between interviews with different people; between interview and documentary evidence; between interviews and observational data and between different documentary sources. Data verification is important because transferability of qualitative studies depends on credibility (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Babbie and Mouton suggest that researchers write thorough, detailed field notes and do "member checks" to enhance validity of the research study. It was envisaged that

participants would be invited to a meeting on completion of the project where they would be presented with a summary of the research findings.

### **3.6. Limitations of the study**

The nature of qualitative research presents limitations because, unlike quantitative research, findings cannot be generalised to all contexts. While objectivity, validity and reliability are a goal for researchers, they can never fully attained (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

Some potential participants may have been hesitant to participate in the study because they may have felt it will expose them. Participants may also have been reluctant to discuss sensitive issues in interviews, which would have impacted on findings.

### **3.7. Reflexivity**

Patton (2002:40-41) mentions that in qualitative research the researcher is required to take responsibility for being "reflective, self-analytical, politically aware and reflexive in consciousness about his/her voice and perspective". The researcher grew up as a child who experienced an absent father and therefore has a personal interest in the topic. She was interested to discover that some of her own experiences may be typical of a daughter who experienced an absent father. The researcher also completed a research study on sons who experienced an absent father in the past and this project has broadened her understanding of the impact of absent fathers on their children. The researcher maintained a reflexive attitude during the process. Supervision played a role in maintaining vigilance that the research was conducted in trustworthy and unbiased manner.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the qualitative research methodology used in this study. Attention was given to the trustworthiness of the research design to enable evaluation of the data analysis that is presented in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

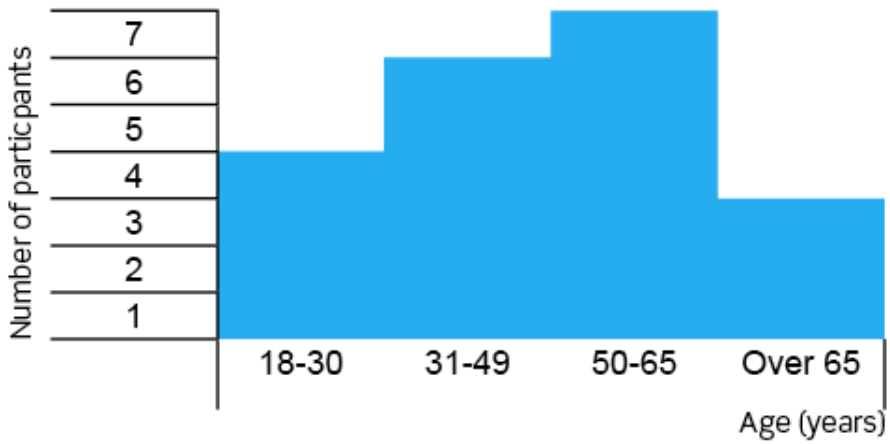
The findings of the clinical study are presented in this chapter in two parts. The first part will present significant demographic information providing the context of the study. The second part introduces the findings. The framework will be presented which provides the structure for introducing the findings for analysis. The findings are grouped into the following four themes which link to the objectives of the study: the psychological effects of the experience of an absent father on the identity formation of women, how an absent father experience influences the social identity formation of women, how an absent father experience influences the intimate relationships of women, and the influence on resiliency an absent father experience has in the identity formation of women. Findings representing a significant portion of participants will be presented, illustrated by examples drawn from the data and linked to pertinent literature.

### **SECTION ONE: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

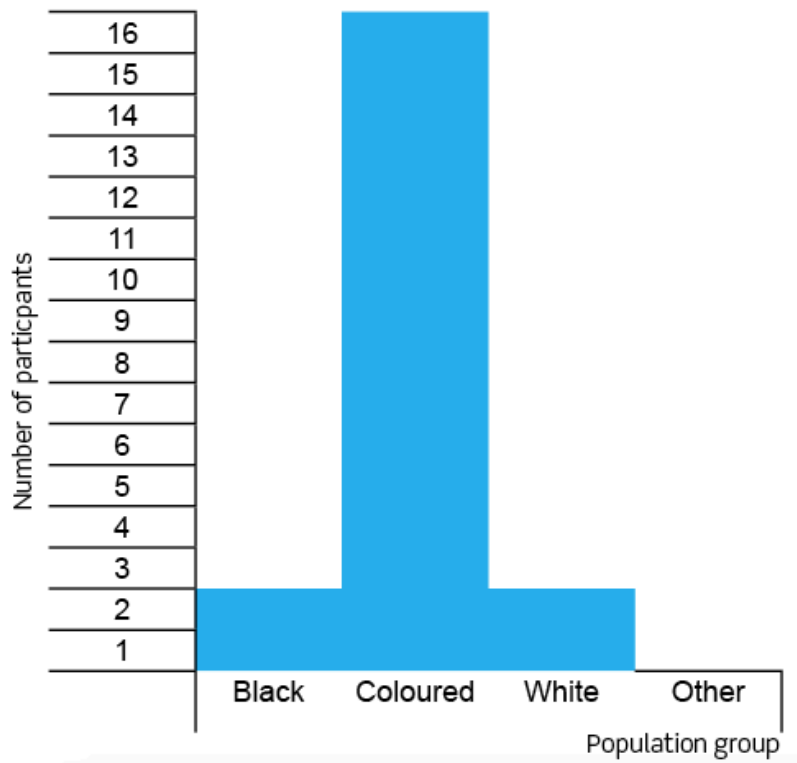
The sample consisted of 20 participants, age 18 and older. For demographic purposes, the age, population group, marital status and reasons for growing up without a father are provided. The sample comprised women who were age 18 or older from a range of backgrounds. Most of the participants were coloured (C) women. Two black (B) women and two white (W) women also participated in the study. The majority of participants were married. Single women, divorcees and widows also participated. There were a number of reasons for participants growing up without a father which included divorce or separation, desertion, death, substance use disorder and abuse of mother. Intervention by family members and polygamy also contributed to the absence of fathers. Table 1 below stipulates the demographic profile of participants in detail. This information is broken down into graphic representations which follow after the table.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Population group</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Main reasons for growing up without a father</b>
P1	18-30	W	Single	Desertion, substance use disorder
P2	18-30	C	Single	Divorce/separation - forced marriage due to pregnancy but never lived together, substance use disorder, abuse of mother
P3	Over 65	C	Divorced	Mother and family kept father away - Cultural and race issues
P4	Over 65	C	Widowed	Divorce/separation, abuse of mother
P5	31-49	C	Divorced	Desertion
P6	50-65	C	Married	Death
P7	31-49	B	Married	Desertion
P8	50-65	C	Divorced	Desertion, married to another person
P9	31-49	C	Married	Never met, nothing known
P10	50-65	C	Married	Death
P11	50-65	B	Widowed	Grandmother kept father away
P12	Over 65	C	Widowed	Death
P13	50-65	C	Widowed	Desertion
P14	31-49	W	Married	Divorce/separation, emotional absence
P15	31-49	C	Married	Divorce/separation, abuse of mother
P16	31-49	C	Married	Divorce/separation
P17	50-65	C	Married	Polygamy - father resided with other family
P18	18-30	C	Married	Desertion
P19	50-65	C	Divorced	Divorce/separation
P20	18-30	C	Single	Divorce/separation, substance use disorder

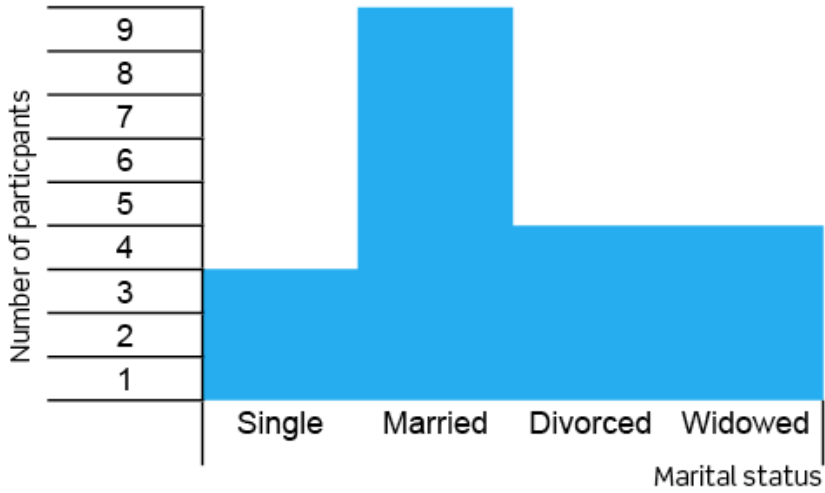
Table 1 Demographic profile of participants



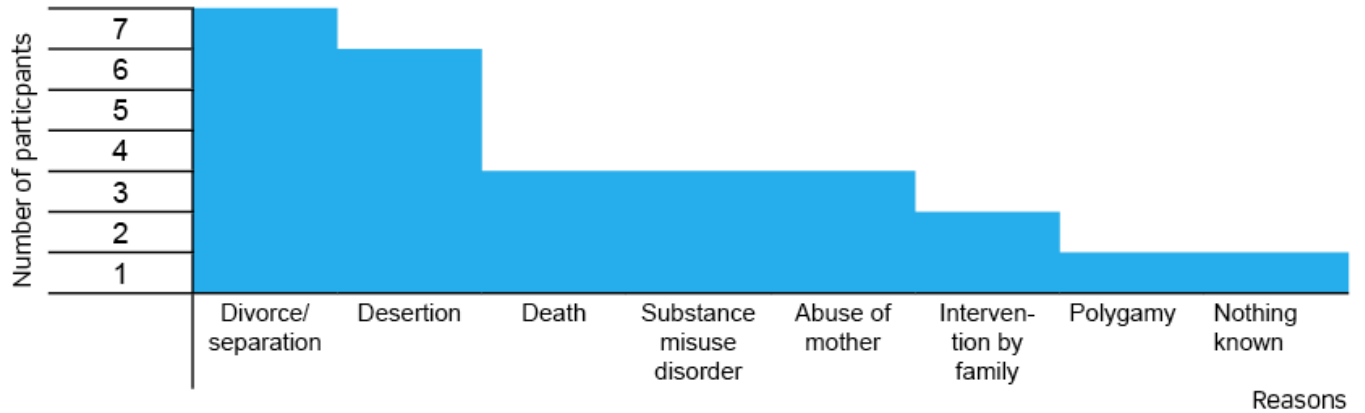
Graph 4.1 Age distribution of participants



Graph 4.3 Population group of participants



Graph 4.2 Marital status of participants



Graph 4.4 Main reasons for growing up without a father

This concludes Section One, which sets the contextual framework for the data analysis. This is followed by Section Two, which represents the analysis of the research data.

## SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH DATA

The Framework for Analysis, presented in Table 2 provides the structure for this section. The Framework includes the research questions and groups the data in themes. Four themes are presented, namely, the psychological effect of having an absent father on the identity formation of women, how the experience of an absent father influences the social identity formation of women, the significance on intimate relationships of an absent father in the Identity formation of women, and the influence on resiliency of the absent father experience on the identity formation of women.

### 4.2 Framework of analysis

Table 2 outlines the framework for data analysis. The method according to Tesch (2013) was utilized for coding and analysing data. After reading the transcript, the researcher identified themes, including material from the literature review. Themes were listed as topics which were coded, given titles and descriptions. Pertinent data was be placed under each relevant theme and the researcher interpreted the research findings.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sub-categories</b>
The psychological effect of having an absent father on the identity formation of women	• Self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth	• Abandoned
		• Risky behaviour
		• Achiever
	• Feelings, moods and mental states	• Depression, suicidal feelings and emptiness
• Defence mechanisms		
How the experience of an absent father influences the	• Interaction with peers and friends	

social identity formation of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community engagement, social isolation and social inclusion / exclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty and risk factors</li> </ul>
The significance on intimate relationships of an absent father in the Identity formation of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of and care for partner or spouse</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interdependence, mutuality, trust and commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and parenting</li> </ul>
The influence on resiliency of the absent father experience on the identity formation of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resilience and capacity to overcome adversity</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support systems</li> </ul>

Table 2: Framework for Analysis

### 4.3 Theme 1: The psychological effect of having an absent father on the identity formation of women

This section presents the data for Theme One. Two categories were significant: Self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth; and Feelings, moods and mental states. Significant sub-categories developed for each of the categories, as outlined in the Framework for Analysis.

All 20 participants experienced some psychological impact due to the absence of a father. A significant proportion of interviewing time was allocated to this topic as indicated by the field notes.

Absence of a father was experienced as a deficit to varying degrees, by all of the participants. Whilst having the common experience of an absent father, each participant was subject to a range of variables that impacted their well-being. The presence of a functional caregiver seemed to be a key contributor to resilience. If caregivers were relatively absent or dysfunctional, the participants were more negatively affected. Winnicott referred to sufficient parental care as "a holding environment" and referred to

"good enough holding" and a "good enough mother" rather than a requirement of "perfect parenting" (Palombo, Bendicson & Koch, 2009). Poverty was a cause of strife for many of the participants. Sexual abuse during childhood was mentioned by 3 participants as having a debilitating effect on their well-being.

*Mother had to support the family, so she was more absent. When one is a child, one doesn't see it [reason for mothers absence] but as a grownup, you know it. So I used to just go on with my life and just be. I don't think there's growth, really. You're just existing and whatever happens, happens. There really isn't a sense of identity then, of being someone of value (P16).*

This participant suggests that the relative absence of her mother, who was away working to support the family, created an internal sense of "barely existing" and "not being of worth". A present father may make a difference because there would be two parents sharing responsibilities and interacting with their children, rather than only one parent. Kristeva (cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018:20) mentioned a father's "recognition function" is to do with loving his daughter "into existence" by recognising her as a unique autonomous human being, rather than an extension of her mother.

#### **4.3.1 Self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth**

All 20 participants made reference to their experiences of self-esteem and self-confidence. Many participants mentioned their self-esteem was low as children which affected their self-confidence. Some participants mentioned that they may have appeared confident to others, but inwardly they were not. One definition of self-esteem relates to "a person's general success or competence, specifically in areas of life that are very meaningful to an individual". Another definition describes self-esteem as "an attitude or feeling concerning a sense of worth or one's worthiness as a person". Self-esteem can also be about a relationship between these two factors (Mruk, 2013: 1). Esteem for the self reflects the sense of one's own value or pride in oneself. The expression of self-confidence is closely related to the concept of "omnipotence" (de Mijolla, A. 2005).

*I can say I had a very low self-esteem. At work people complimented me. People thought highly of me but I didn't think highly of myself. People thought highly of me but I wondered why. (P19)*

This finding correlates with Strauss (2013) and Rosenthal's (2010) views that an absent father is a harmful experience that affects the identity and self-esteem of his daughter.

*Growing up, I was always a very introverted child. I was never the one in the limelight. My self-esteem was low (tearful). I was very shy. I didn't have many friends. (P5)*

*Even in high school, I was always alone. I had such a low self-esteem. I couldn't interact. (P15)*

These participants linked low self-esteem with being introverted, not interacting socially, feelings of shyness and loneliness. The sense of self is formed by experience. Loss of a father in early childhood is likely to be interpreted as rejection, which is carried through into adulthood (Wakerman, 2015).

*A lot of people say I have confidence issues because when I go out I seem very confident but deep down I know I am not confident. Because I always have this fear, 'is this person going to like me? Is this person going to accept me?'. (P2)*

*My confidence outwardly is not bad but my belief in myself can be questionable. I do doubt myself and my abilities often...maybe it's doubting that I am lovable. Connecting to abandonment again. So it's like I don't trust myself or my own answer... I second-guess myself often... And then it's like but actually you are the one who knows itself the best. (P1)*

These participants mention appearing to be confident outwardly, whilst experiencing self doubt and lack of trust in self which they linked to fear of rejection or to abandonment. This finding links to the work of Garfield-Kabbara (2014) who mentioned: A child internalises abandonment by her father as inner abandonment by the self. Shame may

arise from perceived rejection which gives rise to a sense of being worthless due to the experience of abandonment. Shame can be seen as the experience of pain of being valueless, inferior, unlovable and is a defective sense of self.

*I was very confident at school but less so at home. At home I had low self-esteem. But at school because I was quite bright I was confident. (P3)*

This participant reported a split experience: she had low self-esteem at home, but felt confident at school because she was successful academically. A number of participants reported that they did well academically at school. This finding is contrary to findings of Babul & Luise (2016) and Nsamenang (in Lamb, 2010) who found that at the school going stage father absence may negatively affect their daughter's academic performance. This finding is closer to Zulu's (2014) finding that female students who experienced an absent father were generally academic overachievers.

*As a child and even in my early twenties I had a very low self-esteem to the point that I think is ridiculous now. It changed somewhere along the line. It used to be a sense of nonexistence. (P16)*

This participant reported that her experience of low self-esteem improved as she grew older. A number of participants reported improvement in their psychological health and sense of well-being as they grew older, perhaps due to gained life experience. Carstensen, Turan, Scheibe, Ram, Ersner-Hershfield, Samanez-Larkin, Brooks and Nesselroade (2011) found there was improvement in overall emotional well-being with age.

*My confidence improved a lot. I didn't know this name before but I was told in the dream when I was 12. When I went there (where he lived), I was asking for him, using his name. He said, "how do you know my name, because everyone calls me by a shortened version of this name?" I told him. "the people in my dreams." And he said "Yoh, you are really my child!". (P11)*

This participant said her confidence improved after meeting her father.

Eleven participants specifically mentioned that their self-worth had having been affected to some degree.

*I'm a plain Jane so I wouldn't put myself out there. (P20)*

*(Sighs) I've kind of learned to deal with it. I can't say I feel worthless but I felt lower than the ones who had a father in the community and whatever. So because you don't have a father, you get attacked more. There's no strong protection. (P9)*

*My sense of self-worth is still something I'm working on (laughs). It's a lifelong thing. I've been a people pleaser for a very long time. (P14)*

*Being fatherless is always something you want to block out. If you go into it, you're always going to see it ending up being bad. And you don't want to see it that way - it's like it happened all those years ago. Just let it be - why you still on it the whole time? (P2)*

The experiences of self-worth often seemed to related to having been abandoned, which was interpreted as "being of little value". Garfield-Kabbara (2014) mentioned that in the context of a patriarchal society, the absence of a father results in the daughter internalizing shame and an identity that lacks self-worth or value.

*My self-worth was low. As time went by, I started to tell myself, that with or without a father, I can make it. I developed the ability to achieve through my mother because she used to tell us that 'with or without a father, you can make. It doesn't matter what you are facing at school, or what other kids are saying to you, you have to have faith on yourself. There are lots of children without fathers but they are making it'. (P7)*

The support of this participant's mother had helped her to improve her sense of self-worth.

*I discovered why both my grandmothers weren't as loving with me as they were with my other siblings. It was only after meeting my dad that I could make sense of all this and I could understand they did not care for me because I wasn't white. It hurt a bit but I think I outgrew it. My mum didn't treat me differently but she's always had this thing about white... she would take the white children to her work place. (P3)*

Low self-worth was not only linked to abandonment. This participant also experienced race-related stress.

Significant sub-categories which developed from this category were: Abandoned; Risky Behaviour; and Achiever.

#### **4.3.1.1 Abandoned**

*It doesn't matter who it is. I always figure they are going to leave Yes, it's just a matter of time. (P20)*

*As a child I was unable to understand why - it was like I was not good enough for him to be present. Now I think 'you had issues' and I see it a little bit differently but the child in me is like was I am not good enough and I felt abandoned ...Everything related to my father is probably about abandonment. (P1)*

*When I was little, I was worried my mother would abandon me, that she would be so crazy in a moment that she would do something to herself or die, or get thrown into some place that I couldn't have access to her. And then I think with my dad, I was perfect with him so he wouldn't abandon me as well. I had to be a certain way so he wouldn't disapprove of me and abandon me. And then with my husband, in the early part of our relationship, before we got married, we had one or two instances ... and I was very needy and I needed his reassurance. (P14)*

Makofane (2015) mentioned that daughters of absent fathers experience a distrust of men. A child who internalises an absent father may grow up to anticipate abandonment and betrayal in her adult relationships. An abandoned daughter may unwittingly create a

feedback loop or "self-fulfilling prophesy" by re-enacting the absence of her father, thereby contributing to an on-going pattern of the initial abandonment she experienced by her father's absence.

*I'm a very caring person actually. I do a lot of charity work with abandoned babies. About relationships—I think I care too much with someone that I'm dating. It's almost like I'm trying to prove myself all the time. Like with this guy I'm seeing now- I always try and show him - it's almost like trying to make him not leave. (P2)*

*Today my vision is to reach out and help children that have been abandoned and abused (crying). My husband and children don't understand when I care for a child because they had never experienced lack. (P15)*

Some of the participants who worked with abandoned children were perhaps doing so to attend to their own wounded inner child.

*I couldn't call him papa. I could never use the word father, even when I went to church, I couldn't even call the priest father. I couldn't utter the word 'father'. I blocked it out and used to find another word to describe the person. My father was absent, but why am I here? I didn't feel abandoned at that stage but when I became a teenager, I really felt it. (P17)*

According to Berlin and Koch (2009), if one is grieving over the loss of someone, one may suppress thinking about what happened because it is painful, however this conscious desire to suppress is countered because the impulse or drive is likely to display itself in some other ways. Freud explained how it is impossible for humans to hide their deepest feelings and desires when he said, "He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore". Some participants mentioned they had never really thought about their experience of an absent father before, however most participants became emotional during the interview.

*I was five years old when my father drowned. My father was in a boat and drowned with a group of people. He tried to swim but became too exhausted. My mother said they loved each other very much (crying). (P6)*

*I didn't have my father's surname. I got sick because there were certain things that were meant to be done to me. So without my father's clan, no one can do that. My mother didn't tell me who was my father. (P11)*

The majority of participants expressed emotion and cried during the interview. Regardless of the reason for absence, the absence of their father evidently impacted the lives of their daughters when they were children in ways that are often still vividly experienced as an adult. This finding concurs with the White Paper on Families (2013) in South Africa which points to the importance of fathers' involvement in their children's lives. The White Paper (2013:24) speaks to the high numbers of fathers who have failed to take responsibility for their children, and states that there is "cause for concern given the significant body of evidence showing the positive effect of the presence and active involvement of a father in a child's life chances; academic performance; and social, emotional and cognitive functioning". The White Paper (2013:40) recommends that fathers "are encouraged to be involved in their children's upbringing and outlines various steps which should be taken such as the revision of laws and policies "that restrict fathers from being involved in their children's lives and replace them with those that create an environment where fathers have the opportunity to care for, engage with, and support their children". The education system and other means such as the media should address "social norms and positive attitudes regarding the roles of fathers in the lives of children". The White Paper (2013:40-41) also recommends "responsible co-parenting by both mothers and fathers" and "equal parenting care and responsibility, encouraging gender equality with regards to parenting.

*Sometimes at night I start thinking what it would have been like if I had a father. I don't let it get to me. I just brush it off. Sometimes at night when everything is quiet then everything just comes to a person. I never really get sad because I never knew my father... I bump into him occasionally. 'If I see you I see you', it's*

*fine. I don't think anything about it. I don't beat myself up about it because I can't blame myself for what he's done. If you don't care, I don't care. So that's best for both of us. (P18)*

*He was driving on his motorcycle and he was drunk. He was pulled over and taken to prison. He committed suicide in prison with his shirt. So that was that. My mum was really sad about it. But for me it was kind of like the second cousin you have never met. (P1)*

Some participants did not express their pain directly but nevertheless indicated that there was an experience of an absence. Makofane (2015) stated that daughter's responses to the absence of their father may include emotional detachment and denial. Makofane linked this behaviour to deep-seated hurt and pain and pointed out that if unattended to, it is likely to sabotage intimate relationships. Wakerman (2015) mentioned that if a father committed suicide, his daughter may question why he 'chose to leave her'. The degree of omission of emotion may be an indicator of the extent of underlying pain. It is likely that all of the participants experienced some degree of psychological pain, which they either expressed directly or indicated by emotional detachment or denial.

All participants identified themselves as having the experience an absent father which implies that their father had either died or was likely to have been cut off, either through his own doing, or by the family or relatives of the daughter. "Emotional cutoff" is a Bowen's concept in family systems theory. The irony is that cutting off creates a powerful hold over family members. Gilbert (2006) states that "the person who cuts off from his or her family is no more independent than the one who never leaves home" and adds that there is in fact a large degree of fusion.

*I had a lot of questions for my mum, 'Where's my dad, who's my dad'. In the beginning she didn't want to tell me but eventually she did. (P1)*

*Speaking about a father is like speaking about something you wish you had but never experienced. I have no knowledge of my father - who he was, where he*

*lived, name, address. My mother shared nothing with me. I just know I exist. I don't even know if my mother had a relationship with my father. (P9)*

At times mothers obstruct the relationships between fathers and their children (Roberts, Coakley, Washington & Kelley, 2014). It appears that parents do not always make a distinction between their separation from a partner and their children's autonomous relationship with that partner as their parent. Father's may choose not to have a relationship with their daughter, however, it appears that many daughter's seek the right to access knowledge about their absent parent.

*I wondered what he would do if I like just rock up at his house. And so I did that. And he gave me this stare - he looked at me like I wasn't his. And I was so sorry that I rocked up at his house. And I wished that I never ever did it. And I was like, well I am here - let me speak to him maybe he can give me answers and I asked him like 'why did you leave why didn't you phone me, why didn't you wish me on my birthday' - you know all those kinds of questions. (P2)*

While the previous participants relied on their mother for information about their father, this participant actively sought out her father but regretted her decision because she perceived that she was rejected. Shame and a sense of being worthless may arise from perceived rejection when there is an experience of abandonment (Garfield-Kabbara, 2014).

*Affirmation from a father would have probably been helpful in my childhood in order to strengthen up part of myself. (P1)*

*My daddy wasn't going to come back. My mommy was there but she couldn't respond in certain ways as my daddy would have. I would have been strong enough to stand up for myself. I think it would have been completely different. I think I acted out and things happened that wouldn't have happened if he had been there (crying). (P20)*

Kohut referred to mirroring as a means of making the unique qualities, talents, and characteristics visible to the self (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011). A mirror can perhaps be compared with having an audience who reflect one's progress and thereby bolster one's sense of self. With abandonment there is a loss of mirroring (Bradshaw in Garfield-Kabbara, 2014). A daughter who experiences an absent father, lacks an audience and may experience compromised self-confidence, coping skills, feelings of competency and ability to form long term fulfilling relationships (Babul & Luise, 2016).

#### 4.3.1.2 Risky behaviour

*You know, you search for love in the wrong places. I would find myself between taxi drivers kind of stuff and they would offer me money and say 'come, we will go for a drive' and at times it would be sexual as well. Then I started loving clubs, doing all the wrong stuff... alcohol. (P15)*

*As a teenager, I made a lot of the wrong choices based on my emotions. I was always looking for something more. I was looking for what I needed in the wrong places. I was looking for acceptance. I wanted to feel wanted. I never felt wanted... I have my insight of how not having a dad impacted my life. At that age I was vulnerable. What I thought was love wasn't really love. I was sexually promiscuous at a young age, the age of 14. I believed that no one stays... There may have been guys that wanted something real, but I always made sure that before they could hurt me, I had already moved on. (P5)*

These findings correlate with the findings of Babul & Luise (2016), that because adolescence is the most complex stage of a daughter's life, her father's feedback and support are crucial at this stage. A teenage daughter is learning about personal space and establishing boundaries. A father models appropriate boundaries with the opposite sex and his absence may put her at risk and affect her confidence. If her grief is not worked through, loss of her father may result in problems such as "sexual promiscuity, drinking, the need to belong to someone regardless of the costs, eating disorders, cutting, drug experimentation, and even suicidal thoughts" (Babul & Luise, 2016).

#### 4.3.1.3 Achiever

*I was a smart child at school and I used to get A's. (P3)*

*I was an exceller at school. I was an A-student. (P13)*

*I was very clever in school because when you struggle, you are not a spoiled child - you need to fight for yourself. I was always independent - I never let things get me down. (P4)*

*I love challenges and when I don't understand, I love to ask questions. I like learning. (P8)*

*I did very well at school. I had good marks and completed my matric. This was one way of coping - to do well at school. I put myself in extra classes in high school to help myself. My mother didn't want me to apply myself to schoolwork or sports. She always would say there wasn't money for these things, but there was money to drink. I stayed on after school closed to do my schoolwork. This was the only time I could do it because when I got home, everyone was drinking, swearing and going on. (P9)*

A number of participants reported that they did well at school. According to Wakerman (2015), studies found that school going daughters who experienced an absent father placed great importance on achievement of higher grades. It was found their very self-esteem relied on their higher grades. Zulu (2014) found that daughters who experienced an absent father were generally academic overachievers.

*At first, I didn't do well at school. It affected me when I heard other children's fathers did their homework with them and I thought "what about me? Where is he? He's suppose to do this with me?" It started to get to me and sometimes I ran away from school. They told my mother I was not going to school. ... I started to lose marks but as time went on, as I grew up, around the age of 12 I realised that this is my life, and I have to make something of it. Then I started to build myself up and worked for my marks. (P7)*

This participant struggled initially. She linked her lack of progress to her experience of an absent father. However she began to make progress in adolescence and became self motivated

*I didn't do well at school but lately I've been tutoring. A lot of things have changed. Nowadays, I'm the sort of person that when people around me say they can't do things, there's no such thing as can't. .... I always say if it doesn't work this way, then you try that way, but at the end of the day, it can be done. (P10)*

*I was watching a marathon on TV and I went to my mother and said "I want to join the marathon. Tomorrow I'm going to start practicing." My mother said "you can do it. You can do everything but when are you going to start driving." I've done my learners so many times. I said that before I turn 60, I will drive my own car. (P17)*

*I can add value to wherever I'm at. That had to grow until very recently. I'm speeding it up now. I'm accelerating now. I am a late bloomer for sure and now, nothing can hold me back. The age factor is there... I'm starting a business and taking it to the next level. Last year I went to a university and did a course. I won an award. Even before that, I started meeting up with other entrepreneurs and really stepping out and that was an achievement for me, after being a stay at home mom for 20 years. (P16)*

The research study found that a number of participants were late achievers, or "late bloomers". This may link up with the earlier finding that some participants reported improvement in their psychological health and sense of well-being as they grew older, and Carstensen et al's (2011) findings of an overall improvement in emotional well-being being associated with becoming older. According to Utz, Berg and Butner (2017), the experience of later life is the product of "myriad earlier life events, choices, and constraints that set the stage for what is possible for each individual" who reaches this stage. Life experience may be an underestimated resource that the older daughters, who experienced an absent father, may draw from.

### 4.3.2 Feelings, moods and mental states

When asked about their feelings, moods and mental states, 12 participants made significant contributions.

*I cry all the time, even when I watch TV. I have a lot of anger. I don't know what to do. I swear a lot. I fight a lot. (P6)*

*It's only in the last few years that I realized I was a very anxious child and that anxiety was with me as I grew older and it led to a lot of self doubt.... Sometimes I've had flares of angry feelings towards my father. I never expressed it to him. (P14)*

*In my first year of school, my teacher wrote in my report that I was withdrawn and don't interact. I don't really make friends easily. I am a loner. I'm very quiet in a group. (P19)*

According to Makofane (2015:31) the experience of an absent father may result in their daughters feeling emotionally wounded, lost, unloved, hurt, rejected and betrayed. Babul & Luise (2016) mention that daughters who experience an absent father are more likely to experience anxiety and insecurity in emotionally stressful situations than daughters who have a father, and she is also likely to hide or bury these feelings.

Significant sub-categories included: Depression, suicidal feelings and emptiness; and Defence mechanisms.

#### 4.3.2.1 Depression, suicidal feelings and emptiness

Nine participants mentioned experiences of depression or a sense of emptiness and some participants also said they have had suicidal thoughts.

*I can be quite moody. Sometimes I struggle with emptiness. Not as much as I used to but it's still there. (P1)*

*I spoke to this one guy and he asked me 'why are you always sick? Are you sure you're not depressed?...' because honestly I am always sick. When I'm sick I can't do this - I can't do that - I'm stuck in my room and it's like a mind-set and then I'm sick again. I don't know if there's a link. I always feel I can fix my problem. And then I end up - not hurting myself... just like becoming depressed. I feel I'm not doing enough and then I get hard on myself and it's just this whole cycle... And that's how I feel my life is just this cycle. (P2)*

This finding may confirm the assertion by Babul and Luise (2016) that feelings of rejection register in the brain as physical pain, which is triggered repeatedly throughout life, causing physical symptoms such as headaches, gastrointestinal problems and exhaustion.

*During my days of depression, I was just lying down. As a parent I like to be present and being there for my children. During my time of depression, I just lay and didn't care.... I tried reaching out. I'm not a person for medication. I chose to depend on God rather than tablets. Crying out to God helped me a lot. I went through depression because of what happened - these things were hidden from me. It could be related to not having a father. (P10)*

*I thought about suicide when I was younger. ... when my mom was still alive. ... but it's a horrible thing to give up your life like that... But sometimes I do. I get tired...maybe because there's so much conflict within myself - when there's conflict outside as well its like maybe I should put myself out of my misery. But then I get over it- but it's like a process for me to get there. (P1)*

*I was in a relationship with 3 years. I was like finally I'm happy. I have this person then I had the operation then two days after the operation he left.... and then immediately that fear kicked in, it's like it is repeating. It's happening... it's always going to happen. ... I didn't want to live to be honest... I felt like if my father is going to do this - guys are going to do this. So I'm basically always going to be alone... I felt suicidal.... My mum got me past that - she's my rock... and also I keep busy with the things like my charity work. I always try to get out of the house*

*because when you are alone your mind over works and you think about these things ... so you always just want to be out there. (P2)*

*I have felt suicidal, that's when the poetry thing came in. I was looking for attention so took tablets. I wanted to die, I didn't want to wake up... I was fourteen. I don't have suicidal feelings these days, but I get depressed. (P20)*

These findings concur with the view of Nielson (2012), that daughters of absent fathers may be more vulnerable to emotional and psychological problems, including depression. Babul and Luise (2016) found that women who experience an absent father are more likely to experience anger-related depression. An object relations view of suicide is that it is "an attempt, in phantasy, to destroy bad internal objects, introjects - or unwanted aspects of the self" (Kaslow, Reviere, Chance, Rogers, Hatcher, Wasserman, Smith, Jessee, James, & Seelig, 1998:779). In other words suicide is an attempt to kill internalised bad objects or aspects of self that are experienced as intolerable.

*I feel like I will never have that person who is going to stay (crying). ... It's just emptiness. I've always felt that emptiness. I've always felt there's something missing. (P5)*

This participant may link her father's absence with a belief that "no one ever stays" and a sense of precarity of relationships. She speaks of an empty space that she does not expect ever to be filled. Nielson (2012:55) defines "father hunger" as "the emotional and psychological longing" for a father who has been absent. Elise (cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018) explains that a daughter "may register this absence of the object as an internal, bodily sense of being empty".

*Like I believe that a daughter should be a dad's princess - she should be everything to him - her first experience of love and affection should be with her dad in a safe, platonic way - not in a wrong way. I think that would make her into a confident young woman. When a guy comes along and says all these nice*

*things to her, she won't fall for it, because she's getting the same thing from her dad. Her dad has filled that so she won't need it. (P4)*

*There are times when I'm alone and there's something I need and I wish I could tell my father. I wish I had a father to talk to. Then I say "aw, it's ok, I don't have a father and I go on." It is empty but I can manage. It's always empty but it's part of life"... I have a picture of what my father would have been like in my imagination. He was going to be there and do things for me, taking me out, helping my do my homework... I was angry. I asked "why is this happening to me?" I needed the father and daughter relationship. I needed the father to lead me and to chat with. I have a mother yes, but I needed a father to talk to and to cuddle me and say everything is ok when I was crying, but he wasn't there. (P7)*

These participants perhaps refer to a fantasy of an internal idealized father who could hold his daughter and make everything better. According to Baradon (2019:xiv) an absent father exists "as an internal psychic presence". Kohut indicated that there is a need for an "idealised parent imago", which provides a sense of someone strong, calm, and wonderful to idealize and merge with in order to feel safe and complete (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011:171-172). Fantasies of the absent father may provide a satisfactory alternative, which aids the daughter to "create an internalisation of a triangular structure" (Strauss, 2013).

#### **4.3.2.2 Defence mechanisms**

Defence mechanisms can be defined as "psychic processes that are generally attributed to the organized ego. They organize and maintain optimal psychic conditions in a way that helps the subject's ego both to confront and avoid anxiety and psychic disturbance. They are therefore among the attempts to work through psychic conflict but if they are deployed in an excessive or inappropriate way they can compromise psychic growth (de Mijolla, 2005: 376)".

According to Winnicott, when a baby is not protected from impingements, she develops a "false self" and becomes "prematurely autonomous". In adulthood the false self can be

an obstacle to forming intimate relationships which can result in loneliness. (Howard 2011:47-48). A false self is a defence structure and a mask.

*I always put a front up that I am strong and can take care of myself. And my boyfriend always says it's weird because 'you know the woman is supposed to be the emotional one and here I'm crying and you just sitting there looking at me, like, 'why you crying?'' (P2)*

*No one is going to see me break (laughs) because people believe me to strong. They always say you are a strong woman so they are not going to see me at my worse'. (P5)*

*He was crying... and he was like, 'you never cry when you speak about what happens to you'. And then I was like, 'I don't want to become vulnerable to this person - I don't want to show him that I am this soft and broken person actually. (P2)*

*I loved clubbing and dancing but my self-esteem was low. I never had the courage to speak to somebody because I was too afraid that a person might say the wrong words and reject me because then I would just go into a corner and cry. If I was at a club, I was the person who loved having fun. I'm still the person who loves having fun and being happy. (P15)*

Defences are strategies of protection which are employed and the role they play needs to be understood (Simson 2002). The participants are likely to have used defences to protect their inner fragile self from vulnerability. Masks, such as 'having fun at a club' may have been a method of "medicating" inner pain.

An individual employs defences. At a systems level defences may include secrets which family members keep. These secrets affect the whole system and all the members, knowingly or unknowingly. Abraham (in Johnson, 2004:9) stated that "what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others". A secret is a form of hidden knowledge. The word is etymologically related to excrement and seduction... the

idea of separation, setting aside, and preserving... The secret has a positive, necessary side and a negative, destructive side (de Mijolla, 2005).

A number of participants experienced family secrets in some form or another and often mentioned the silence in their family about their father.

*I don't think I longed for my dad as a young child. I think it was just the way my sisters looks different from me. They were white with blue eyes and blonde hair and I was the only dark one with black hair... So when I met my dad, I also couldn't tell my friends at home that I have met my dad and he's Indian. They would never understand that I have an Indian dad ... I was in a state of shock because I didn't know my dad was still alive. But I latched on quickly to him because he came looking for me. For me it was, 'somebody cares'. ... my mom had kept me away from him. (P3)*

The issue of racism arose, perhaps most starkly in the case of this participant, because she felt alienated within the context of her own family. She was able to link her "otherness" to her father as someone else in her world who was "dark like her" and felt a twinship with him but also experienced him as the cause of her "otherness". The participant's mother had kept her father a secret from her, which perhaps played a role in her introjected shame. If her father had been not been a hidden factor in her life, she may have felt less alone and experienced less of a sense of alienation. These findings confirm Bousin's (in Johnson, 2004:1) linking of race awareness to shame. It is also an example of "othering" referred to by Dalal who held that "the naming of people as black or white is not so much a descriptive act as an othering. The traits associated with whiteness are idealised while there is the sense of being devalued due to "being darker" (Berzoff, Flanagan & Patricia Hertz, 2011: 261, 274-280).

*My father said I must meet him around the corner, so that his wife wouldn't see us. He said "my wife is a witch". I think I've seen him 10 or 20 times in my whole life. (P8)*

This participant's father, who had little contact with her, made her meet him in secret. He indicated that it would be problematic if his wife were to know of their meeting. His role as father was not given priority. She discovered that she was a secret who had to be hidden.

*My mother was shocked and asked me "how dare you look for your father!" I replied that my siblings had fathers that they could talk about. (P17)*

*I never saw my father. I don't know when he was first absent. My mother never spoke about it. (P7)*

*(Crying) I didn't bury my father. My mother knew my father passed away and I was dreaming about him being sick. We went to my mother's cousin's funeral. After the funeral I was talking to this other lady and she said "You didn't hear?" I asked her "hear what?" and she said, "about your father". Then she said, "your mother knew about your father." (P11)*

Some participants reported that the absence of their father was due to interference of relatives and family members who prevented them from having contact with their father, thus cutting them off. "Emotional cutoff" is a Bowen's concept in family systems, which was discussed earlier. Gilbert (2006) pointed out that cutting off does not create the imagined separation because in fact there is a large degree of fusion.

Participants were often prevented by their mother from making contact with their father. Their father was in a sense their mother's secret, and they as children were denied the right to their own autonomous experience. The last participant indicated by her tears that she was still experiencing grief long after the death of her father. Her grief was exacerbated due to not being told at the time that her father had died. Father's may make a decision not to have contact with their children, which is likely to be experienced as loss by their daughters, or as Roberts, Coakley, Washington and Kelley (2014:1-2) mention, mothers may obstruct the relationship between fathers and their daughter. Holmes-Walker (2015) added that mothers sometimes had a negative influence on the

relationship between fathers and their children. Lesch and Kelapile (2016) found fathers who are prevented from contacting their children experience emotional distress.

*... It's something that haunts me because the first thing I see in my dreams is three men. Two old men, they are holding a goat. Another is holding a horn this side, another is holding a horn that side. I grew up in Cape Town so I have no knowledge about goats. When I see these people coming to me with I goat, I used to run, and when I ran, I want to pee and all of a sudden, I am peeing in my bed. .... (later in a dream) They said to me since I'm pregnant and I'm getting married using my mother's surname, the child that I'm carrying is going to die.... They told me the clan name in my dream.... I asked an aunt of mine and she told me [where to go] and I went there and this man said 'you are my child'. He asked me about the men in the dream and then replied, 'this is my late brother, elder brother and late uncle'. He said 'I am your father, but your grandmother didn't want me to marry your mother. (P11)*

Makofane (2015) pointed out that in a traditional African context, a child should be formally introduced to her father's family or ancestors, and neglecting to do so is believed to have negative consequences. In a Western context Nielson's (2012) findings are that father's play a significant role in their children's lives and impact on their "social, cognitive, physical and psychological health". The multigenerational transmission process discussed above can be seen as linking to the traditional African concept of ancestors and their strong influence on living family members. A Western perspective may be to see a daughter who experiences an absent father as illegitimate because her father does not acknowledge her and has withheld his surname from her. He has prevented being associated with her. Being "illegitimate" is likely to impact on a child's perception of self and be a source of shame. Zulu (2014) indicates a similar response in traditional black South Africans who maintain that a father is the doorway to a child's identity, providing a history, kinship, roots and a sense of belonging. A father's surname joins a child with her paternal family'.

The participant felt guided by her dreams to seek out her father. Dreams are perceived as messages from the ancestors in a traditional African context. Ogden (1990: 234-235), a psychoanalyst, described dreams as "an internal communication" generated by "one aspect of self that must be perceived, understood and experienced by another aspect of self", thus there is "the dreamer who dreams the dream" and "the dreamer who understands the dream". Dreams are required to be understood and interpreted in both the traditional African and psychoanalytic contexts and can thus be related to within a multicultural context.

*Secrecy - I try and imprint on my grandchildren to speak out - I didn't speak out. My daughter too - he cheated on her- that's why she went on drugs. It's all fatherlessness playing out. Ja. (P3)*

This participant believed that the consequences of secrecy brought about hardship in the family. She connected secrecy with her experience an absent father. She was trying to change the system and put an end to the patterns of secrecy by teaching her grandchildren to 'speak out'.

*My mother doesn't know anything that happened to me as a child, nor does my daughter. (P8)*

This participant may be continuing a family tradition of secrecy. Three participants spoke about having been sexually abused as children. When trauma is kept secret it can find it's expression through multigenerational transmission. The dangers of this are, as Goldenberg, Stanton and Goldenberg (2017) point out, the dysfunction that results from chronic anxiety that has been transmitted down the generations. Rand (cited in Johnson, 2004:2) mentions that some people unknowingly "inherit the secret psychic substance of their ancestors" lives ... here symptoms do not spring from the individual's own life experiences but from someone else's psychic conflicts, traumas, or secrets". Abraham and Torok referred to this as a "concept of the phantom", describing "the interpersonal and transgenerational consequence of silence". This observation potentially throws light on "not only the impact of silenced histories on the individual psyche, but the dynamics of silenced history more generally" (Johnson, 2004:2).

#### **4.4 Theme 2: How the experience of an absent father influences the social identity formation of women**

This section presents the data for Theme Two. Two significant categories that emerged were as follows: Interaction with Peers and Friends; and Community, Social isolation and social inclusion/exclusion.

Participants appeared to identify that their social interactions were influenced by their psychological experiences. Although some participants said they were not very sociable, the participants generally seemed to have little difficulty in speaking about their experiences and expressing their feelings. In a study on daughter's relational communication, Jackson (2010) found that daughters who experience an absent father generally scored higher on self-disclosure, expressed themselves with less effort and were less likely to "self-silence", than daughters with present fathers.

The sense of self of an individual is formed by experience. Experience, in turn informs the expectations the individual has of others. Thus the present builds on the past. Loss of a father in early childhood is likely to be interpreted as rejection, which is carried through into adulthood (Wakerman, 2015).

*Our self-esteem affects how you interact with people. So you are so consumed with what's going on here. I think I still struggle but I'm able to identify it and able to work through it. I don't turn away from anything. (P16)*

*I used to isolate but that has changed recently. With my colleagues, my relationship is a lot better. I always used to feel that other people are better than me. (P10)*

Many participants were less socially engaged than their peers may have been. According to Vanderheiden and Mayer (2017), internalised abandonment gives rise to the experience of shame which is informed by internalised object relations. The action which corresponds to shame is a need to hide (Kinston in Bigliani, Moguillansky & Sluzki, 2013). According to Bigliani, Moguillansky and Sluzki (2013) shame and

humiliation are private, intimate emotions, and also social emotions which play out in interactions between people. Shame is therefore is both a deep personal and a social experience of a distorted and unworthy self which is enacted in relationships.

*Having no father does not affect my relationships with my colleagues but if they started to speak about their father, I just brush it off because I don't know anything about that. I don't know what to feel because I don't have a father so I just keep quiet because I don't have anything to say. (P18)*

This participant suggested that although her interaction with her peers felt 'normal', when it came to speaking about fathers, she was unable to engage in conversation because she lacked a shared reference system. To some degree this participant experienced being an outsider due to father absence.

*I don't want to be like a sheep following the herd. I often wonder if my dad felt like that. I don't think he was very normal either but I don't think he knew how to deal with it. I think we were a lot more similar than I know - I don't know how to know. There are things I have that my mum was not like. It's more like an energetic feeling of who he was - who he is in me. (P1)*

This participant seemed to be seeking a twinship experience of her father. Twinship is about need to experience others as similar in order to have the comfort of recognising oneself in another. An absence of twinship may lead to a sense of having to cope alone and may lead to difficulties in attaining a sense of connectedness with others (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011). The participant was asking questions and sensing that her father held the answers. However the questions remained suspended and unanswered due to the absence of her father. Kristeva (cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018:20) describes the father's cathexis or "recognition function" as "loving his daughter into existence" by recognising her as a unique autonomous human being, rather than an extension of her mother. In this instance this participant was seeking how she was different from her mother, but similar to her father. Perhaps this participant may have wanted the grounding of connectedness to each parent, to enable an experience of her autonomous self.

*So when I met my dad, I also couldn't tell my friends at home that I have met my dad and he's Indian. They would never understand that I have an Indian dad. The problem living in a road where there were only coloured families and white families. This was before group areas act... My dad would give me money and I couldn't share my mum. He couldn't buy me stuff because if I took it home and my mum would see it. ... I feel like I'm fake. I feel like I'm false to my friends because I know everything about them but they don't know everything about me. I have a childhood friend who up to today doesn't know about my Dad. (P3)*

This participant referred to one of the effects of apartheid in South Africa which resulted in secrets being held by family members in the context of mixed race families. The participant indicated that she cannot be accepted due to being the "odd one out" in the context of her family and neighbourhood. She had a secret life as a child. Her father who was "different" like she was, was denied and cut off by the family, because of his racial attributes. The participant in a sense became a scapegoat; a container of "othering" which links to the theory of Dalal who stated that an "othering process" takes place when people are labeled along racial lines. Bousin (in Johnson, 2004:1) links race awareness with cultural shame. Object relations identifies racism is an example of psychological splitting and the "tendency to (mis)use devalued racial groups as "containers" for disavowed and unwanted aspects of the self" (Berzoff, Flanagan & Patricia Hertz, 2011).

The categories that emerged from this theme will be discussed below.

#### **4.4.1 Interaction with peers and friends**

Many participants said they had few friends and had been withdrawn, especially during childhood.

*I couldn't interact. I didn't have friends. I would just sit alone at school or stand alone. (P15)*

*At work, I'm not close to anyone. I'll help them with work. I think I got close to two people out of thousands. I have acquaintances, but I don't go out of my way to be close. (P20)*

These findings appear to correlate to Strauss's (2013) statement that research shows that daughters of absent fathers are more likely to build emotional barriers which hinder their capacity to establish connections with others.

*When I played with my friends, they had skipping ropes and hula hoops and I didn't have any. I used to play with them and they let me. They accepted me. I was quite comfortable with my friends at home but it was bad when I went to school. I used to come first or second and the children there used to hit me because they were jealous. They thought I was poor but I always did well. (P4)*

A number of participants said that they felt poverty played a role in their social relations.

*At school I was the quiet one. I just focused on my work. No friends basically. When I started at college it started changing. I interacted more with a lot of people. I realised I actually like it and I don't know why I was avoiding it for so long. It was nice to be around other people. And also I can't be with other people for too long. We do things on a day and go out but then they want to do more and like I am 'it's enough'- I want to go home. To my own space. I don't know why I'm like that. (P2)*

A number of participants mentioned that they had few, if any friends as young children, but started making more friends and having more satisfactory social relations when they were older.

*I've had a lot of woman colleagues. I feel more comfortable with woman at work. I think because I'm still confused about men in a working environment, even*

*clients sometimes. I find it harder to understand the internal world of a man because I'm just not used to it. (P14)*

This participant experienced men as unfamiliar because she did not grow up with men in the household.

A number of participants said that did not have many friends. Some participants preferred having one or two close friends. A few participants said they had many friends. According to Babul & Luise (2016) the social world becomes paramount around the stage of puberty.

*I feel lonely. As a child I was also lonely. I had a friend at school but it was more about school work than friendship. I had no one to talk to. I've got one friend now but she's not close (in proximity). I don't see her often. (P6)*

*Even with friends I keep my distance. There was one particular friend who was much younger than me and came into my life through my sister... Our friendship started at that time because her mother wasn't there anymore and we took them in. We formed a bond. We're still very close but she's always the one fighting for the friendship to keep our relationship together. (P5)*

A number of participants indicated that they had one friend whom they did not see often.

*I was alone. I have an intuition with people when they don't want to be with me and I keep my distance. Not that I want to, I'd love to be part of that. I was quiet as a young person, but after I married my husband, I became more talkative. (P13)*

This participant became more sociable after getting married.

*I was never selfish, even now. I've got such a lot of friends and people who love me a lot. I have a close friend who told me that if I need her, she will be there for me. (P4)*

Some participants said that had many acquaintances but one close friend.

*I have lots of friends. I make friends easily. Male and female. I have solid friendships. (P3)*

A few participants mentioned having a lot of friends.

*I loved my male friends more than my female friends. I distanced myself from my female friends. (P17)*

Two participants mentioned preferring male over female friendships.

*When I was at school - the role of friendship was like my freedom. When I was alone I'd feel depressed. I'd always ask my friends - ok guys, can I come over and do some work. But actually I just wanted to get out. I am actually on my own now. My friends all have kids... (P2)*

Some participants said that when they were children their friends had been a form of escape from their home life.

#### **4.4.2 Community engagement, social isolation and social inclusion/exclusion**

Seven participants spoke about community engagement.

*I am very community orientated. I am chairperson with neighbourhood watch, block committee etc. I get on fairly well with people. Maybe some people don't like me because I'm always in their face... I am never alone. I would love to have some alone time but I don't have alone time. I'm busy with my community. (P3)*

*There would be a gathering of church ladies. It was a special day and we all had dresses. My granny used to make me the secretary. Granny was the captain. We were always close and together. I've always been engaged in that way and know a lot of people, even now. I help at the mosque here. If*

*they have events, I volunteer. It is how it kept me going. My friend used to help me when my husband passed on. (P4)*

Some participants engaged actively with their communities, had leadership positions and found that community work kept them busy. The second quote, reveals how the participant entered community activity through the influence of her grandmother whom she grew up with.

*I belonged to a parent club that was very important to me. I connected with more parents going through different things with their children. It was all about helping the child through the parents. So they would work with the parent and then the parent would help the child. That's the only group I went to. It was good because I could share things in the group. There were other parents sharing deep things and that put me at ease to share and I also developed friendships there. I stopped going because I felt my season there was done... Church is the one place where I can't hide what I'm feeling because I feel connected to God in some way because I grew up in church. Church gives me support but it's scary because I know I'm going to get emotional so I don't go as much. (P5)*

Some participants mentioned that they engaged in community activities that they benefited from in some way. This participant found the parenting educational group helpful. A number of participants attended religious activities in their community such as church or mosque.

*I didn't socialize easily so the 'me' speaking now is a different me. I started reaching out and joined the health committee in my area. These are things I never did. This was not me. This has been the last five years. We had to speak to groups on a daily basis so I had to come out of my shell'. 'I feel so close to people in my church. I'm still very private about my feelings and emotions. I've seen you can tell someone something very personal today and they can use it against you in 10 years. Trust is a big issue. I don't speak openly about my problems. I would only speak openly to my husband and then feel better. (P10)*

This participant indicated that she had only recently started to participate in community activity. She engaged with her church community, however she felt distrust of people and only shared private, intimate information with her husband.

*'I feel people include me. I get on with people ok but I'm not close to them. I don't trust people to share myself, I don't. Generally, I don't feel excluded'. (P7)*

*People always include me, but I sometimes exclude myself. Some days I'll be normal and chat to someone, and other days keep to myself. I don't think it's anything to do with anyone. (P18)*

*People do include me all the time but I don't want to. I'll make excuses not to go. I'm not sure if they like me. (P20)*

*I felt more left out. I suppose it's more perceived than what's actually happening. I do a lot of introspection all the time. (P16)*

*I feel like having an absent father is like the seed... it's the cause of everything that's happening... with school... with college... when there was like sports days... I used to get anxiety... I told my mom I wouldn't want to go. I wouldn't want to be around crowds of people. I just didn't feel comfortable. I didn't feel like I fit in. It was weird because people would say 'when you are around people you are a totally different person'. But I wouldn't allow myself to be that person ... I was always scared. (P2)*

Most of the participants who discussed this subject seemed to experience some ambivalence about the degree that they wanted to be included socially. Generally they seemed to feel insecure about whether they would be accepted. This finding correlates with Wakerman (2015) who held that loss of a father in early childhood is likely to be interpreted as rejection, which is carried through into adulthood. Some participants seemed to anticipate rejection without any apparent cause.

*I generally choose to be excluded but if I feel they are excluding me that's when I get hit with the abandonment kind of thing. People are very welcoming of me because I am approachable. (P1)*

This participant expressed a dilemma created by internal conflict, because although she felt included, she preferred not to be included, however when not included, she re-experienced abandonment.

A Significant sub-category that emerged was: Poverty and risk factors.

#### **4.4.2.1 Poverty and risk factors**

A father's absence often resulted in a household where there were fewer resources for the family to draw from. At times lack of resources led to an increase of risk factors which daughters were exposed to.

*My mother was struggling. To take me to school, my mother had to sell pap in the industries. So if at school they ask you for money, it made me cry because I knew at that time she didn't have money and to find that money she had to hustle. ... When you cry to your mother all the time, you end up feeling sorry for her. We ended up not telling our mother what we wanted. We knew there was no way she could get those things. (P7)*

This participant reflects the findings of Holborn and Eddy (2011) regarding South African children who are typically parented by mothers in single-parent households, that a father's absence creates the condition where the mother has to parent alone with fewer resources that negatively impact their children.

*As children, we had to go to school. If you don't have a uniform you still went to school but we always had a piece of bread. There was a lady who gave us bread (crying). She never chased us away. (P6)*

Many participants experienced poverty during their childhood. Survival sometimes meant support from a kindly neighbour, a teacher or some other acquaintance.

Witkowski (2017) referred to a concept of "othermothering", a form of kin networking that developed out of a survival strategy for child rearing due to necessity rather than convenience.

*At Christmas time all my friends daddy's bought them presents and my dad was not there and my mom couldn't afford to buy for all her children'. ... [And now as an adult] 'We are the less fortunate family in the church. Because their dad also does not contribute. So I do feel left out sometimes. (P3)*

A pattern of an absent father has repeated in this participant's life. She grew up in a home where her father was absent and now her children have the same experience. A feedback loop relates to cycles being re-enacted and people being likely to repeat unresolved psycho-dynamics (Simson, 2002).

*Maybe if my father had still been alive I could have finished school, maybe I would have become a teacher. I remember my mother saying "You must help me now" when my father died. (P12)*

This participant's education was interrupted by the death of her father. She had to mourn both the loss of her father as well as the lost opportunities an education may have afforded her. The type and timing of the absenteeism of a father has a range of repercussions on different areas of a daughter's development throughout her life cycles (La Guardia, Nelson & Lertora, 2014: 340). According to Wakerman (2015) a daughter affected by the permanence of death is hard hit and may have be less self-assurance than a daughter who experienced loss of a father through divorce.

*Even though my mum was there physically she was emotionally and mentally not present most of the time. So for me it is that I wish I had one stable parent. One wasn't there and the other one wasn't there in essence. (P1)*

If a mother is a single parent and does not function well as a parent, there is no one else for the child to turn to. A present father may offer an alternative parent and support in such circumstances. Bernstein (cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018:19) mentions that a

father of a daughter may feature as "libidinal objects, as protectors and rescuers from the mother".

*I was very cooped up with my mum. I didn't do much or get out much. We didn't have a car. And my mum was miserable (laughs)'. ... being with my mum there was no buffer in a way. Like my mum and I fought a lot! All the time. (P1)*

As discussed earlier, a father introduces a "separating third" into the mother-daughter dyad and can act as a buffer. Bernstein (cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018) mentions that fathers of daughters can serve as a protector and rescuer from the mother. A father offers opportunity of an alternate attachment figure to whom to flee physically or psychically for comfort of safety and support when the mother-child relationship is experienced as turbulent.

*I had a grandfather. He was quite supportive, but it was mostly my granny. My grandfather was drinking and sometimes rude to my granny and then we had to go sleep early because we couldn't be in the way. (P4)*

This participant indicated that a male role model is not always a positive experience.

*I asked questions as I was growing up but I couldn't really get closure. I saw my mother leave with male friends with a car and came back a couple of hours later with wine and gave me some sweets or chips to calm me. ... Recently I had a spiritual experience at church, where God opened up something in me that I didn't know before. I saw what happened when I was very, very small, around the age of two or three. I saw my mother laying with another man. I realized my mother was a prostitute. Then I looked back on my life and thought maybe that's how I was born. (sighs) It feels like my mother didn't want me but I was there and she had to deal with it'... There was no motherly love. She used to go with guys. (P9)*

This participant appeared to experience different forms of abandonment. She felt unwanted by her mother who was present and abandoned by her father due to his

absence. She grew up in circumstances where she believed her alcoholic mother was a prostitute.

Bowlby formulated an attachment theory regarding mother-child bonding during early childhood years. Disrupted attachment has been found to contribute to developmental problems. Bowlby's term "maternal deprivation" points to potential long-term negative outcomes for a child, "including a wide range of anxiety disorders, depression and cognitive impairment" (Witkowski, 2017).

The experience of an alcoholic mother is likely to be harmful to her children. Witkowski (2017) described the painful feelings resulting from a daughter's experience of her mother's alcoholism, which included sadness, embarrassment, anger, rejection, abandonment and the sorrow of losing the close relationship. Witkowski added that a daughter may distance herself to keep painful feelings from overwhelming her.

Children who grow up in an environment where their mother is a sex worker are exposed to risk. James Baldwin (Baldwin & Stein, 2004) stated that "an environment is also an inward reality, it's one of the things which makes you, it takes from you and it gives to you". Research conducted with sex workers who discussed the impact and neglectful nature of the sex industry on their children, found that living conditions, housing stability and child supervision arrangements were potentially harmful to the child's safety (Witkowski, 2017). The author (2017:44) found that risk factors included the presence of drugs and alcohol, exposure to strangers (clients), and witnessing violence, raised safety concerns and concerns about the child's growth and development. The study revealed parental responsibilities and involvement in prostitution promoted stress in mothers who frequently coped by "consuming alcohol and drugs to relieve feelings of shame and low self-esteem".

*My mother was present, she was a heavy drinker. I saw her drinking and I never touched alcohol in my life. I said when I am a parent one day, I will never do that to my child, but I loved her to bits. Because I didn't have a father, my mother was important so I had a double portion of love for my mom. We were very close.*  
(P10)

It appears that the mother of this participant managed to maintain a caring relationship with her mother despite the negative effects of alcohol misuse. The participant mentions that she has avoided alcohol herself due to her experiences and mentions that an absent father increased the significance of her mother in her life. A daughter has no one else to turn to when her father is absent.

*Looking now from the perspective of a grown person, I can see she was wrong how she treated us. God gives you a gift and you should treasure that gift ... She was a beautiful woman. When I look at her behaviour, she acted upon what she thought was best for her kids. When I got older, I could understand her situation and I was in a better situation. Growing up, I said "As God is my witness, I will not be like her". (P13)*

This participant also stressed that she did not wish to be like her mother and indicated that her mother did not treat her children well. This is another example of how a child is more vulnerable when a mother is a single parent without the presence of a father as a potential protector or rescuer from the mother. During infancy a father may be a provider of psychic safety, a safe refuge "during times of persecutory anxiety in the mother-infant relationship", either by being an alternative container of the baby's hostile projections "so that these projections are not directed towards the mother", or being a non threatening, safe object for the baby when the mother "is the target of the infant's hostility" (Bernstein cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018).

*We never had much male influence apart from my mother's boyfriends and I went to all girl schools so I was quite wary of boys and men in general. I didn't know how to relate in just a friendship way. When I hit my twenties I was in my rebellious stage and all I knew was how to flirt with people but I didn't how to interact as a friend. ... I didn't know who I quite was compared to a man or a guy and I think that was lack of modelling. (P14)*

This participant indicates that the absence of a male model in her childhood created a sense of disadvantage or awkwardness. Unlike a relationship with a same-sex child, fathers are not "objects of identification for their daughters" (Bernstein in Kamau &

Davies, 2018:19). A father models appropriate boundaries with the opposite sex and his absence may put her at risk and affect her confidence (Babul & Luise, 2016).

#### **4.5 Theme 3: The significance on intimate relationships of an absent father in the identity formation of women**

This section presents the data for Theme Three. Two significant categories emerged which included: Knowledge and care of partner or spouse; and Interdependence, mutuality Trust; and Commitment. A significant sub-category emerged, as outlined in the Framework for Analysis.

Each participant's relationships appear to be influenced by their early relational experiences and are therefore may be better understood in context.

*Because of growing up without a father, I am close to my husband. He is caring and loving and I appreciate him so much. He is my husband, not my father. He's like a father figure but doesn't fill the space that my father was supposed to fill. I just cling to him because he is a man. He's a father figure because of what he does for our children, and that way he is a father figure but he is not my father. He brings relief because at least he is a father. (P7)*

*When I looked at my husband with his children, I always thought this was the kind of father I would have wanted. (P10)*

These participants do not refer to a need for their husbands to be their father figure, however they express appreciation and relief for the experience of their children having a functioning father after the void they experienced in their own childhood. The experience of a father in the context of their children appears to enhance their relationship with their husband. According to Wakerman (2015), daughters who experience an absent father do not look for father figures but are drawn to gentle, kind and protective partners rather than those with stereotypical masculine traits.

*My husband taught me a lot. He taught me how to be me. He was a strong individual so I learned a lot from him. It should have been my father. (P13)*

This participant stated that she learned from her husband that which she felt her father should have taught her. It appears that by having a safe close relationship with her husband, she had a person to practice with, as she may have done with her father. Kohut's concept of mirroring is a form of affirming and constructive feedback (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011:169). A daughter who experiences an absent father does not experience mirroring from her father, however in the case of this participant she appears to have experienced it at a later stage from her husband.

*When I met my husband, I escaped to his house. They had a very traditional family and his parents were together. I escaped into that life rather. I really see my mother-in-law as a second mother to me. (P14)*

For some participants marriage presented an escape and an opportunity to experience more constructive relationships and role models than they had experienced as children.

*He was a very good husband, very supportive, very understanding. My husband was very loving. If we went shopping and we looked at a chandelier and I liked it very much, even though we couldn't afford it, he wouldn't say anything, but he would disappear and come back with the chandelier. He was that type of person. (P4)*

Some of the participants reflected they had the experience of a happy, long-term marriage.

*... I do want to be open to love and companionship. And I just want to get rid of the toxicness around me or within me in order to be open to other stuff. (P1)*

This younger participant expressed the wish for a caring relationship however she felt she was not ready for such an experience.

*I started picking up that he really isn't intimate with me. It wasn't as enjoyable when we were alone as when we were in company. When we were in company, he would entertain everybody. Everybody enjoyed his company. But behind closed doors, he was completely different. I decided I didn't want to be with him*

*anymore and went into a relationship with a woman. This woman opened up my eyes and revealed stuff to me that I couldn't be treated like this. We would talk and I would cry a lot and she would comfort me. We were together for five years. This relationship also became too much. (P9)*

A number of participants had been married more than once.

*I feel I want to leave. If I could find someone who loves me, I may fall into his hands because my husband just sleeps out when he wants. He's in a drug world. ... My marriage is a disaster. Five years ago, my husband went on drugs after he experienced some trauma and deaths. I'm very loyal but I don't know what to do with him because of the drugs and womanising. I caught him several times with woman (crying). I feel I've got no control. I'm only there because I have the house. I don't know where to go otherwise. (P6)*

*I was married for 3 years. We had a daughter. I was in such an abusive relationship. I was physically abused every weekend. I hated my husband. I used to wait to hear he was lying dead somewhere. I never looked forward to weekends like my colleagues. Because he used to come home drunk on a Friday and weekends it was chaos. (P3)*

Some participants experienced unhappy and abusive relationships.

*I had a relationship last year which ended this year. He was the first guy that I allowed to have contact with my children after my divorce. There were other guys before him, but with him, everything looked perfect and I allowed him to connect with my children. They got to know him and liked him, but then things changed and I think they suffered a loss because they got close to him and now they are not there. So I don't want them to go through that. (P5)*

This participant expressed concern about the effect her relationships had on her children.

#### **4.5.1 Knowledge of and care for partner or spouse**

*I'm nervous to go into an emotional place with him. If I have something to say that may cause him to be upset or angry, I tend to not go there because I don't feel comfortable with exposing myself to him as a man. That reflects my relationship with my dad. I'm not saying how I really feel. With my husband, we've developed our own way of kind of dealing with it. Like if I'm exploding because of bottling it in, he says "you just have to ask me nicely the first time." (laughs) Now I know I have to pipe up earlier. We've been together for 20 something years. I do think that on some level, I'm definitely affected by my relationship with my dad in terms of how I relate to him too. But I think because I've been on this journey of realizing parts of myself through counselling (P14)*

This participant connected her reluctance to reveal her vulnerable self to her husband, to the absence of her father. However she felt she was learning within the context of her marriage.

*When we are alone we do get to talk about his child from his previous relationship. We talk about the children, his work, my work and whatever comes up. I know him quite well. He also grew up without a dad. I get drawn to these things - even the woman I was in a relationship with - she didn't know her father. (P9)*

This participant felt drawn to people who were similar to herself in terms of having the experience an absent father. This relates to Kohut's concept of twinship which is about need to experience others as similar in order to have the comfort of recognising oneself in another (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011).

*I don't think when it comes to men that they can show their emotions. (P15)*

Not having the experience of a father figure, this participant's perceptions may be limited to her experience of her mother. Schulman (in Akhtar, 2009) states that during the separation–individuation phase, as ego boundaries and gender identity crystallize, a girl continues to identify with her mother and because she has difficulty with separating self from other, she learns to value relatedness and caring, as she and mother continue to

have a reciprocal relationship. Thus her identity development takes place in the context of relatedness, and she comes to value attunement, empathy, and togetherness.

*We've been married for 27 years. He's a beautiful soul. I have a heavenly a father because to have a husband like him.... I know when he's sad. He will try and hide it but I can see it. I know when he is in pain. We were best friends for six years before we got married. I know him very well. My husband is my best friend. (P10)*

Some participants felt they had a close bond with their husband and knew him well.

*At first I knew him very well, but he didn't know me very well. If you know a person, you know their needs and you know how they feel when you do this and that. I knew him each and every step. Even if he had a girlfriend, I used to tell him that you have a girlfriend and this girlfriend is so and so. (P11)*

This participant experienced her relationship as one-sided and was vigilant due to lack of trust.

*We've been married for almost 40 years. We have a good understanding but now that he is older, he is very possessive. I used to freely attend a lot of conferences and activities, now he just wants me to stay around him. (P17)*

*We worked together for 30 years in one place. We were good friends. His parents were also nice people. It was a happy marriage. The thing in our marriage even when I was angry, I would always say good night before I went to sleep. I think I knew him well. I had other friends, but he was the one. He was also protective towards me. Like he would say to me "aren't you going to the hairdressers? It is Friday" and I would say "I've got something to do, I'll go tomorrow." (P12)*

Some of the participants experienced well-established relationships with knowledge and care for one another.

*It was very hard to express my feelings, to say I love you, to be intimate and loving, touch and hold him without him first initiating. He always said "I never*

*know when you want to ..." It's hard for me to be the first one. It was difficult to initiate after I felt I couldn't trust the person. In the beginning it was easy but when I saw he wasn't really with me and I withdrew. (P19)*

This participant did not feel safe in her relationship because she felt trust had been broken and this affected her relationship. However she second guessed herself and blamed herself for finding it hard to express her feelings openly. According to Babul and Luise (2016), women who experience an absent father are more likely to struggle with intimate relationships and fear abandonment. The role of a father in his daughter's life is said to critically impact on her ability to trust, have regard for, or relate well to other males in her life (Erikson & Erikson, Flouri & Leonard cited in La Guardia, Nelson & Lertora, 2014:340).

*He also told unnecessary lies. My doubt is that I should have done more in the marriage. I never showed him enough love. I never told him I love him. If I had handled him differently, it might have been different. I find it hard to express my feelings. Very hard. Trust is a big factor especially if I saw something is not right, I didn't stick it out. When I saw something was going wrong, I would leave. I think I did the same when I was working. Instead of trying to work on it I would leave. (P19)*

This participant found it difficult to trust which resulted in her finding it difficult to express her emotions. She mentioned leaving instead of trying to bring about change. This behaviour may reflect her father's leaving her. She had no reference of her father "sticking it out" or "trying to work on it". Nielson (2012) mentions that daughters of absent fathers are more likely to have difficulty trusting and being emotionally intimate with men.

*That's why I'm divorced, because of all of this and up to today, I can't handle sex. I'm not longing for it because I don't like it. I was emotionally abused by my husband. I'm a very lonely person. (P8)*

Sexual abuse as a child negatively affected this participant's intimate relationships.

*I feel I don't know how to have a relationship. I didn't allow him to be very affectionate. The only affection I would show was during sex but other than that, I would be cold. Because I was promiscuous at a young age, I thought that was love. I thought that was the only way I could show someone how I felt. (P5)*

This participant experienced sex as the only means of making a loving connection. She did not expect a sexual partner to stay in her life. Babul & Luise (2016) maintain that women who experience an absent father are more likely to develop detrimental relationships due to profound feelings of neediness. A father models appropriate boundaries with the opposite sex and absence of a father may put his daughter at risk and affect her confidence. If her grief is not worked through, loss of her father may result in problems such as "sexual promiscuity, drinking, the need to belong to someone regardless of the costs, eating disorders, cutting, drug experimentation, and even suicidal thoughts". This participant said she "was cold" and did not allow affection. According to Gilbert (2006:60), "relationship nomads, or serial monogamists and hermits all represent versions of intense cut-off. One who cuts off from parents is vulnerable to impulsively getting into an emotionally intense marriage that ends in the cut-off of divorce".

#### **4.5.2 Interdependence, mutuality, trust and commitment**

*We need each other a lot. If there's a big decision to be made, for example with the children, first we speak about it, and then we decide. We come to an agreement before we do something. Yesterday he was at home before me so he did the washing. On weekends, I don't have to make food. He's very helpful. (P10)*

*It's give and take. I'm also loving towards him. We depend on each other. There's an emotional bond and we are interested in each other. (P7)*

*He did things for me like on mother's day and even packed my bread for work - things like that. Later on, he depended on me. Ja, you don't know it's coming...*

*He was diabetic. His legs were amputated. We went to church. We'd go see the night lights and I'd take a wheelchair and push him to the shops. If there's a dance, we would go to the dance and I'd dance with him in his chair like this... I said "why must I leave him at home? There's nothing wrong with his mind." We used to do things together. It was difficult but became easier when I got used to it. (P12)*

Some participants said they had a positive interdependent experience in their relationship.

*I feel like I try not to depend on him at all. Because I feel if I do depend on him he is just going to disappoint me in the end then I'm just going to get hurt. (P2)*

*The drive, in terms of being successful in my own rights and being able to earn has been a source of stress for me. I like to have my own money, my own source of independence because I don't want to be like my mom who depended so much on her boyfriend's. (P14)*

*I don't depend on anybody. (P19)*

Some participants did not experience a mutual or interdependent relationship. The experience of having been abandoned by her father appeared to have impacted on some of the participant's ability to trust men as they often anticipated abandonment and betrayal. According to La Guardia, Nelson and Lertora (2014), the role of a father in his daughter's life plays a key role in her ability to trust other males in her life. Makofane (2015) held that distrust of men is likely to be a factor for daughters who experience an absent father.

*There would be a mutual understanding of what would happen in the kitchen. I cook, he would do the dishes. But when we went out I felt alone. I felt like an accessory when we went out. I felt it was one sided. (P18)*

Some participants complained that there was a discrepancy between their private and public relational experience with their partner.

*I'm more looking for a mirror.... almost like a twin. Ever since I was young I've been looking - not consciously - but I know that's what my ideal would be. Not like ideal, I know no one is perfect but the core values need to be similar. He needs to be imperfectly perfect that kind of thing (laughs). Just a match. (P1)*

The participant points to two concepts, "mirroring" and "twinship", which were discussed earlier. Kohut, associated mirroring as a need to "feel special and full of well-being" which is fulfilled when one is mirrored by "people who will reflect and identify their unique capacities, talents, and characteristics" Twinship is a need to experience others as similar to oneself and that the absence of such experience, may lead to difficulties in attaining a sense of connectedness with others (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011). As a daughter who experienced an absent father she missed out on the opportunity of affirming, constructive feedback, in the form of mirroring, and also the connectedness of a twinship experience with her father.

*At first it was difficult to trust a man. At first when we are not married, it was difficult but as time went on, I spoke to people, especially at church and got help. I learned to forgive and forget. I realized that every person has got their own things to deal with and that's when I started getting closer to him and we got married. That's when I started to trust him.... He is the person I've committed to and put my trust in. He's doing his part. (P7)*

*In the beginning, when we dated, he used to flirt around with girls. He just loved women. He appreciated women. I was pregnant at the time so I just took the chance and prayed it wouldn't go that way. I took a big step when I married him because I thought "he's already flirting now...how will it be when I marry him?"... I truly believe that he has never been unfaithful. He's always been there. (P10)*

*Even now as an adult, I'm always making mistakes. I'm still very guarded. I don't allow a guy to connect with because in my mind, I know he's going to*

*leave. Trust is a big issue. I don't think I trust anyone (laughs). (P5)*

*You never trust a man. (P11)*

The participants appeared to experience varying degrees of trust in their partners and significant others. Some participants experienced difficulties with trust initially but gained confidence in their partner over time, whilst other participants expressed that they had trusted their partner, but felt trust had been broken for one reason or another. Nielson (2012) mentions that statistics indicate that daughters of absent fathers are more likely to have difficulty trusting men.

*I'm quite dedicated to our relationship. He is too. He has the model from his parents. They've had hard times together but they've got through it. I think we definitely trust each other. Neither of us would stray away from the other. We both realize it would cause too much damage in our relationship. Having his parents as such a strong model has been good. They are very much involved in our life, and our kids their grandchildren. (P14)*

*I've never been untrue to any partner. I'm very committed as I am at work. I've only had three jobs in my life, where I've been at for about a decade or more, but partners have not been faithful. (P8)*

A number of participants stated that they felt committed to their partner and some participants said they experienced mutual commitment. This finding is in contradiction to Nielson (2012:149), who mentioned that daughters of absent fathers are more likely to: have unstable romantic relationships and be more likely to have unsuccessful marriages.

*This is a theme... First boyfriend - I fell in love with his best friend and then we kind of broke up. And then I dated this other guy and then I started dating another guy while I was dating this guy. Then after that I dated his best friend. Then after that I started liking this other guy and then went to him. Then I made one really bad decision and regretted it and I made two more bad decisions. I've been kind*

*of making my way through... it looks bad but it wasn't because I learnt a lot from all of them and I needed to get to the point where I am now - those were my sounding boards. And then I came to my ex-boyfriend who is now still my best friend... He kind of ended that cycle of all those other guys. It made me realise what I really wanted and connect deeper to myself and my journey and my path... Now I am a lot more empathetic. (P1)*

This participant did not have a history of committed relationships. She said she was learning from her experiences and felt she had become more empathetic.

*I always mess up before they can mess up because it's a way of protecting myself. If there's any sign of suspicion, then I will act first.*

*In this new generation, they call it "vibing"...you see each other with no expectations. There's no rules. One guy is divorced as well. He has this thinking that there are no questions. When we see each other, we see each other. I think I feel it's safe that way. Instead of believing it when someone says they love you and you get hurt. You know where you stand. I don't expect anything. It's easier than being disappointed... I've struggled with sex addiction, I think (laughs). I sort of separate sex from emotions. (P5)*

Some participants did not feel committed to any relationship. This participant had low expectations of relationships and appeared to be protecting herself from potential abandonment. According to Rosenthal (2010) an absent father is a harmful experience that affects the identity, self-esteem and relationships of his daughter into adulthood. According to Makofane (2015) daughters responses to absence of fathers may include emotional detachment, denial, deep-seated hurt and pain which if not attended to is likely to obstruct intimate relationships.

*I really want to love somebody and be in a relationship, and I'm faithful. I want a relationship. I want to get married, but this is always in the back of my mind. Will it last? (P20)*

This participant expressed a wish for a committed relationship, however she struggled with fear of transience.

A Significant sub-category that emerged was: Children and parenting.

#### **4.5.3.1 Children and parenting**

Participants generally spoke about their children, or in the case of some of the older participants, their grandchildren, with concern that they have the experience of a father and are well taken care of. According to Babul and Luise (2016) a daughter who experiences an absent father may be a strong role model for her own daughter, inspiring self-confidence and wisdom to go into the world knowing how to love and be loved in a healthy way" and as a mother to a son, she may be a teacher, raising him "to love others, respect women, and balance strength with emotion".

*I advised my daughter to make a good choice about having a father for her children. I used to tell my children not to take away the father from their children. The son needs a father but yoh, the daughters demand their fathers! (P11)*

This participant encouraged her children to ensure the presence of a father in their children's lives.

*Sometimes I've had flares of angry feelings towards my father. I never expressed it to him but since I've become a mother and I look at my own children, I think 'how could you possibly have left a young child with a mom who's not well emotionally? (P14)*

This participant spoke about the experience of how becoming a parent enabled her to see through the eyes of a parent and question her father's absence.

*My own father is an empty space but watching my husband play the role of father with our children gives me something. (P7)*

This participant indicated that she experienced some healing of her absent father by witnessing her husband as a father with their children.

*I think a father would have made a difference. I have a husband and six children of my own. If I compare with my own childhood, I think there's a lot more stability for my children. They can interact easier with others. We've been married twenty years now. I think the abuse did affect my relationship with my husband. I struggled with intimacy for years but I've worked through it. We are very protective of our kids. If there's only one person, especially a mom having to do everything, you can't be everywhere. (P16)*

This participant felt that her children fared well and made better progress than she did because their father was present.

*With my kids, I was very paranoid. I had a fear of losing them. I was always afraid I would lose them and even had dreams that they got lost in a crowd or things like that. I was so protective ... I think I tried to be better than my mom - tried too hard to get the perfect balance. I've relaxed over the years because I am more experienced ... At 19 I fell pregnant and decided to get married based on not wanting our child to grow up without a dad because my ex-husband's dad was in prison, so he also grew up without a dad. So we both wanted our child to have a dad. First, his fathering was good but I expected more from him than he was capable of. What I wanted from my dad I wanted to get from him. Just to feel accepted and wanted. We had 3 kids when the divorce started. During my fourth pregnancy, the divorce went through and finalized. Now my kids are growing up without their father. He is still in their lives, but not as much as he should be. (P5)*

This participant was very protective towards her children because she feared losing them. She did not trust anyone else to care for them. She did not want her children to have the experiences she had as a child. She attempted to prevent her children from having her experience of being a child who had experienced an absent father, however the pattern repeated. Freud explained the concept "repetition compulsion", as the

tendency people have of repeating unresolved psycho-dynamics again and again until there is "re-remembering", or healing (Simson, 2002).

*I don't want children - it might change... the lack of parental stuff within me - but I kind of just want to live for myself and my partner... I definitely want a partner... If I fell pregnant I would have the baby and I would try my best... but my choice is no. Because I know what is like for the parents to take it out on the child. Because I had to carry it, I don't want to do that to someone else. (P1)*

This participant said she did not want children due to her own childhood experiences.

#### **4.6 Theme 4: Resiliency of daughters in the context of the absent father experience**

This section presents the data for Theme Five, The influence on resiliency of the absent father experience on the identity formation of women. Significant categories included: Resilience and capacity to overcome adversity; and Resources.

Significant sub-categories developed for two of the categories, as outlined in the Framework for Analysis.

Most participants expressed some degree of resiliency and mentioned a degree of support received from others in their lives. Many participants felt they were their own most reliable resource.

*An absent father probably helped solidify that part of me - I had to cope. Like an inward sounding board. (P1)*

This participant indicated that her experience of an absent father had made her self reliant. According to Rosenthal (2010) daughters of absent fathers are likely to fill in missing parts of the story for themselves.

*I learned from seeing my mom - she struggled financially - she raised 7 other children. I focussed on not having to struggle in the way that she had to. Not knowing that I would have to raise my grandchildren for my daughter. (P3)*

This participant felt she learned from her mother's struggles, however the participant found that a generation later, she was her grand daughter's caregiver.

#### **4.6.1 Resiliency and capacity to overcome adversity**

*I feel I am unique. I started writing a book about myself. I think from having left home at 17 up to now I have achieved quite a bit. I feel it's made me strong. It's made me resilient. I'm not a fearful person. I can walk in the dark and I am the head of my home. Ja. My daughter and her children depend a lot on me. I've always been a go-getter. I ran a company for 19 years. (P3)*

A number of participants saw themselves as their key coping mechanism. They felt their resiliency was related to having to cope due to having experienced an absent father. Research by Babul and Luise (2016) revealed that daughters who experience an absent father are likely to resort to effective coping mechanisms and mature at an early age, presenting as persevering and self-reliant with leadership qualities.

*In terms of resiliency, I've been very good at coping and I've been very independent. I've tended to do too much to try to please everybody for fear of not being liked. It relates to fear of abandonment. (P14)*

This participant recognised strengths alongside her challenges and had insight into how abandonment affected her behaviour.

*I am there for myself and also my children make me strong because I must be there for them. My friend has always been there when it got too bad. When I haven't coped, my friend has helped. (P5)*

*I realized that in the last two or so years, that one cannot be isolated. I've learned that I have to be in a relationship. I have to invite people into my space and form*

*partnerships and I can't do everything. It can't be just me. So that has changed. (P16)*

These participants indicated that they felt strong while also requiring support.

*Two years ago, I went back to apologise to everybody, that I thought I did wrong to. Up to today, I'm still looking for people I was bad to. I can see the big impact this has had in my life and I can say to people "Just remember that you have a voice." I tell people to speak about what bothers them because it can stress them out and somehow it will come out so they need to talk about it. I even tell people that I have been sexually abused but I have been only saying this for the last two or three years and so many ladies have come out and shared their experiences of sexual abuse. My granddaughter has also played a role. I've started to learn patience. I have become a different person. (P8)*

This participant shared her journey of transformation that will play a role in the next generation through her influence on her grand daughter. She also spoke about breaking the silence around sexual abuse.

#### **4.6.2 Resources**

*My only coping mechanism is to just rely on yourself. If you have a problem, just pray. (P9)*

*I'm praying God will use me in the church. I still do things like healing people. When I was growing up, I used to see things like flowers, climbing the mountain, getting some flowers from the mountain and these flowers are used for medicine. I've noticed that some of the flowers I picked up in my dreams I now see in the garden. So those are the flowers I'm using to heal people, even small babies for colic. (P11)*

Religion and self-reliance were key resources for most participants.

*I was my own key resource. I created a mask for others to see. Pretending. I drank and went to gym. I used to drink a lot. I no longer drink. (P8)*

This participant was self-motivated and recovered from alcohol abuse.

*Myself. Time with abandoned babies in charity work. So when I feel depressed or alone I just take a drive and spend time with the babies and I feel like I'm a new person when I leave... cause I feel like I've done something good and it makes me feel better. The last thing I did - I fostered a baby because I felt that if I did that it would give me closure- because this baby didn't have a mother and a dad - I just don't have a dad. (P2)*

This participant felt she was her main resource. Caring for abandoned babies were perhaps a means of attending to her inner abandoned baby and were perhaps transitional objects. Donald Winnicott's concept of transitional objects related to providing a means of self-soothing (Sharf, 2012).

*I'm very creative like my mom. Creativity is a real source of joy and diversion for me when life is hectic. It's been a source of bonding for my mother and I. We may have had disagreements, but we can still share creativity and do that together. I do a lot of reading for further knowledge about how to help other people. I can really understand people because of my own experiences. (P14)*

This participant made use of creative projects as a therapeutic experience and as a means of bonding with her mother who was also creative (twinship). She also enjoyed reading and improving her knowledge.

*I had my mummy as my support system. I would complain and she would say it's not as bad as you think and tell me to focus. I probably wouldn't have done anything, including high school, if my mother hadn't encouraged me. (P20)*

*My mom was a very brave woman. (P6)*

Some of the participants reported a positive relationship with their mother whom they found to be a supportive, inspiring and caring role model. Women usually fulfil the role of nurturer. Throughout the world, the mother is generally the key care-giver (Eddy et al, 2013:11).

*I've turned to alternative medicine for the cancer but still accept the doctor's help. There's pain throughout my body but I treat myself with herbs. I learned how to grow and eat organic vegetables. It helps, that's why I can sit here! (laughs) If I didn't have the knowledge of herbs and gardening, I would have been a goner by now. I'm also very spiritual and God-fearing. My husband is a provider and even if I had 100 or 200 rands, I would use it to help people. I have youth are from the streets volunteering in my garden. I've grown to love them so much. (P15)*

This participant suffers from cancer and is self-motivated regarding the use of alternative medication. She is perhaps healing her inner child when she takes care of the youth who live on the streets, who volunteer in her garden.

*Me and my granny used to go to the bushes to collect wood for our stove. Granny carried the wood on her head and I dragged it. Me and my granny used to eat mielie rice while my friends use to eat real rice. They could afford it. ... On Eid, my mother used to send me a new vest, panty, bag, accessories. I felt cared about by my mother. I didn't see her much... When there wasn't food, granny would take the mielie rice and an onion and braise it, and that was our food. And on Sunday, our pudding was pumpkin mashed with mealie meal, a stick of cinnamon, a little flour. For us it was tasty. It was a treat. (P4)*

*'My mother got sick and I went to live with my grandmother who had 19 other grandchildren living with her.... When my granny received her pension, I would be the one to go with her to the shops in town and she would buy everything in bulk. She never had to buy vegetables because whenever a child was born, they got a gardening patch. We ate veggies fresh from the land. She taught us how to make dishes straight from the garden... She taught us how to survive. I never walked with broken clothes. She taught us to take a needle and sew our clothes, if we*

*don't have shoes, we must wash our feet'... I was thinking that my grandmother is like a father and a mother. We only ever saw pictures of my grandfather, but the things my grandmother taught us, I don't think anyone else could have taught us. (P17)*

Some participants mentioned a loving relationship with their grandmother where they felt safe and cared for, despite poverty that was often a feature in their lives. Their grandmothers were often creative and hard working and served as role models on how to manage with limited resources. A study showed that children raised by grandparents rather than a single parent appeared to fare better in the areas of health, behaviour and academic progress (Solomon & Marx cited in Makofane, 2015:28). It is possible that a grandmother may have more time to allocate to her grandchildren. The final developmental stage according to Erikson is "integrity versus despair" which focuses on a sense of meaning, involvement and acceptance of life (Watts, Cockcroft & Duncan, 2013). A grandmother is likely to have more life experience as a resource to draw from.

*I grew up with strict grandparents who did everything I needed to benefit me. I was very quiet and kept to myself. I always stayed in the house. We were never allowed to be outside. It made me who I am today. I'm a stronger person because of how my grandparents were... Because of how I've grown up, I actually choose my life over having a father because it's made me who I am. My mom was in the picture. She always visited. She tried to see me every day. (p18)*

This participant was reared by both of her grandparents, whom she appreciated. She also had almost daily contact with her mother.

For those participants who had even a brief but constructive interaction with their father, it appeared to be internalised as a positive resource.

*I saw him pulling up and said "oh my God, I look like him. Same mouth and everything. (P8)*

*... My one sister said, "look, there's dad." I asked "who are you talking about?" and she said, "our father." I asked, "which one?" He looks like me, same colour, round face and whatever, well-built. ... When we turned back, he was gone, so we just walked on. (P4)*

A number of participants appeared to identify with their father in some way when they saw him. Perhaps even a brief glimpse offered an opportunity for twinship as discussed above, which if absent may increase the sense being alone in the world and result in difficulties with feeling a connectedness with others (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011).

*My dad is the very opposite to my mum. My mother is creative and eccentric and my dad is an academic and an accountant. So having him would have been a good balance if he had been around. My husband says I am pessimistic but I call it practical and realistic (laugh). So I'm a bit more like my dad (coughs). (P14)*

A father may offer an "otherness" for a daughter within the context of the mother-daughter dyad. Bernstein (cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018:19) mentioned that unlike a relationship with a same-sex child, fathers are not objects of identification for their daughters'. The participant indicates that she was aware of her father's "otherness" and appears to also identify with this aspect of "otherness". Perhaps she is enacting Kohut's concept of twinship, which is about taking comfort from the experience of her father as being similar to herself and thereby recognising herself in him (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011).

A significant sub-category that developed was: Support systems.

#### **4.6.2.1 Support systems**

A number of participants referred to support from other people such as family, relatives, neighbours, teachers and friends.

*When confronted with stressful situations, I always ask for help. If I can do something on my own, I will. When I was studying, I wanted to give up but I pushed on and asked my family for a loan and they helped out. I have a support*

*system. They are my mother and two older sisters and brother in laws. I have my best friend. She may be harsh but she's there for me. And another male best friend. (Crying) I get emotional about them. (P20)*

*My mother, my maternal aunt is another one - she's a very religious person - I pick up the phone and say I'm having a bad day, would you mind praying with me. She's on the phone and she's praying for me and then two minutes later I see a car outside and she's like 'come with me, you have to get out the house... I speak to my mom about everything ... ok not everything - but a lot... The other person in my life is my ex's mum. She's very strong and she always encourages me. She's still in touch with me. (P2)*

*When I went to school, most of the time I did not have lunch with me. My next door neighbour's son gave me a slice of bread or whatever, and even the teacher can see who didn't have. My granny was always there. (P4)*

*Before, I had my grandmother. When I spoke to her, I never had any problems. She just made everything go away. She was like that to all my other cousins as well. She's a very sweet person. Now it's my husband. We are always there for each other, helping each other with whatever needs to be fixed. (P18)*

These findings are similar to those of Babul and Luise (2016), who found that a high number of women who experienced an absent father received support from other people such as friends or relatives. According to Brown (2018), healthy family structures may compensate for some of the negative effects of an absent father.

*... At first I didn't trust them [my brothers] but as time went on I saw how they were helping my mother because I was the youngest. We were close. They were role models. That made me change my views of men. I thought that if we could stand united, we could make it. (P7)*

A sibling may represent a positive male figure. This participant indicates that positive male role models in the form of siblings, may restore some faith in males, despite having

been abandoned by a father. Lamb (2010) mentions that a "social father" may adequately compensate for an absent father. Social fathers may include older brothers who potentially mitigate negative outcomes of the absence of a biological father.

*I have my Godfather which is great. Very strict. Very generous and kind. He doesn't live here ...but he was kind of like my dad or a financial version of one I guess. (P1)*

This participant related her experience of a "distance" social father figure whom she perceived as a support.

*Me. My two sisters would help if I ask but I don't. But they have helped on various occasions. I asked my father once for money - to lend money for a car - he said no. I never asked him again. He will give when I see him but I wont ask. (P3)*

This participant had sought help from her father who had refused to assist her.

Some participants referred to community resources that played a supportive role in their lives.

*Church was a resource. My husband and I were part of the youth group in the church. They taught us and that helped us a lot. (P7)*

*I would say school. I never really had friends at home. We always had to be in the house but school was about having fun with friends. (P18)*

Some participants indicated that assisting others in some way provided a source of meaning and healing in their lives.

*Charity work. (P14)*

Support systems played a critical role and contributed to the resiliency and well being of the participants.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter is comprised of two sections. Section One presents demographic data which provides the context for data findings. Section two presents data that emerged from the four research questions outlined in Chapter One. Data is organized into four themes. The first theme explores the psychological effect of having an absent father on the identity formation of women. Themes two and three focus on social and intimate relationships of daughters who had experienced an absent father and theme four explores resiliency of daughters in the context of the absent father experience.

The next chapter discusses conclusions and recommendations arising from this chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Four research questions were asked in this study to explore how growing up without a father may affect a daughter: What psychological effects does the experience of an absent father have on the identity formation of women; how does an absent father experience influence the social identity formation of women; how does an absent father experience influence the intimate relationships of women and; what influence on resiliency does an absent father experience have on the identity formation of women. Section One of this chapter considers the conclusions derived from addressing these four research questions. Section Two presents recommendations drawn from the conclusions.

### **5.2 Section 1: Conclusions**

This section considers the conclusions from each Theme. The conclusions for each theme will synchronize with the categories that emerged. Each theme will be concluded with an overall conclusion about the experience of an absent father on the identity formation of women. This section commences with considering the conclusions that derived from the demographic and contextual data before discussing the conclusions that were drawn from the findings of the research questions.

#### **5.2.1 Conclusions to theme 1: The psychological effect of having an absent father on the identity formation of women**

All 20 participants experienced some psychological impact due to the absence of a father. A significant proportion of interviewing time was allocated to this topic as indicated by the field notes. Father absence may impact his daughter psychologically in a range ways at different stages of their life. Whilst poverty was often a cause of suffering, feelings of abandonment often seemed to haunt daughters who experienced an absent father, throughout life. A child's environment plays an influential role in their psychological development. An experience of supportive caregivers appeared to

promote resilience and a stronger sense of well-being, whereas experiences of neglect, abuse or sexual abuse, often had a debilitating effect on well-being. Self-esteem was often low during childhood, affecting self-confidence and the daughters who experienced an absent father frequently felt withdrawn and lonely. Many of the daughters who experienced an absent father struggled with depression, feelings of emptiness and some had suicidal thoughts. On the other hand, the daughters who experienced an absent father were often self-reliant and did well in their studies at school. Some daughters who experienced an absent father felt they received a sense of healing from working with abandoned children, charities or a community project. It appeared that later in life, after gaining life experience, the daughters often fared better than when they were younger and some were late achievers.

#### **5.2.1.1 Self-esteem, self-confidence and self worth**

All 20 participants made reference to their experiences of self-esteem and self-confidence. The participants who experienced a more constructive caregiver experience in early childhood, appeared to be more resilient and had a stronger sense of well-being than the other participants. Winnicott referred to sufficient parental care as "a holding environment" and referred to "good enough holding" and a "good enough mother" rather than a requirement of "perfect parenting" (Palombo, Bendicson & Koch, 2009).

Poverty was a cause of strife and shame for many of the participants which affected their self esteem. Sexual abuse during childhood was mentioned by several participants as having a debilitating effect on their well-being. Some of the participants worked with abandoned children or charities through which they were perhaps attending to their wounded inner child.

Many participants mentioned their self-esteem was low as children which affected their self-confidence. This finding correlates with Strauss (2013) and Rosenthal's (2010) views that an absent father is a harmful experience that affects the identity and self-esteem of his daughter. Low self-esteem was frequently linked with being introverted, not interacting socially, feelings of shyness and loneliness. Loss of a father in early

childhood is likely to be interpreted as rejection, which is carried through into adulthood (Wakerman, 2015).

A number of participants mentioned they appear to be confident outwardly, but inwardly experienced self doubt and lack of trust in self which they linked to fear of rejection or linked to abandonment. This finding links to the work of Garfield-Kabbara (2014) who mentioned: A child internalises abandonment by her father as inner abandonment by the self. Shame may arise from perceived rejection that gives rise to a sense of being worthless due to the experience of abandonment. Shame can be seen as the experience of pain of being valueless, inferior, unlovable and is a defective sense of self.

Eleven participants specifically mentioned that their self-worth had been affected to some degree. A number of participants experienced shame and a sense of being worthless, which according to Garfield-Kabbara (2014) may arise from perceived rejection when there is an experience of abandonment. Abandoned may be interpreted as "being of little value". Garfield-Kabbara (2014) mentioned that in the context of a patriarchal society, the absence of a father results in the daughter internalizing shame and an identity that lacks self-worth or value.

Some participants reported a split experience where their low self-esteem at home and at school were different, sometimes because they were successful academically while at home they may not have had an experience which bolstered their sense of self-worth. A number of participants reported that they did well academically at school. This finding is contrary to findings of Babul & Luise (2016) and Nsamenang (in Lamb, 2010) who found that at the school going stage father absence may negatively affect their daughter's academic performance. This finding is closer to Zulu's (2014) finding that female students who experienced an absent father were generally academic overachievers. These findings concur with the researcher's assumption stated earlier, that women who have not experienced the role of a father in their lives may have less early experience of a patriarchal environment, which may result in more independence than their counterparts who grew up with a father.

Most of the older participants spoke about their experience of low self-esteem improving as they grew older. A number of participants reported improvement in their psychological health and sense of well-being as they grew older, perhaps due to gained life experience. Carstensen et al (2011) found there was improvement in overall emotional well-being with age. The research study found that a number of participants were late achievers, or "late bloomers". According to Utz, Berg and Butner (2017), the experience of later life is the product of "myriad earlier life events, choices, and constraints that set the stage for what is possible for each individual" who reaches this stage. Life experience may be an underestimated resource that the older daughters who experience an absent father, draw from.

#### **5.2.1.2 Feelings, moods and mental states**

When asked about their feelings, moods and mental states, 12 participants made significant contributions.

Almost half of the participants spoke about using a mask in some form as a defence, such as not revealing emotions or lack of confidence. Babul & Luise (2016) mention that daughters who experience an absent father are more likely to experience anxiety and insecurity in emotionally stressful situations than daughters who have a father, and she is also likely to hide or bury these feelings. According to Winnicott, when a baby is not protected from impingements, she develops a "false self" and becomes "prematurely autonomous". In adulthood the false self can be an obstacle to forming intimate relationships which can result in loneliness. (Howard 2011:47-48). A false self is a defence structure and a mask. Defences are strategies of protection which are employed and the role they play needs to be understood (Simson 2002). The participants are likely to have used defences to protect their inner fragile self from vulnerability.

A number of participants reported they had behaved riskily at some stage of their life. These findings correlate with the findings of Babul & Luise (2016), that because adolescence is the most complex stage of a daughter's life, her father's feedback and support are crucial at this stage. If her grief is not worked through, loss of her father may

result in problems such as "sexual promiscuity, drinking, the need to belong to someone regardless of the costs, eating disorders, cutting, drug experimentation, and even suicidal thoughts". Participants who resorted to risky behaviour may have been "medicating" inner pain.

Nine participants mentioned experiencing depression or a sense of emptiness and some of the participants also said they have had suicidal thoughts. The researcher's assumption was confirmed that women who have experienced an absent father may experience a sense of inner void that they will attempt to compensate for, or repair in some way, and that women who had absent fathers may be more prone to suicidal feelings. Kimani and Kombo (2010) mentioned that in Kenya 63% of youth who committed suicide were from homes where the father is absent. An object relations view of suicide is that it is "an attempt, in phantasy, to destroy bad internal objects, introjects - or unwanted aspects of the self" (Kaslow et al, 1998:779). In other words suicide is an attempt to kill internalised bad objects or aspects of self which are experienced as intolerable. These findings concur with the view of Nielson (2012), that daughters of absent fathers may be more vulnerable to emotional and psychological problems, including depression.

### **5.2.2 Conclusions to theme 2: How the experience of an absent father influences the social identity formation of women**

The experience of an absent father is likely to negatively impact a child's social identity. Participants appeared to identify that their social interactions were influenced by their psychological experiences. Many participants were less socially engaged than their peers were. According to Vanderheiden and Mayer (2017), internalised abandonment gives rise to the experience of shame which is informed by internalised object relations. The action which corresponds to shame is a need to hide (Kinston in Bigliani, Moguillansky & Sluzki, 2013). According to Bigliani, Moguillansky and Sluzki (2013) shame and humiliation are private, intimate emotions, and also social emotions which play out in interactions between people. Shame is therefore both a deep personal and a social experience of a distorted and unworthy self that is enacted in relationships.

Shame is likely to be an obstacle to healthy social interactions and may result in a negative sense of social identity.

Despite claiming to be private and not very sociable, the participants generally seemed to have little difficulty in speaking about their experiences and expressing their feelings. In a study on relational communication, Jackson (2010) found that daughters who experience an absent father generally scored higher on self-disclosure, expressed themselves with less effort and were less likely to self-silence or prohibit self expression, than daughters with present fathers.

#### **5.2.2.1 Interaction with peers and friends**

A number of participants mentioned feeling like an outsider when they saw other fathers interacting with their children or when their peers mentioned their fathers in conversations. A number of participants said they did not have many friends but a few participants contrasted these findings because they had many friends. According to Babul & Luise (2016) the social world becomes paramount around the stage of puberty. Some participants said that their friends had been a form of escape from their home life when they were children. A number of participants mentioned that although as young children they had few, if any friends, they started making more friends and having more satisfactory social relations as they grew older. These findings appear to correlate to Strauss's (2013) statement that research shows that daughters of absent fathers are more likely to build emotional barriers which hinder their capacity to establish connections with others. However these findings by Strauss do not appear to take into account that there may be change and improvement over time. Many participants mentioned that poverty played a negative role in their social relations. Some, for example, did not have shoes to wear to school and others struggled for survival. Abandonment and strife were compounded when existing caregivers were dysfunctional.

#### **5.2.2.2 Community engagement, social isolation and social inclusion/exclusion**

Seven participants spoke about community engagement. Some participants engaged actively with their communities and had leadership position. Other participants mentioned that they engaged in community activities which they benefited from in some way, such as a parenting educational group or religious group.

Most of the participants who discussed this subject seemed to be somewhat ambivalent about the degree they wanted to be included socially. Generally they seemed to feel insecure about whether they would be accepted by others. Some participants seemed to anticipate rejection without any apparent cause. This finding correlates with Wakerman (2015) who held that loss of a father in early childhood is likely to be interpreted as rejection, which is carried through into adulthood.

Many participants experienced poverty during their childhood. Households where the father was absent often meant there were fewer resources for the family to draw from. This confirms the findings of Holborn and Eddy (2011) that a father's absence creates conditions of a single caregiver with fewer resources which negatively impacts the children in the household. Survival sometimes depended on support, from the social environment, such as help from neighbours, schools or other acquaintances. This finding links with the concept of "othermothering", referred to by Witkowski (2017), a form of kin networking that developed out of a survival strategy for child rearing due to necessity rather than convenience.

Some of the participants were brought up by single parent mothers who did not function well as a parent. Some mothers abused alcohol. The findings of Witkowski (2017) describe the painful feelings resulting from such experiences, of sadness, embarrassment, anger, rejection, abandonment and the sorrow of losing the close relationship. A present father may have offered support in such circumstances. This finding is supported by Bernstein (cited in Kamau & Davies, 2018:19) who mentions that a father may play the role of protector and rescuer from the mother in certain circumstances. Some participants chose to lead different lives from that of their mother. In some instances a difficult relationship with mother was perhaps compounded by abandonment by a father.

A number of participants experienced the absence of a male model, which Babul & Luise (2016) indicate may put a daughter at risk when she interacts with men, because a father models appropriate boundaries with the opposite sex and these daughters were without such a model.

### **5.2.3 Conclusions to theme 3: The significance on intimate relationships of an absent father in the identity formation of women**

Intimate relationships appeared to have been influenced by early relational experiences and are therefore better understood in this context. A number of the participants reported that they had the experience of a happy, long-term marriage. Several participants had been married more than once. Some of the participants experienced unhappy and abusive relationships.

The participants did not refer to a need for their husbands to be their father figure, however a number of participants expressed appreciation and relief for the experience of their children having a functioning father after the void they had experienced in their own childhood. The experience of witnessing a father playing a positive role in the context of their children appeared to enhance their relationship with their husband. According to Wakerman (2015), daughters who experience an absent father do not look for father figures but are drawn to gentle, kind and protective partners rather than those with stereotypical masculine traits. For some participants marriage presented an escape and an opportunity to experience more constructive relationships and role models than they had experienced as children.

#### **5.2.3.1 Knowledge and care of partner or spouse**

A number of participants appeared to find this question difficult and seemed to link knowledge of their partner with vigilance due to mistrust. There was a range of responses. Some participants made a connection between their difficulty with allowing themselves to feel vulnerable in their relationship and the absence of their fathers, while others felt they had a close bond with their husband and knew him well. Some spoke lovingly about their partner with whom they had a long, solid relationship. A number of

participants found it difficult to have a close caring relationship because they experienced distrust due to abuse from their partner or a previous partner. The role of a father in his daughter's life is said to critically impact on her ability to trust, have regard for, or relate well to other males in her life (Erikson & Erikson, Flouri & Leonard cited in La Guardia, Nelson & Lertora, 2014:340). Nielson (2012) mentions that daughters of absent fathers are more likely to have difficulty trusting and being emotionally intimate with men. A number of the findings correlate with the researchers assumption that women who experience an absent father may experience feelings of abandonment and may struggle with intimate relationships

Participants who had been sexually abused as children often experienced more challenges with intimate relationships.

Some participants experienced sex as a means of intimacy but were unable to make an emotional connection. Babul & Luise (2016) maintain that women who experience an absent father are more likely to develop detrimental relationships due to profound feelings of neediness. According to Gilbert (2006:60), "relationship nomads, or serial monogamists and hermits all represent versions of intense cutoff. One who cuts off from parents is vulnerable to impulsively getting into an emotionally intense marriage that ends in the cut-off of divorce".

#### **5.2.3.2 Interdependence, mutuality, trust and commitment**

Some participants said they had a positive interdependent experience in their relationship while others did not experience a mutual or interdependent relationship. A few participants complained that there was a discrepancy between their private and public relational experience, saying their husbands were more attentive at home and less so in public, or visa versa.

Father absence resulted in the lack of a twinship experience for their daughter. Berzoff, Flanagan and Hertz (2011) notes that the deficit of a twinship experience may lead to difficulties in attaining a sense of connectedness with others

Participants generally spoke about their children, or in the case of some of the older participants, their grandchildren, expressing concern that they have the experience of a present father and be well taken care of. Participants often encouraged their children to ensure the presence of a father in their children's lives. According to Babul and Luise (2016) a daughter who experiences an absent father may be a strong role model for her own daughter, "inspiring self-confidence and wisdom to go into the world knowing how to love and be loved in a healthy way" and as a mother to a son, she may be a teacher, raising him "to love others, respect women, and balance strength with emotion".

A number of participants appeared to experience some healing of their absent father by witnessing their husband as a present father with their children. Participant's who had a partner who was a present father, often felt that their children were generally in a better position and doing better than they had been as children. Some participants were very protective towards their children and fearful that their children may have the same experiences they had as children, however some mentioned that despite their attempts, their children also experienced an absent father. Freud explained the concept "repetition compulsion", as the tendency people have of repeating unresolved psycho-dynamics again and again until there is "re-membering", or healing (Simson, 2002).

The participants appeared to experience varying degrees of trust in their partners and significant others. Some participants experienced difficulties with trust initially but gained confidence in their partner over time, whilst other participants expressed that they had trusted their partner, but felt trust had been broken for one reason or another. Nielson (2012) mentions that statistics indicate that daughters of absent fathers are more likely to have difficulty with trusting men. Abandonment by a father is likely to impair his daughter's ability to trust men. She may grow up anticipating abandonment and betrayal. According to La Guardia, Nelson and Lertora (2014), the role of a father in his daughter's life plays a key role in her ability to trust other males in her life.

A number of participants stated that they felt committed to their partner and some participants said they experienced mutual commitment. Some participants did not feel committed to any relationship. These participants had low expectations of relationships

and appeared to be protecting themselves from potential abandonment. A number of participants expressed a wish to be in a committed relationship. Makofane (2015) mentioned that daughters responses to absence of their father may include emotional detachment, denial, deep-seated hurt and pain which if not attended to is likely to obstruct intimate relationships. According to Nielson (2012:149) daughters of absent fathers are more likely to have unstable romantic relationships and unsuccessful marriages.

#### **5.2.4 Conclusions to theme 4: The influence on resiliency of the absent father experience on the identity formation of women**

Most participants expressed some degree of resiliency and mentioned a degree of support received from others in their lives. Many participants felt they were their own most reliable resource. Religion emerged as a key resource for many participants. Some participants linked their independence and self-reliance to the experience of an absent father while others felt their caregiver had been a role model whom they had learned from. Notably, even brief constructive contact with their father appeared to be of some benefit to participants.

##### **5.2.4.1 Resilience and capacity to overcome adversity**

Many participants appeared to be self reflective and insightful about their experiences. A number of participants saw themselves as their key coping mechanism. They felt their resiliency was related to having to cope due to their experience of an absent father. This concurs with the findings of Babul and Luise (2016) who found that daughters who experience an absent father are likely to resort to effective coping mechanisms and mature at an early age, presenting as persevering and self-reliant with leadership qualities. A number of participants felt they were strong and independent however they recognised that they also needed external support. A number of participants played a positive role either in the lives of their own children or grandchildren, or in the lives other vulnerable children such as orphans or street children. Some participants felt that caring for others, such as abandoned babies provided them with a therapeutic experience. These participants may have been healing their inner child by caring for other children.

An abandoned baby may be a transitional object. Donald Winnicott's concept of transitional objects related to providing a means of self-soothing (Sharf, 2012). Some participants volunteered at charities or other organisations which played a supportive role for people.

#### **5.2.4.2 Resources**

Religion and self-reliance were key resources for most participants. A number of participants referred to support from other people, such as family, relatives, neighbours, teachers and friends. These findings correlate with those of Babul and Luise (2016), who found that a high number of women who experience an absent father received support from other people.

Some participants referred to community resources such as church groups which played a supportive role in their lives. A number of participants were self-motivated and successfully recovered from a range of challenges, for example, misuse of alcohol. Some participants relished participating in activities which in some way were linked to their experiences with their childhood caregiver, for example religious activities or hobbies.

Some of the participants experienced their mother as a supportive, inspiring and caring role model. A number of participants mentioned a loving, positive relationship with their grandmother who had been their caregiver and served as a role model. Solomon & Marx (cited in Makofane, 2015:28, mention that children raised by grandparents rather than a single parent may be a more favourable experience.

Participants who had even a brief but constructive interaction with their father, appeared to internalise the experience as a positive resource. A number of participants appeared to identify with their father in some way. Berzoff, Flanagan and Hertz (2011) indicate that Kohut's concept of twinship, which is about taking comfort from the experience of another as being similar to oneself and thereby recognising oneself in another, may decrease the sense being alone in the world and result in less difficulty with feelings of connectedness to others.

Some participants experienced positive male role models, such as siblings, grandfathers or a god father. Lamb (2010) mentions that a "social father" may adequately compensate for an absent father.

In summary, the key factors influencing the identity formation of participants were: Father absence generally impacted their daughters negatively. The presence of a positive caregiver experience in early childhood appeared to play a role in the psychological well-being of the participants. Poverty was often a cause of suffering. Feelings of abandonment frequently led to low self esteem and self confidence, feelings of shame and sometimes resulted in depression. Social and intimate relationships were also often negatively effected by the experience of abandonment by their fathers. The women were generally resilient to some degree and received a measure of support from others however participants often felt they were their own most reliable resource.

### **5.3 Section Two: Recommendations**

Recommendations are based on an integrated assessment of the conclusions, and are ordered for ease of reference for the following: Daughters who experience an absent father, Fathers, Mothers and Caregivers, and Social Workers and Community

#### **5.3.1 Daughters who experience an absent father**

It is recommended that daughters who experience an absent father are facilitated to have regular contact with their fathers, taking into consideration the protection and wellbeing of the child and the child's "best interests" as set out in South Africa's Children's Act. If a daughter has sustained contact with her father, she is unlikely to consider herself as having the experience of an absent father. The findings of this research conclude that an absent father is usually a deficit in a daughter's life with negative consequences.

It is recommended that a daughter be provided with information about her absent father. This research found that daughters of absent fathers often knew little if anything about

their father despite having made attempts to gain information. Lack of knowledge about their fathers was often intensified the experience of loss of their father.

It is recommended that a daughter who experiences an absent father is encouraged to tell her story. This research found that daughter who experienced an absent father had usually not previously spoken about their experience. The participants often expressed that speaking about their experiences brought a sense of relief. Exploration of their experiences may provide an opportunity to gain insight and understanding of themselves, especially if listened to by an empathetic person.

It is recommended that daughters who grow up with an absent father, receive support in appropriate ways according to each development stage.

It is recommended that if age appropriate, daughters who experience an absent father consider joining support groups with peers who share the experience of father absence. Daughters who experience an absent father may not have given their experience much thought because they have no other reference system to compare it with. A support group would provide an opportunity to: assist those attending to function better, be supported emotionally, fully recognise what has happened, share experiences, form new bonds, reduce possible isolation/alienation, learn more about self, explore constructive communicating, and learn from each other.

It is recommended that daughters who experience an absent father attend therapy sessions with a male therapist. Baradon (2019) mentions that a therapeutic relationship with a male therapist presents the transformational potential for her to experience a male who is available to her and who offers containment of her destructiveness without abandonment.

### **5.3.2 Fathers**

It is recommended that fathers have regular and sustained contact with their daughters, taking into consideration the protection and wellbeing of the child and the child's "best interests" as set out in South Africa's Children's Act.

The following recommended strategies and envisaged actions, listed as top priority for promotion of healthy families according to The White Paper on Families (2013) should be put into affect:

"Encourage fathers' involvement in their children's upbringing.

- Elaborate or revise current laws and social policies that restrict fathers from being involved in their children's lives and replace them with those that create an environment where fathers have the opportunity to care for, engage with, and support their children.

- Consider the introduction of paternity leave.

- Use the formal education system and informal information sources such as the media to construct and maintain social norms and positive attitudes regarding the roles of fathers in the lives of children.

- Ensure more effective enforcement of maintenance payments by absent fathers

- Ensure that fathers are treated equally by the courts in custody decisions (which the law provides for but which anecdotal evidence suggest does not always happen)

- To the extent that unemployment is likely to be playing a major role in the absence of fathers from families—either because they have migrated to other areas in search of jobs, or because a lack of income puts men off taking responsibility for the children they father—intensify the creation of employment opportunities."

It is recommended that fathers become informed about the impact of their absence on their daughters.

It is recommended that fathers become informed about their rights and responsibilities as a parent according to The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 which is based on framework of "The Best Interests of the Child Standard" taking into consideration the care, protection and wellbeing of children.

It is recommended that father's consider attending therapy sessions if they feel they experience resistance to their role of being a father.

It is recommended that fathers consider joining a support group with their peers who are also fathers. A support group may assist group members to function better as fathers, be supported emotionally, fully recognise what has happened, share experiences, form new bonds, reduce possible isolation/alienation, learn more about self, explore constructive communicating, and learn from each other.

It is recommended that if a father takes a new partner, that consideration is given to the daughter who may feel excluded when there is a transition into a blended family. She will require extra attention to assist her with the process. Faber (2004) suggests that each spouse must renegotiate their new relationships with children. Family therapy should be considered when required.

### **5.3.3 Mothers and caregivers**

It is recommended that neither parent denies the other parental rights or estranges their child from the other parent according to "The Best Interests of the Child Standard" in The South Africa's Children's Act.

It is recommended that mothers and caregivers become informed about the impact father absence on their daughters.

It is recommended that mothers or caregivers of daughters who experience an absent father be provided with educational support aligned with the needs of a daughter who experience an absent father, including the recommendations made under section 5.3.1 about the daughter, to better equip the caregiver to understand and parent their daughters.

It is recommended that mothers and caregivers become informed about their rights and responsibilities as a parent according to The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 which is based on framework of 'The Best Interests of the Child Standard' taking into consideration the care, protection and wellbeing of children.

It is recommended that mothers or caregivers consider attending therapy sessions if they feel they experience challenges to their role of parenting.

It is recommended that mothers or caregivers consider joining a support group with their peers who are also caregivers. A support group may assist group members to function better as caregivers, be supported emotionally, fully recognise what has happened, share experiences, form new bonds, reduce possible isolation/alienation, learn more about self, explore constructive communicating, and learn from each other.

It is recommended that if a mother or caregiver takes a new partner, that consideration is given to the daughter who may feel excluded when there is a transition into a blended family. She will require attention to assist her with the process. Faber (2004) suggests that each spouse must renegotiate their new relationships with children.

#### **5.3.4 Social workers and community**

It is recommended that social workers and the community at large become informed about the impact of the absence of a father on their daughters so that they may be better positioned to be of assistance to families where the father is absent. Holborn and Eddy (2011) mentioned that children in single-parent households are frequently subjected to fewer resources with negative consequences.

It is recommended that social workers take into consideration that an absent father may afford daughters less protection which may result in harm to the daughter. Possible harm includes neglect due to an over burdened single parent and risk of sexual abuse.

It is recommended that the impact of a dysfunctional single parent be taken into consideration and the appropriate support be provided to both the parent and children.

It is recommended that in a therapeutic context with a daughter who experiences an absent father, the social worker should become familiar with the early attachment experiences of the daughter, including whether she was raised with a supportive caregiver. The social worker should be aware that a daughter who experiences an absent father, who did not have a supportive caregiver experience, may be strongly self-reliant and appear confident, while internally feeling fragile, insecure with abandonment and relational issues.

It is recommended that support groups be provided as mentioned in the sections above for all members of the family.

### **5.3.5 Future research**

Because there is limited information on the subject of daughters who have been brought up without fathers, the researcher recommends that further research be done on the subject. This research was conducted on a small sample size and focused on daughters who experienced an absent father, in a specific region, the city of Cape Town in the Western Cape. Given that daughters who experience an absent father constitute a large portion of the population of children who experience an absent father, and the increasing rate of children who experience an absent father in South Africa, more extensive research is warranted. The researcher recommends that future research also take into consideration the changing nature of society and what it means to be a father in a context where there is less gender disparity

### **5.4 Conclusion**

It is clear according to the findings in this research that absent fathers result in multiple and far reaching negative outcomes for their daughters. These outcomes are also likely to have an intergenerational impact. This finding is in keeping with The White Paper on Families that highlights absent fathers as a crucial issue affecting families in South

Africa. "The Best Interests of the Child Standard" in The South Africa's Children's Act provides guidelines on care for children and the rights and responsibilities of parents. The aim of this research was to gain an understanding of how experience of an absent father influences the identity of women which may provide useful information to service delivery organisations to assist clinical interventions. The findings of this research project may be helpful in creating awareness of the significance of the role of fathers in their daughters lives and contribute to knowledge required for effective family functioning in a healthy society. The findings of this research may contribute to existing information on the subject and be expanded by further research. The goal of this study has been met within the limitations of a minor dissertation, the methodology, and the limitations of the researcher.

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**APPENDICES****Appendix A: Letter to organisation****REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE WITH ACCESSING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Date: 1 April 2019

**Dear Madam /Sir**

My name is Anna Varney-Wong, and I am a social worker completing a Masters in Social Sciences, specializing in Clinical Social Work at UCT. As part of my degree, I am conducting a research study on absent fathers and its effects on the lives of women. The study is entitled "An exploratory study of the influence of an absent father on the identity formation of women".

The main objectives of the study are:

- to explore how the experience of an absent father influences the identity formation of women.
- to understand the psychological effect of having an absent father on the identity formation of women.
- to examine how the experience of an absent father influences the social identity formation of women.
- to gain insight into the significance on intimate relationships of an absent father in the identity formation of women.
- to study the influence on resiliency of the absent father experience on the identity formation of women.

The research requires conducting interviews with twenty adult women age eighteen and above, from different backgrounds who grew up without a father and reside in the geographical area of Cape Town.

I would like to request your assistance in identifying potential participants whom I can approach to participate. Participation in the research is voluntary and Interview sessions will last an estimated hour per interviewee. Interviews will be recorded but the process will be confidential: names and any personal information will not be shared, therefore participants will not be identifiable. An informed consent form will be provided prior to participation which will request consent from the participant and explain the voluntary nature of participation, clarifying that the participant may withdraw from the project at any time if she wishes to do so. The form will also clarify confidentiality, anonymity and the management of information.

The proposed research has been accepted and verified by the Social Development ethics review committee and will be supervised by Dr Somaya Abdullah.

Please feel free to contact my academic supervisor Dr Somaya Abdullah should you require any additional information. Her contact details are: somaya.abdullah@uct.ac.za, 021 650 4219.

Warm regards

**Anna Varney-Wong**

Tel: 072 387 3900

Email: VRNANN004@myuct.ac.za

## **Appendix B: Letter to the Participants**

### **REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION & CONSENT FORM**

**Date:**

**Name of Researcher:** Anna Varney-Wong

**Student number:** VRNANN004

This research forms part of the qualification for a Masters in Social Sciences, specializing in Clinical Social Work degree in the Department of Social Development at the University of Cape Town.

**Title of Study:**

"An exploratory study of the influence of an absent father on the identity formation of women".

**Objectives of the Study:**

- to explore how the experience of an absent father influences the identity formation of women.
- to understand the psychological effect of having an absent father on the identity formation of women.
- to examine how the experience of an absent father influences the social identity formation of women.
- to gain insight into the significance on intimate relationships of an absent father in the identity formation of women.
- to study the influence on resiliency of the absent father experience on the identity formation of women.

Please read the following and sign if you agree to participate in this study.

**Research Procedures:** I understand that I will be participating in an interview process to explore of how the experience of an absent father impacts the identity formation of women. The interview will last approximately one hour and will be recorded with your permission using a digital recorder or by taking notes. The recording will be transcribed and the notes, the recorded information and the transcripts will be kept in a secure place. Once the research has been completed, this material will be only be used for academic purposes and the transcripts will be destroyed.

**Risks and Harm:** There are no foreseen risks or harm in participating in this research. However, in the event of any emotional distress by a participant, the researcher will make a referral for appropriate assistance.

**Benefits/Incentives:** I understand that this research will not benefit me directly and that I will not be paid for agreeing to do this interview. However, through my participation, the information gathered will provide important information on the effects of father absence on the identity formation of women.

**Participant's Rights:** I understand that I am free to withdraw from participating in this study at any time, without giving any reason and that there are no consequences should I decide not to participate at any stage.

**Confidentiality:** I understand that the interview process will be kept strictly confidential and that information will be available to the researcher and the supervisor. Extracts from the interviews will be included in the final research report without anyone being able to link my quotes to my identity. The final report will be examined by an external examiner and the findings will be made available to participating agencies. Under no circumstances will my name be revealed in the report or any other publications related to this research.

I understand that if at any time I would like any additional information about this research, I can contact my research supervisor, Dr.Somaya Abdullah telephonically at 021 650-4219 or by email at [somaya.abdullah@uct.ac.za](mailto:somaya.abdullah@uct.ac.za)

**I confirm that I have read this consent form or researcher has read it to me and that the study has been explained to me. I voluntarily participate in this study**

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**Signature of Participant**

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Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

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**Signature of Researcher**

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Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

## Appendix C: Interview Schedule

### Research questions

1. What psychological effects does the experience of an absent father have on the identity formation of women?
2. How does an absent father experience influence the social identity formation of women?
3. How does an absent father experience influence the intimate relationships of women?
4. What influence on resiliency does an absent father experience have on the identity formation of women?

### Introduction and profile building

- What is your age group?

18- 30	
31-50	
50-65	
Over 65	

- With which population group do you associate?

Black	
White	

Coloured	
other	

- What is your marital status?

Single	
Married	
Separated	
Divorced	
Widowed	

- Where do you live?

Cape Town	
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- What were the main reasons for you growing up without a father? (Prompt/probe rather than list)

divorce or separation	
Emotional absence	
substance use disorder	
death	
desertion	

abuse	
never met	
incarceration	
other	

## 1. What psychological effects has an absent father had on your sense of identity?

'Psychological' is about one's state of mind and emotions.

'Identity' refers to forming ones own identity and is one's sense of who one is.

### 1.1 How has the experience affected your self-esteem?

'Self-esteem' is about confidence in one's own worth or abilities.

### 1.2 How has the experience affected your sense of self-worth?

Self-worth is about dignity, pride, self-respect or self-regard.

### 1.3 How has the experience affected your self-confidence?

Self-confidence is feeling of trust in one's abilities, qualities, and judgement; self-reliance and self-assurance.

### 1.5 How has the experience affected your emotional well-being?

'Emotions' are about feelings, moods, mental state

### 1.5 How has the experience affected your sense of self?

Self is about 'who you are'.

## **2. How has an absent father influenced your social identity?**

'Social' is about community, society and one's connection with it.

2.1 How has the experience affected your interaction with peers in your life?

'Peers' are associates or people who are one's equals, such as colleagues.

2.2 How has the experience affected the role of friendships?

2.3 Has the experience played a role in social isolation?

'Isolation' is to do with aloneness.

2.4 Has the experience played a role in social inclusion?

'Inclusion' is about participation, such as in activities with others.

2.5 Has the experience played a role in social exclusion?

'Exclusion' is about separation or being excluded, left out or kept out.

## **3. How has an absent father influenced your intimate relationships?**

'Intimate' is about being close and refers to your relationship with your partner or spouse in this case.

3.1 How has the experience affected your knowledge of your partner/spouse?

How well do you feel you are able to know him; be close to him?

3.2 How has the experience affected your caring for the person in your relationship?

Care is about interest, love and emotional bond.

3.3 How has the experience affected your sense of interdependence in your

relationship

'Interdependence' is about depending on each other.

3.4 How has the experience affected your sense of mutuality in your relationship?

'Mutuality' is about sharing a common understanding of obligations to each other. Sharing of a feeling, action, relationship. Cooperation, exchange, reciprocating. Emotional connection and interaction.

3.5 How has the experience affected your sense of trust in your relationship?

3.6 How has the experience affected your sense of commitment in your relationship?

'Commitment' is about being committed or dedicated to someone.

#### **4. What influence has an absent father had on your resiliency?**

'Resilience' is the ability to deal with crisis and challenges. It is about coping, problem solving, adapting and even transformation and growth. Resilience refers to the one's ability to overcome adversity and is about hardiness, ability to draw on supportive networks and positive emotions in the face of threatening situations and having insight.

4.1 How has the experience affected your sense of resiliency?

Have you been able to cope?

4.2 How has the experience affected your capacity to overcome adversity

What did you do to overcome or cope? What were your greatest resources?

4.3 How has the experience affected your sense of resiliency in terms of drawing

from people in your life?

Who was helpful? How were they helpful?

4.4 How has the experience affected your sense of resiliency in terms of drawing from the environment?

What were useful resources?

4.5 What are your coping mechanisms

How has you deal with the challenges you experienced in growing up without a father?

What did you actually do/activities, to cope? How have you moved from that space and it's impact on you?