

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

THE PARENTAL ROLE IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN.

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award of the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore parenting as experienced by mothers of preschool age children. The researcher aimed to gain an understanding of these mothers' perception of their parental role, their major challenges experienced in fulfilling this role, their availability and use of support systems and parenting resources and their needs for further support. The study was undertaken at St Joseph's Marist College with a further aim of using the results to highlight key areas for possible support for parents at the pre-school.

This study was conducted as an exploratory qualitative study. The researcher used non-probability, purposive sampling and mothers who currently have a preschool child and where both parents are living in the home were included. Eighteen participants were interviewed by means of a face-to-face interview using an interview schedule as a guideline. The data were transcribed and analysed using Tesch's (1990, cited in de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 1998) method of analysis.

The participants described their parental role primarily as that of caregiver, nurturer and teacher / guide. The findings further revealed that participants' major challenges to role fulfilment could be grouped according to three areas, namely, factors within the child; factors within the parent and the broader social context. It was highlighted that participants rely heavily on emotional and instrumental support from their partners and extended family. It was also identified that the participants readily make use of other parents and the internet as a source of parenting resources. It became evident that the child's teacher is an underutilised resource for informational support for parents. Participants highlighted the key areas which they would like resources to focus on. It was also identified that parents need affirmation and reassurance in their role as parents. Recommendations are made to St Joseph's Marist College at the level of management, the pre-school staff and the school social worker.

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Chapter One

Problem Formulation

1.1 Introduction

This study sought to gain a better understanding of aspects of parenting experienced by mothers relating to preschool children. The specific aspects of parenting which the study sought to explore relate to: perceptions of parental role, major challenges experienced by parents of children falling within this age group and support systems and resources available to these parents.

The study was undertaken with mothers of children who attend St Joseph's Marist College Pre-School. The participants were mothers but the study specifically explored parenting as opposed to mothering because the role of parent can be seen to encompass broader aspects than mothering. The sample was limited to mothers as the researcher's interest related particularly to gaining an understanding of parenting the preschool age child and mothers are generally the primary nurturers. The study aims to make use of the information gathered to highlight key areas for possible support of parents at the pre-school.

The first chapter of the dissertation introduces the background to the problem and the significance of the study. It will also highlight the research topic, the main research questions and objectives. Key concepts used in the study will be clarified, the ethical considerations of the study will be highlighted and the researcher's reflexivity will be discussed. Concluding remarks will complete the chapter.

1.2 Background to the problem

The Greeks were the first to think systematically about parenting and child development, and they laid the theoretical foundations for childrearing and education that dominated the Mediterranean world from 600 BCE to 400 BCE. Greek and Roman descriptions of childhood and prescriptions for parenting showed an emphasis on the effects of nurture and the need for parents to invest the time, energy and resources appropriate for the particular stage of the child's development (French, 1995).

Parenting can be seen as the most challenging and complex of all the tasks of adulthood and is a task which is vitally important to the life of the human community (Zigler in Bornstein, 1995). Sigmund Freud is quoted as having referred to parenting as one of the three “impossible professions” (Bornstein in Kerr, Stattin and Engels, 2008). Bornstein goes on to highlight that despite the fact that many people become parents and that everyone who ever lived has had parents, parenting remains a mystifying subject about which there are many varying opinions (in Kerr, Stattin and Engels, 2008).

Early research around parenting focused on child rearing as something that adults did to children and child development studies saw children as independent entities and there was little consideration of the interactive nature of the relationship (Smith, 2011). Lamb and Baumrind carried out research in the late 1970's (Lamb & Baumrind, 1978) where they identified a number of different parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative and permissive) and found that the effectiveness of parenting depended on these parenting styles. Maccoby and Martin (1983, cited in Papalia, Olds, Feldman & Yak, 2001) added a fourth parenting style – neglectful or uninvolved – to describe parents who focus on their own needs rather than those of the child, often as a result of stress or depression. Baumrind (in Lamb & Baumrind, 1978) pointed out that concepts of parenting style were seen as independent of child behaviour, also resulting in little emphasis on interaction.

Rutter (1979) was the first to describe parenting as a process of reciprocal interactions and see parenting as influenced by and expressed through a series of dyadic relationships. In a study on the history of parenting, Smith (2011) points out that research on parenting in the 1980's emphasised that parenting is multiply determined and multi-level, with historical and current influences. These include individual (parental personality or child characteristics), historical (parental developmental history), social (marital satisfaction and social network support), as well as circumstantial (poverty, ignorance about child development) factors (Smith, 2011). By the end of the 1980's, Belsky and Vondra (1989) proposed that parenting was a “buffered system” where interactions between sources of stress (such as having a difficult child) were buffered by parenting supports (such as social support

and resources). Abusive or neglectful parenting was seen as the outcome of accumulated risk factors in conjunction with a lack of support (Smith, 2011).

As early as 1966, Hobbs (1966, cited in Barnett, Bell & Carey, 1999:1108) stated that “the child is an inseparable part of a small social system of an ecological unit made up of the child, his family, his school, his neighbourhood, and community.” Bronfenbrenner (1973, cited in Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008:265) shows in his ecological development model that many factors influence the development of children – culture and social class, media and schools, family and peers – but parenthood is the ‘final common pathway’ to childhood oversight and care giving, development and stature, adjustment and success.

Parents play a critical role in children’s development and represent essential individuals to work with in meeting infants’ and young children’s needs (Mowder, Rubinson & Yasik, 2009). Parents create the environment for young children to grow and develop and they influence virtually all aspects of their development.

Rustin (in Lanyado & Horne, 2000) draws our attention to the fact that the twenty-first century parent lives in a world which is very different to that of fifty years ago. The author (2000:207) points out that “we are faced with huge social and technological change, but the human capacity for responding to change is a well-recognised area of psychological vulnerability” and there is a “misattunement between the rate of technical change and the pace at which humans can adapt their forms of life to the new conditions”. This may result in a destabilising effect on traditional identities and on a socially accepted notion of what it is to be a parent. This background is important in understanding what parents are troubled by and in helping professionals to be aware of what is helpful for parents in their difficulties with their children (Rustin in Lanyado & Horne, 2000).

The preschool period is characterised by dramatic changes in physical, cognitive and emotional development for the child which results in it being a time of change, stress and adjustment for the parents (Douglas, 1989). Parents frequently express concern about their child’s behaviour during the preschool period and they need reassurance and guidance about normal behavioural development. Some parents may find considerable difficulty in managing the demands and behaviour of their young child.

This may be due to various reasons: lack of confidence, lack of knowledge about parenting skills, social isolation, marital problems, parents may have experienced poor and inadequate parenting themselves in childhood and thus find it difficult to show affection or set appropriate limits for their children (Douglas, 1989).

If parents experience considerable stress in negotiating this period they may require psychological support in developing strategies for coping with their child's behaviour. This is very important as there is the risk that repeated problems in coping with developmental transitions may have an additive effect in undermining a parent's confidence or ability to manage their child's behaviour appropriately (Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008).

The literature used in this section may appear to be dated but these texts are seminal studies and descriptions around parenting.

1.3 Rationale

It is evident for the researcher that the role of the parent is crucial with regard to the initial and ongoing development of the child. It is also evident that parenting is a challenging job as it is a complex responsibility to shape the life of an individual. Parenting does not take place within a vacuum but within the context of a specific family, a specific community and the larger socio-political world and this has an impact on the quality of parenting. It has also been highlighted that the modern parent lives in an ever-changing society which places additional stress on their role as parents and these are the contexts in which parents must nurture, educate and try to understand their children and themselves as parents. This highlights the potential value of exploring parenting as well as the particular context in which parenting is taking place.

Sorenson (2005) speaks of the importance of realising that parents have a need to be understood. Parents need understanding, support, and skills to help them to reach their goals as parents. Sorenson (2005) adds that parenting can bring many unexpected challenges which may result in parents feeling that they are failing in their role and feeling frustrated by their inability to cope. They may feel deskilled and undervalued and they thus need to be validated in their role. It is helpful for

professionals to become aware of what would be helpful for parents in dealing with difficulties with their children. Parents need to be “given tools to understand their children’s behaviour and to release their own capacities for empathy, curiosity and independent thought” (Sorensen, 2005:160). It is likely that this will reduce stress in the parenting role and lead to increased satisfaction in their role as a parent. This highlights the rationale of using the study to explore the particular needs of parents within their role as parent and helping parents to feel better understood as a result of this.

Garbarino (1982:3) points out that families present both “risks and opportunities” for children. This highlights the importance of the assessment of family realities. Taking an Ecological Systems Approach it is evident that early intervention may need to be directed towards improving the realities of family circumstances or improving their ability to cope with certain realities. This relates to the rationale for this study in that it is important to identify the realities which parents are faced with in their role as parents.

Parenting does not necessarily ‘come naturally’ and there is no such thing as compulsory parenting education classes. Parents are not necessarily provided with adequate guidance, support or preparation for their role as parent. Being a parent presents people with a developmental opportunity for significant personal growth (Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008). Professionals can encourage parents to acknowledge their need to learn, think about and prepare for their role as parents. This highlights the potential significance of the study in identifying specific areas for input for parents of this age-group.

The preschool age child is generally beginning their journey of formal schooling. It is a stage of significant development and growth in all areas including physical, social, emotional, cognitive and character. Research indicates that supportive parenting is fundamental for facilitating positive developmental outcomes in young children (Jennings & Connors, 1989, cited in Rafferty & Griffin, 2010). The rationale for this study can also be seen in terms of targeting children at their first point of entry into the school which is the pre-school. Positive intervention at this stage can be a

building block for future positive development of the child which will also be evident in their later schooling years.

As a result of the extensive research around effective parenting, there are many resources available to guide the modern-day parent. At the same time, the researcher is of the opinion that there is evidence of many parents who seem 'ignorant' as regards certain key elements of effective parenting and there are many children who struggle as a result of this. A key rationale of this study relates to determining parents' use of parenting resources and their particular needs for resources so as to inform intervention.

The researcher thus believed that this study would be beneficial by providing a broader understanding of the experience of mothers as parents of preschool age children. This understanding would include developing an understanding of their perceived needs for support and of the major challenges they face. It was also hoped to develop an understanding of parents' current use of available parenting resources and needs for further resources.

The information gained will allow the researcher and pre-school staff at St Joseph's Marist College (SJMC) to provide support services to this specific group of parents. Barnett et al., (1999) in their exploration of relevant pre-school interventions, draw attention to the fact that interventions within pre-school settings should be aimed at meeting parental needs. The outcomes of this research will provide information as to specific parental needs for support and information. Parent education programmes will be designed on the basis of this information. It will also provide pre-school staff with guidelines for giving supportive advice to the parents on a daily basis. It is very important that pre-school staff and parents develop a good working relationship as pre-schools are typically the first settings where social and educational developmental difficulties of children are usually noticed (Barnett et al., 1999). It is extremely important to address these difficulties when they are noticed so as to prevent exacerbation of the difficulties as the child becomes older.

1.4 Research site

St Joseph's Marist College (SJMC) is a multicultural, fully co-educational school that extends from Playschool to Matric. SJMC believes in educating the whole person and recognises that humans have spiritual, physical, intellectual and emotional needs which are all taken into account in the curriculum followed by the school. The school runs both a playschool (2 – 4 years) and a pre-primary (3 – 6 years). Children generally move from the pre-primary to the Junior School and many children remain at the school until Matric. SJMC is a Catholic School and is thus guided by the educational mission and doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church. It is also specifically a Marist school and is guided by a specific Marist ethos. However, the school respects religious diversity and the children attending reflect a microcosm of South African society. There is diversity of race, religion, culture, language and nationality (<http://www.maristsj.co.za>).

The researcher is employed at the school and has observed a number of current realities at the school. Grade 1 teachers struggle with a large number of children who are not socially or emotionally mature enough to cope adequately. Lack of adequate parental involvement in education related matters is also an area of concern. Teachers are also aware of the effects displayed by children of parenting 'gaps' such as: lack of adequate boundaries and appropriate limit setting, exposure to age inappropriate activities, lack of adequate nurturing and parental attention for children, lack of adequate structure and routine for children, lack of knowledge of the needs of children, and lack of skills in coping with difficult behaviour. This study will assist the school in planning for adequate support and educational services to parents of preschool age children; encourage collaborative relationships between parents and pre-school staff and assist in providing early intervention services for this age group.

The researcher approached the Headmaster of SJMC with a proposal for the research in order to gain permission for conducting the research at the school. The researcher also discussed the research with the pre-school staff in order to gain their support.

1.5 Research Topic

“An exploration of the parental role as perceived and experienced by mothers of preschool age children who attend St Joseph's Marist College Pre-school.”

1.6 Research Questions

- How would mothers describe their perceived parental role as related to their preschool age child?
- What are their current challenges in fulfilling this role as they perceive it to be?
- What are their needs for support as parents of this age group?
- What sources of parenting resources do they make use of and what is needed?

1.7 Research objectives

- To determine how mothers of preschool age children perceive their parental role in respect of their child.
- To explore their major challenges to parental role fulfilment.
- To determine parents' availability of and perceived needs for parenting support as parents of preschool age children.
- To determine what sources of parenting resources are currently used and what resources are needed.

1.8 Concept Clarification

Preschool age child – the preschool age child generally refers to the child between the ages of 3 and 6. Erik Erikson (1959) referred to this age as the third crisis in psychosocial development, named, initiative vs. guilt. This stage of development will be dealt with comprehensively in the literature review.

Parental – pertaining to or characteristic of a parent (New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary, 2004).

Mother – a mother is a female parent (New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary, 2004).

Role – according to Barker (2003) a role is a pattern of behaviour which is culturally determined and is related to a specific status. Role is a prescription of behaviour

which is defined by the self but also by the social and cultural context in which the person exists (Heinicke in Bornstein, 1995).

Perception – Barker (2003) defines this as the psychic impression made by the five senses and the way these impressions are understood cognitively and emotionally based on an individual's life experiences.

Exploration – exploration is the noun of 'explore' which means to examine or investigate (New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary, 2004).

Experienced – to observe or share in (an event etc.) personally, to be affected by (a feeling) (New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary, 2004).

Parenting - O'Connor (in Smith 2011:158) states that "there is no definitive or accepted definition of what parenting is and no accepted single theory of parenting". However, most definitions will include the following: an element of child rearing behaviour, the provision of a stimulating home environment, affective elements of the parent-child relationship, negative aspects, and parental beliefs.

The ethical considerations will now be discussed.

1.9 Ethical considerations

Ethics refers to the moral principles which offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards participants and the research process (Strydom in de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2011).

The following ethical considerations as outlined by Strydom (in de Vos et al., 2011) were incorporated into the research:

1.9.1 Avoidance of harm to participants:

Participants can be harmed during research through being asked questions which may raise physical discomfort in them (Strydom in de Vos et al., 2011). The researcher needs to avoid direct harm to the reputations or feelings of participants (Engel & Schutt, 2009). The researcher informed participants beforehand about the potential impact of the process. The researcher was sensitive throughout the process, paying careful attention to conveying a non-judgemental attitude and a

sense of empathy. Participants were informed that they were not obliged to answer questions they did not wish to answer and the researcher also emphasised confidentiality. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study should they wish to.

1.9.2 Informed consent:

Informed consent from participants' means that all possible or adequate information about the research, the procedures to be followed during the research, and the possible advantages and disadvantages and risks to which participants may be exposed are highlighted (Strydom in de Vos et al., 2011). The researcher comprehensively informed participants of the following: the purpose of the study; the interview procedures; advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which participants may be exposed; and the credibility of the researcher before asking them to make an informed decision about their involvement in the research.

1.9.3 Deception of subjects:

Deception involves withholding information, offering incorrect information or intentionally misleading subject (Strydom in de Vos et al., 2011). The researcher did not deliberately misrepresent facts or withhold information.

1.9.4 Violation of privacy and confidentiality:

Responses from the participants need to be handled with confidentiality to ensure that their right to privacy is respected (Strydom in de Vos et al., 2011). The researcher respected the participants' right to self-determination and privacy. Confidentiality was explained and emphasised to participants. Permission was obtained for the use of a voice recorder. Privacy was protected through anonymity and all manuscripts were treated with confidentiality. Interviews were conducted in a private venue and the researcher gained the permission of the participants for recommendations to be made to SJMC related to the outcome of the research.

1.9.5 Actions and competence of researcher:

Researchers are ethically obliged to ensure that they are competent and adequately skilled to undertake the proposed investigation (Strydom in de Vos et al., 2011). The

researcher made use of her interviewing and counselling skills to ensure a sensitive, empathic and non-judgemental approach. The researcher also received regular supervision from her University supervisor.

1.9.6 Debriefing of participants:

Debriefing of participants is important as it assists them to work through their experience of the research and also minimise possible harm during the interview session (Strydom in de Vos et al., 2011). Participants were given an opportunity at the end of the interview to ask questions or highlight areas that they needed clarification on and also to comment on their experience of the interview. This provided them with an opportunity to debrief and have closure in their participation in the research.

1.9.7 Reporting of findings:

The researcher has an obligation to report the findings scientifically without manipulating the data (Strydom in de Vos et al., 2011). The researcher provided feedback from the research to the participants and to the school. The feedback was presented in an accurate, objective and understandable manner.

1.10 Reflexivity:

Reflexivity refers to “the ability to formulate an integrated understanding of one’s own cognitive world, especially understanding one’s influence or role in a set of human relations” (de Vos in de Vos et al., 2011:363). The process of reflexivity involved the researcher reflecting on the following: exploring any preconceived assumptions regarding the research topic; querying possible stereotypes or prejudices held about participants; reflecting on her own life experience in shaping her understanding; and reflecting on the learning process and findings as they evolved through the research process (Carey, 2009).

The researcher is a parent herself and holds her own particular views regarding parenting. The researcher also has a background of her own experiences of having been parented and of being a parent (both positive and negative). It was important to be aware of the possible impact of this on her non-verbal communication with

participants as well as in terms of analysis of the data. The researcher was able to deal with this by maintaining an openness and receptiveness to the information being shared. There was information shared by participants which the researcher could identify with on a personal level and it was thus important for the researcher to reflect on this when it happened and separate her own experiences from those of the participants.

The researcher is employed at the school where the sample was drawn from, although the researcher does not carry out much direct work with this age group. The researcher thus needed to clarify in her own mind as well as that of the participants the difference between her role as researcher and her role as Social Worker at the school. It was challenging at times for the researcher to remain in the role of researcher as opposed to engaging with participants around various issues which emerged. The researcher dealt with this by clarifying the difference in role at the beginning of the interview.

The researcher needed to seek to create an atmosphere of 'coming alongside' the participants to learn from them as opposed to being seen as having 'expert' knowledge or skills. The researcher came to realise that this was easier to achieve when the interviews were held in neutral venues and more difficult when the interviews were held in the researcher's work office. The researcher dealt with this by emphasising her role in learning from the participants.

The researcher was aware that she did hold some preconceived ideas as a result of her work with the children at the school. Many of the children who the researcher works with at the school live in family situations where there are concerns about effective parenting. The researcher came to realise the need to let go of certain assumptions that she had about the type of responses which she would receive. The researcher had presumed that her findings would be more indicative of the observed gaps in parenting. It became evident that the majority of participants who made themselves available for the study were parents who pay particular attention to their parenting.

The researcher valued the openness and willingness with which participants approached the process. The researcher found the participants responses insightful

and honest and was left with a sense of admiration for each participant's dedication to their role as parent.

1.11 Outline of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of five chapters. A brief introduction to each chapter will follow.

Chapter One – Problem formulation

The first chapter discusses the background to the problem; the rationale for the study; the research site; the research topic, questions and objectives; concept clarification; ethical considerations; reflexivity and an outline of the dissertation.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

Chapter Two presents a review of literature related to the theories underpinning the study and to relevant aspects of parenting.

Chapter Three – Methodology

Chapter Three discusses the methodology used in carrying out the study.

Chapter Four – Discussion of Findings

Chapter Four presents the discussion of the findings of the study.

Chapter Five – Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter Five discusses the main conclusions and recommendations of the study.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the background of the research problem and its significance. It then highlighted the research topic, main questions and objectives and clarified key concepts used in the study. The ethical considerations of the study and the researcher's reflexivity were also discussed. The next chapter will present the literature review.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The chapter will begin by presenting one of the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study which is Bronfenbrenner's model of the Ecology of Human Development or Ecological Systems Framework (1973, cited in Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004). The second theoretical framework, which is the Parent Development Theory (Sperling, 2003; Mowder, 2005; Sperling & Mowder, 2006) will then be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the developmental stage of the preschool age child. The chapter will then discuss further literature around the parental role as well as the impact of parenting practices on the preschool age child. The review moves on to explore various challenges to parental role fulfilment and the impact of stress on parenting. This will be followed by a discussion of the concept of support systems for parents. A conclusion will complete the chapter.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

2.2.1 Ecology of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner developed a model of the Ecology of Human Development (1973, cited in Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Cornell, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004). It is a systems approach to human development. He argues that human development needs to be understood as it occurs in its real-world setting or ecology. According to the systems view, many factors (environment, experience, genetics and biology as well as their dynamic transaction, influence parenting outcome and it is thus important to understand the role of each (Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008). Bronfenbrenner (in McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004) describes the natural environments of children as including immediate and extended family, neighbourhoods, schools, parents' workplaces, mass media and political systems. These systems interact with one another to influence development in the child. The family is seen as a nested system within larger environmental and community systems (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004).

The ecology of human development is composed of four distinct but interrelated systems:

Microsystem

The microsystem refers to the immediate setting containing the person, which is usually the family. This involves interactions between children, their parents and any siblings. This would also extend to interactions with extended family members. Microsystems also refer to the pre-school and school setting involving child-teacher and child-peer interactions. Microsystems evolve and develop from forces generated both within and without. Microsystems, like individuals, change over time (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995). Individuals influence their microsystems and microsystems influence individuals (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004). The quality of a microsystem depends on its ability to sustain and enhance development and to provide a context that is emotionally validating and developmentally challenging, whereas risk lies in patterns of abuse, neglect, resource deficiency and stress within the microsystems that threaten the child and compromise development (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995). Relationships with people outside the family may be particularly important when parents work outside the home or have limited energy or resources (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992).

The Microsystems in this study are the child's family, the interactions between the child and its parents, interactions between the immediate family and the extended family, and the pre-school setting involving child-teacher, child-peer and teacher-parent interactions.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem refers to the interrelations between the major microsystems in the child's life at any given point in time (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995). The richness of a mesosystem is measured in the number and quality of its connections (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004). Research indicates that the strength of the mesosystem linking the setting in which an intervention is implemented with the settings in which the individual spends the most significant time is crucial to the long-term effectiveness of

the intervention and to the maintenance of its effects (Whittaker, Garbarino & Associates in Garbarino and Kostelny, 1995).

Exosystem

The exosystem relates to specific social structures which influence the immediate setting in which the child is found (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995), for example; children are not part of their parent's workplace interactions but events that affect the parent at work will have an influence on their relationship with their child. These are settings which have a bearing on the development of children but in which those children do not play a direct role (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004). We can look at risk and opportunity in these systems in the following ways. Parents can be treated in ways that impoverish (risk) or enhance (opportunity) their behaviour in the microsystems they share with their children. Examples of this would be elements of the parent's working experience that impoverish or enhance family life – such as long working hours, stress, low income as opposed to adequate income and an understanding employer. Public policy also results in decisions that affect the day-to-day experience of children and their families (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995). The exosystem includes parents' extended family and friends which can offer indirect support to children through the direct support which they offer to parents (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004).

Macrosystem

The macrosystem is composed of cultural values and beliefs and historical events which may impact the other ecological systems (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004). Meso- and exosystems are set within the broad ideological patterns of a particular culture. This refers to people's shared assumptions about how things should be done. Religion can be seen as a macrosystem concept as it involves a definition of the world and a set of roles, rules and programmes that reflect that definition.

SJMC is a Marist Catholic school which is reflected in its ethos. One of the ideals by which SJMC fulfils its mission is the value given to community. The school seeks to do this by developing relationships between parents and the school. They seek to

assure that life outside of the classroom (i.e. Home) is supportive of the educational goals pursued in the classroom.

This theory draws attention to the fact that parent-child relations are influenced by the interpersonal and institutional networks within which parents and children are embedded and this perspective forces one to consider the concept of risk beyond the narrow confines of individual personality and family dynamics (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995). This highlights other avenues of influence that can be worked with beyond the individual organism. It provides a framework to use in thinking about what is happening and what to do when faced with developmental problems and social pathologies that impact children. It highlights that problems do not reside within individuals but are shared by members within important systems (family, school, peer, community) (Barnett, Bell & Carey, 1999).

This theory was useful for this study in the following ways. The study explored the impact of factors at the level of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem on parenting. Developing an understanding of what parents struggle with on these different levels assists in highlighting ideas for intervention and support on the different levels. The preschool setting is a microsystem in the child's life and strong ties between the various microsystems can positively influence the child's development. It is thus important to develop positive links between the child's microsystems and developing a better understanding of the needs of parents may strengthen the connections between the school and the home microsystems. This study helped to draw attention to aspects of exosystems causing stress for parents. It was useful to view this in terms of this theory in order to develop an understanding of the impact of this on the child's development as well as to explore what supports parents have access to within their exosystems.

The review will now discuss the second theoretical framework which is the Parent Development Theory developed by Barbara Mowder (2005).

2.2.2 The Parent Development Theory

The Parent Development Theory (Sperling, 2003; Mowder, 2005; Sperling & Mowder, 2006) is used to gain an understanding of the parenting role. As

background, the concept of parenting cognitions will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the theory.

Parenting cognitions include perceptions about, attitudes toward and knowledge of all aspects of parenting and childhood. What parents believe about themselves and their children as well as what parenting entails will influence their affect, thinking and behaviour in child-rearing (Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008). Parents tend to parent, or behave toward their children, in a way which is consistent with their views about what it is important to do as a parent (Fagot, 1995; Fox & Brice, 2001, cited in Mowder, 2005). Parenting beliefs are founded on individuals themselves (i.e. education, personality, prior experience in a parent-child relationship) and, after becoming a parent, those beliefs adjust to the child (i.e. age, gender, developmental difficulties); the emerging parent-child relationship; family dynamics (i.e. extended family, siblings, spousal relationship), and the social-cultural environment (Mowder, Rubinson & Yasik, 2009).

Bornstein (1995, cited in Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008) explains that by focusing on what parents conceive parenting to be, allows parenting to be accessible, understandable and capable of changing. It provides a point of entry for exploring how parents behave in relation to what they think about parenting. An understanding of how parents' view their parental role is a significant contributor to what and how often parenting tasks are performed (Mowder, 2005).

If parent perceptions indicate little adjustment to children's developmental changes or over-emphasise one aspect of the role over another, this can provide insight for education and intervention. If research determines that specific experiences or education are significant in forming parent role perceptions, then this can also guide educational programmes and interventions (Bornstein, 1995).

The Parent Development Theory (PDT) was developed by Mowder (2005) and has become a useful theoretical perspective for understanding parenting perceptions and behaviours. This theory provides a framework for viewing parents as "individuals who acknowledge, accept and perform the parent role" (Mowder, 2005:46). The parent role is one key to understanding parents as the role is undertaken by individuals who create the role as well as respond to role demands. The theory

states that being a parent involves a socially recognised role which is associated with specific behaviours. It is important to understand the parent role as it is through this role that individuals perceive what parenting involves and consequently parent children (Sperling & Mowder, 2006).

The theory draws attention to the difference between procreation and parenting. Parenting is the performance of a social role rather than a biological parent role requiring that individual parents recognise, assume and perform the parent role (Mowder, 2005). There is generally no consensus on what constitutes parent role responsibility and because role is socially defined and subject to individual interpretation, adequate role performance is not spelled out except where abuse and neglect are concerned (Emery & Billings, 1998, cited in Mowder, 2005). This results in some parenting functions being well-recognised while others are less well-recognised. Another difference between parenting and procreation is the assurance of role performance (Mowder, 2005). When children have been biologically parented there is the assumption that they have been socially parented, but this is not necessarily so.

The theory also addresses parenting from a developmental perspective in that it acknowledges that the parent role shifts and changes over time according to the developmental stage of the child (Sperling & Mowder, 2006).

This theory was relevant to this study as it provided a framework against which to explore parental role perceptions. The researcher sought to explore the role perceptions of the participants and the information gained could be evaluated according to this framework.

The review will now focus on the developmental stage of the preschool age child as this was the age group of the children of the participants in the study.

2.3 Developmental stage of the preschool child

The child aged 3 to 6 years is typically referred to as the preschool age child. This stage of development will be discussed firstly according to Erik Erikson (1959; 1963; 1968; Papalia, Olds, Feldman & Yak, 2001; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004). This will be followed by discussion around the developmental tasks of this stage.

2.3.1 Erikson's Psycho-Social theory

Erik Erikson (1959; 1963) describes eight stages or ego-crises which need to be mastered during the life cycle from infancy to old age. Each stage is named after an ego-skill which the person must gain and is contrasted with a pathological state that emerges if he / she does not succeed (Erikson, 1963). The age comprising the 3 to 7 year old child is stage three and is referred to as initiative vs. guilt. The ego-crisis is one in which the child develops and needs strong initiative to face the expanding social environment. As the child ventures further and makes new relationships, it overcomes a sense of guilt at breaking the warm trusting relationships of earlier years. The young child shows initiative and purposefully seeks valued goals and confidence in its own abilities (Erikson, 1963).

The child's relationship with its parents becomes a central socialising force but it's newly found initiative often leads to confrontation with parents. If the child accepts and internalises parental values, he/she experiences guilt at the thought of losing their love by their unsocialised acts. If parents become aggressive in their response to destructive behaviour, the child develops more guilt, but if they 'contain' the behaviour, initiative can flourish. The support of the parent is thus important in cultivating and fostering initiative and purposefulness and limiting feelings of guilt. Children who learn to regulate these opposing drives develop the 'virtue' of purpose – the courage to envision and pursue goals without being unduly inhibited by guilt or fear of punishment. The successful resolution of this crisis is important in preparing children for formal schooling (Erikson, 1963).

This theory was useful in providing an understanding of the specific needs and challenges of the child related to their stage of development. It also provided a basis for understanding the child's parenting needs at this stage of development.

In order to further understand the needs of the preschool age child, the review will now focus on further specific developmental tasks as well as the role which parents can play in helping children to achieve these tasks.

The review will now present a summary of the developmental tasks of this age group (Nash, Stoch & Harper, 1984; Papalia et al., 2001; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004; Berk, 2007; de Witt, 2009).

2.3.2 Developmental tasks of the preschool child

2.3.2.1 Physical development

Physiological changes enhance the child's powers of endurance and the child becomes much more physically capable. An important developmental task is the acquisition of new physical skills ie. gross motor skills such as running and jumping, and fine motor skills such as doing buttons and drawing pictures. Their physical development is influenced by their physical readiness for certain activities, their motivation, the attention they give to particular activities and the feedback they get on their activities (de Witt, 2009).

2.3.2.2 Cognitive development

The cognitive development of the child requires the child to master ego functions (motor control and self-care; perceptual skills; intellectual skills, speech and play). The developing central nervous system sets the pace for the development of motor and perceptual skills and parental guidance and expectations enhance skills which improve with practice (Nash et al., 1984; Papalia et al., 2001; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004).

2.3.2.3 Social development

Social development which needs to take place relates to the growth of a conscience and learning moral values; and growth in socialisation ability and social maturity. The ideal conditions for acquiring values and developing an appropriate sense of guilt result when there are strong ties of affection between children and parents; consistent discipline and explanations given to the child (Nash et al., 1984; Papalia et al., 2001; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004).

2.3.2.4 Emotional development

The child's emotions are particularly intense during this period. They are also easily aroused to emotional outbursts (de Witt, 2009). They need to learn to experience

and deal with a broad range of emotions. Emotional development also relates to the growth and development of self-concept and the strengthening of sexual identity.

Growth in social and emotional maturity is encouraged through the following aspects of healthy parenting – strong ties of affection, firm moral demands, consistency in sanctions, appropriate discipline instead of physical punishment, and use of reasoning where appropriate (Nash et al., 1984; Papalia et al., 2001; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004).

In their work on evaluating the science of early childhood development, Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), identified developmental tasks that, if mastered, move children along adaptive pathways and, if delayed or problematic, can lead to problems. They identified three specific tasks. The first relates to negotiating the transition from external to self-regulation which includes learning to regulate one's own emotions, behaviours and attention. This relates to the emergence of self-control and independence. The second task involves acquiring the capabilities that relate to the early development of language, reasoning and problem-solving. The third task involves learning to relate well to other children, to form friendships and to resolve conflict constructively (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

The review will now look at the role of the parent in assisting their children to meet these specific developmental tasks which relate to the child's cognitive, emotional and social development.

2.3.3 The role of parents

Parents need to provide the experiences, supports and encouragement that will enable children to take over and self-regulate in one area of functioning after another (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). For the preschool age child this relates to helping them to develop their capacity to manage powerful emotions constructively and keep their attention focused. Specifically, parents need to help their preschooler to learn to understand emotions, to learn to regulate and manage their emotions, and to learn to control their behaviour and regulate mental processes (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). This view is supported by Maccoby (1992) who states that learning to self-regulate affect is one of the major achievements of early childhood.

Early learning for children requires environmental support which is dependent on parents for providing (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Parents have an important role in providing an environment which is playful and nurturing, rich in conversation, strikes a balance between safety and freedom to explore and helps the child to see the world as a receptive and responsive place (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The parental role is to provide a structure for learning that will increase the likelihood of children succeeding in their attempts to learn (Maccoby, 1992).

Parents have an instrumental role to play in fostering their children's social relationships. They can do this by deliberately creating opportunities for peer interaction, monitoring their children's encounters with peers, coaching their children to deal competently with peers, sanctioning unacceptable peer-related behaviour, and teaching their children how to deal with conflict (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). It is evident that events that occur in the context of the parent-child interaction affect children's social behaviour in other settings and in later times (Maccoby, 1992).

A central feature of all these tasks relates to the parents' role in fostering cooperation in their preschool age child. One of the important developmental tasks of the preschool age child relates to their developing assertiveness, their desire to assert their own independent judgement and their desire to feel that they are in control of their lives (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). At the same time, parents' use of prohibitions and sanctions leads to many conflicts of will (Biringen, Emde, Campos & Appelbaum, 1995). It has been found that preschool age children tend to begin to comply more but they also show a greater tendency to refuse before they comply and to negotiate, compromise and display other indicators of self-assertion (Gralinski & Kopp, 1993). The challenge for the parent is to be able to encourage cooperation while also fostering feelings of control and self-determination which lead the child to co-operate because they want to (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

The review will now return to the Parent Development Theory and explore the six dimensions of role functioning as highlighted by Mowder (2005).

2.4 Dimensions of role functioning

Mowder (2005) reports that extensive research over a period of time indicates that parents generally describe the parenting role as including six major characteristics and these are the six dimensions of parental role which are highlighted by the theory.

The first dimension is bonding which refers to the affection, love and regard parents feel and show towards their children. It describes the positive affect of the parent towards the child. The second dimension is discipline which refers to parents setting limits for their children and assuring that the limits are adhered to. It involves the establishing of rules as well as parental responses to the child's behaviour. The third dimension is that of education which includes educating, guiding and teaching children. This would include activities such as advising and being a role-model (Mowder, 2005).

The fourth dimension is general welfare and protection which means that parents assure that their children are protected from harm and that their basic needs, such as adequate clothing, food, safety and shelter are met. The fifth dimension is responsivity which refers to the extent to which parents respond to their children. The parent perceives that the child needs something (other than basic needs) and is responsive to this need. It involves supporting and encouraging one's children. The sixth and final dimension is sensitivity and this refers to the ability of the parent to discern what the child is communicating and match the parent response to the child's need. It involves the accuracy with which parents understand and respond to their children (Mowder, 2005).

Winnicott (1965) described the parent's role as providing a 'holding environment' which requires that he / she has the physical and psychological resources to be alert to the child and respond in a way that satisfies the child's need and facilitates the child's ongoing development. This can be applied to any age as the characteristics of the child form the changing nature of the child's needs. There are two aspects to this role – (1) the monitoring / surveillance function and (2) responsive caregiving.

The researcher's own review of the literature indicates that Mowder's six dimensions of bonding, discipline, education, welfare and protection, responsivity and sensitivity

provide a comprehensive description of parental role. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will compare parental role perceptions with the six dimensions identified by Mowder (2005).

The review will now focus on recent research around the relationship between parental role functioning and child development outcomes.

2.5 Parenting practices and the preschool child

Bijou (1975:829) states that the preschool years are “unquestionably the period during which the foundation is laid for the complex behavioural structures that are built in a child’s lifetime”.

2.5.1 Impact of parenting practices on a child’s cognitive development:

Smith (2011) reports that there is evidence of a moderate but consistent relationship in a wide range of cultures between aspects of parenting such as warmth and responsiveness, stimulation and teaching, and child outcomes such as language development, intellect and educational attainment and behaviour. Heath (1983, cited in Sternberg & Williams, 1995) found that one of the major differences in children’s intellectual development stemmed from the involvement of parents in the intellectual upbringing of their children throughout their lives. The study found that parents can positively influence their children’s intellectual development through an attitude of seeking activities that promote intellectual development and then participating with the child to help them grow. There is a large body of research which indicates significant associations between the quality and quantity of stimulation and support of the home environment and children’s Intelligence Quotient scores, cognitive and language development and school performance (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

One of the developmental challenges of the preschool period is the transition to formal schooling and this can be made especially difficult for children displaying individual risk factors such as overactivity, impulsivity, social skills deficits and delayed cognitive development (Campbell, Shaw & Gilliom, cited in Brotman, Gouley, Chesir-Teran, Dennis, Klein & Shrout, 2005), as well as risk factors such as socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and stressful family environments

(Raver & Knitzer, 2002; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1998, cited in Brotman et al., 2005).

2.5.2 Impact of parenting practices on moral development:

Parental warmth and responsiveness have been found to have important influences on the development of the child's moral regulation (Gardner & Ward, 2000). It is also important for parents themselves to model morally responsible behaviour and respond prosocially to others (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Parents who talk to their children about the day's events also create opportunities to teach moral lessons (Dunn, 1988). It has been highlighted by Kochanska (1995) that a relationship of warmth and mutual responsiveness provides a context in which the parent's values and standards are most likely to be believed, accepted and adopted by the young child.

2.5.3 Impact of parenting practices on a child's social development:

The family is the first environment in which the child is socialised (de Witt, 2009). It is here that children learn who they are, what they can and should expect in life, and how to behave towards others in society. Parents need to actively teach values, norms, roles and life skills (de Witt, 2009).

The development of social competence is one of the key challenges for the preschool age child. A socially competent child is able to develop relationships with both peers and other adults which is needed as they move away from the home environment and towards the school environment. Social competence can be seen as an important protective factor for children which can buffer them from stressors and help to prevent emotional and behaviour problems later in life (Garmezy, 1991).

Bradley and Caldwell (1995, cited in Whiteside-Mansell, Bradley & McKelvey, 2009) report that a review of parenting literature identifies the following parenting practices that generally promote adaptive social functioning in children. These are: parental warmth and acceptance, parental sensitivity and responsiveness, the use of firm but positive discipline, the avoidance of harsh and demeaning punishment and exposure to a rich array of materials and social encounters.

2.5.4 Impact of parenting practices on the child's emotional development:

The parent-child relationship provides the major early context for the child's emotional development with parents acting as teachers, role models and attachment figures (Wilson, Havighurst & Harley, 2012). They report that parents play an important role in helping children to understand, regulate and appropriately express emotions. This is done in the way they model emotional expression, how they react to their child's emotions and how they directly assist their child to learn about emotional responses. Parents can 'learn' these skills and make use of an 'emotion coaching' approach which involves: responding supportively, verbally labelling emotions, using empathy and teaching children to understand and regulate their emotions (Wilson et al., 2012).

The review has focused on the impact of parenting practices on the child's cognitive, social, moral and emotional development. It will now specifically focus on the impact of parenting on a child's behaviour.

2.5.5 Impact of parenting practices on the child's behaviour:

The preschool years are a period of enormous change in children's ability to regulate activity, attention, and impulses according to Campbell (in Keown, 2010). Parental qualities of mutual responsiveness, emotional warmth, and authoritative parenting are thought to be important in the development of the preschool age child's attentional and self-organising skills (Sonuga-Barke, Thompson, Abikoff, Klein, & Brotman, 2006; Winsler, 1998, cited in Keown, 2010).

Keown (2010) undertook a study which examined the links between paternal and maternal parenting factors and preschool hyperactivity in a community sample. The results showed that less observed maternal warmth, fathers' self-reported over reactive and less authoritative parenting practices, and less satisfaction with parenting (fathers and mothers) were all significantly related to child hyperactivity.

It is evident that certain discipline strategies are clearly implicated in the development and maintenance of children's externalising behaviour disorders. This is supported by studies which have repeatedly identified associations between

retrospective reports of inconsistent, harsh, and excessively lax parental discipline and problematic outcomes in children (Arnold, O'Leary, Wolff & Acker, 1993).

This is further illustrated in a study carried out by Denham and colleagues (2000), who found that proactive parenting (instruction, support, and limit setting) for preschoolers is related to low levels of externalising problems over time.

Baumrind, Larzelere and Owens (2010) investigated the effects of preschool patterns of parental authority on adolescent competence and emotional health. The results indicated that adolescents whose parents were classified as directive, democratic or authoritative when these adolescents were preschool children were competent and well-adjusted relative to adolescents whose parents were classified as authoritarian, permissive or disengaged. The findings extend the consistently negative outcomes of authoritarian parenting and positive outcomes of authoritative parenting to 10-year outcomes that control for initial child differences.

Maternal factors such as responsiveness, sensitivity, mood and involvement have been implicated as influencing child compliance / non-compliance. Parents are thought to play a key role in preparing children to learn cooperation skills and teaching them the value of being compliant (Chamberlain & Patterson, 1995). Their review of studies revealed that mothers who foster child compliance have been found to be sensitive and responsive to factors such as the child's developmental level, behavioural tendencies and mood states. There are many factors which will affect how well the parents can accomplish this task. This includes general factors such as the overall physical and mental well-being of the parent and the resources and level of support they have available to them.

The above information has drawn links between parental role functioning and child development outcomes. It is clear from the above that the six dimensions of role functioning as identified by Mowder (2005) all play an important part in achieving healthy child development outcomes. This highlights the value of being aware of what parents perceive their role to be, as their perception of their role will impact their parenting focus. It also points to possible areas for intervention, education or assistance for parents.

The above section focused on the impact of parenting practices on a child's developmental outcomes. The review will now focus on challenges to parental role fulfilment.

2.6 Challenges to parental role fulfilment

2.6.1 The causes of stress in parenting

Parenting cannot be understood in isolation from the larger set of social and economic structures in which it is embedded. There are many factors which influence the networks of families thus limiting their capacity to nurture and support parents and their children (Belsky 1984, cited in Heinicke, 1995). Gutermuth Anthony, Anthony, Glanville, Naiman, Waanders, and Shaffer (2005) define parenting stress as the difficulty that arises from the demands of being a parent. They state that parenting and its concurrent responsibilities lead to high levels of stress in the preschool period.

Parenting stress refers to a parent's perception about whether he or she has sufficient resources to carry out the demands of parenting (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Some common causes of stress in parenting can be seen as – lack of confidence, lack of knowledge of parenting skills, social isolation, marital problems, parents having experienced inadequate parenting themselves, the presence or absence of support systems, low self-esteem, and work demands.

Smith (2011) states that stress may result from factors in the parent – such as depression or anxiety; factors in the child – such as difficult behaviour; or factors in the environment – such as poverty, lack of social support; or a combination of these.

Crnic and Acevedo's (1995) views support this by pointing out that there are a variety of factors which contribute to parents' experience of daily stress: parental factors (prebirth functioning, personality, parental mood and beliefs with regard to child development and childrearing); child factors (temperament, gender, behaviour); family system factors (marital relationship, co-parenting processes, sibling relationships); and social system factors (lack of support, lack of resources).

2.6.2 Belsky's Determinants of Parenting

The above mentioned views are supported by Belsky (1984, cited in Heinicke, 1995) who developed a process model about the determinants of parenting. He stated that parenting is directly influenced by forces from within the individual parent (personality); within the individual child (child characteristics) and from the broader social context in which the relationship is embedded (marital relations, social network, work situation). The model assumes that parents' developmental histories, marital relations, social networks and jobs influence individual personality and general psychological well-being of parents, and therefore, parental and child development.

With regard to the parent's personality, Belsky (1984, cited in Heinicke, 1995) found that the linkages between parents' psychological well-being and their parental functioning could be traced back to the experiences which they had while growing up. He found that supportive developmental experiences gave rise to a mature healthy personality which is then able to provide sensitive parental care which optimises child development. With regard to the child's characteristics, he stressed the 'goodness-of-fit' between parent and child that impacts the relationship. He related the broader social context to the support or stress created by the marital relationship, social networks and work opportunities.

Belsky (1984, cited in Heinicke, 1995) believed that strength in one area can buffer against stresses from the other two sources. He suggested that the psychological well-being of the parent may have the greatest potential for buffering because of its direct effect on parental competence. This has been supported by studies which have shown that poor role performance may be associated with: parent not having experienced adequate parenting themselves; lacking general knowledge around parenting; unmanageable stress or psychological dysfunction. He found that child risk characteristics can be overcome (buffered) where both personal resources and support systems function effectively (Belsky 1984, cited in Heinicke, 1995).

332.6.3 The Developmental stage of the child

The particular developmental period of the child may also be a critical determinant of the everyday stressors associated with parenthood (Crnic & Acevedo, 1995) as well as the developmental stage of the family. It is important to note that, at different points in time, developmentally salient behaviours of children challenge the parenting system (Crnic and Acevedo, 1995). This implies that the natural changes through which children progress at certain periods create conditions that may cause parental stress. This has been highlighted by Douglas (1989) who describes the preschool period as a time characterised by dramatic changes in physical, cognitive and emotional development for the child, which may result in it being a time of change, stress and adjustment for the parents. The author (Douglas, 1989) has highlighted that parents often express concern about their child's behaviour during the preschool period and some parents find it difficult to manage the demands and behaviour of this age group.

2.6.4 'Parenting daily hassles'

'Parenting daily hassles' is a phrase developed by Crnic and Acevedo (1995) which refers to the typical, normal events that characterise some of the everyday transactions that parents have with their children. These events involve either the normal challenging behaviours that children display in their daily activities or the multiplicity of time consuming tasks associated with parents' routine care giving or child-rearing responsibilities. Parents' experience of and subjective evaluation of these events may impact their responsiveness to their children and their needs. This may become a source of stress for parents and may eventually have an adverse influence on the quality of parenting, the parent-child relationship and eventually, child functioning (Crnic & Acevedo, 1995).

The awareness of parental stress is important as it has been associated with adverse outcomes across a variety of functional domains (Crnic & Acevedo, 1995). The review will now explore the impact of stress on parenting.

32.7 The impact of stress on parenting:

It has been highlighted by Crnic and Acevedo (1995) that parenting stressors affect the quality of parenting which children receive and the satisfaction that parents receive from the process of child-rearing and the nature of the parent-child relationship. These effects can, in turn, produce direct and indirect influences on children's behaviour and psychological well-being putting children at risk for problematic development (Crnic & Acevedo, 1995).

Crnic, Gaze and Hoffman (2005) report that diverse approaches to understanding parenting stress have shown multiple associations with negative parenting attitudes and parental well-being, as well as negative parenting behaviour. They report that studies have shown that parents reporting greater levels of parenting stress have been found to be more authoritarian in their parenting styles, more negative in their interactions with their children, and are less involved with their children (Crnic et al., 2005). They further report that parenting stress has been found to be associated with a range of negative outcomes for children including insecure attachment and behaviour problems (Crnic et al., 2005). They conclude from their literature review that stress in the family context which is chronic and present early in development has detrimental effects on the well being of parents, children and parent-child relationships (Crnic et al., 2005). Chronic stress can lead to harsh reactive parenting and interfere with parents' abilities to respond in constructive ways to their children's ever-changing competencies and limitations (Deater-Deckard, 2005).

There are times when life circumstances or events may place demands on parents that exceed their coping resources. As a result of the stress caused by this, developmentally appropriate needs and behaviours of young children can produce a more negative impact with an increased tendency to make use of punitive, arbitrary and inconsistent parenting practices (Gutermuth Anthony et al., 2005).

If parenting stress impacts the parent-child relationship resulting in it becoming more conflictual and problematic, this may provide a context that facilitates the occurrence of more frequent and intense daily stressors in parenting. This sets up a dynamic and circular process which results in less competent, responsive and satisfied

parents and children with more behavioural difficulties (Gutermuth Anthony et al., 2005).

Crnic et al. (2005) report that life stress and parenting daily hassles appear to be stable across the preschool period which suggests that stressed parents tend to remain stressed and cumulative stress may build across developmental periods to create increased risk for parenting and child functioning. Their findings showed that stressed parents at child age 3 were likely to report higher stresses at child age 5 (Crnic, Gaze, & Hoffman, 2005).

Gutermuth Anthony et al. (2005) undertook a study which examined whether parenting stress in the home context is related to children's behaviour in preschool. Their findings were as follows: significant relations were found between children's classroom adjustment and aspects of parenting stress related to interactions with the child as well as personal distress. Parenting stress proved to be a significant correlate of parenting practices. Parenting stress accounted for a significant amount of the variance in social competence, internalising and externalising behaviours, beyond that attributed to parenting behaviours. Gutermuth Anthony et al. (2005) further conclude that a parent's level of stress, independent of economic level or parenting practices, is significantly related to the child's functioning in a preschool setting. Interventions should thus target parents. This should include social support, education and psychological resources to reduce the stress and burden of parents.

The review has explored the relationship between stress and parenting and will now look specifically at the South African situation.

2.8 The South African situation

De Witt (2009) draws attention to five areas of vulnerability of the modern day South African family caused by changes relating to urbanisation and loss of the extended family structure. This has resulted in economic vulnerability of the family unit. Families need to move to larger urban areas so as to find employment. This may also result in the splitting of families where the breadwinner needs to live where work is available. Due to economic pressures, a family's income often needs to be divided amongst extended family members too. It also results in a social vulnerability

where families are removed from the support of the extended family and often live socially isolated lives. If families have to move away from their original homes to find employment this may result in social isolation and lack of support. There may be emotional vulnerability due to a lack of emotional support as a result of isolation. The fact that both parents need to work in families may lead to many increased pressures and may result in, for example, an educational vulnerability as parents don't have the time to 'educate' their children. There is vulnerability in terms of role identification where contact with both gender figures is often limited due to work demands as well as a high divorce rate. The young child demands both quality time and enough time and attention and the value of the amount of time spent on basic care of the young child cannot be overestimated (de Witt, 2009). This demands a great deal of time in the rushed lives of modern families. This current reality of many South African thus families impacts parenting in various ways.

Deater-Deckard (2005) states that it is important to further our understanding of how and why parents become distressed in their care-giving roles. It is important to explore those factors that might help to prevent or moderate the effects of cumulative stressful events. It is important to identify those factors most relevant to the development of stressful experience with children. This knowledge can be used to provide interventions in ways that promote healthier outcomes for parents and children. Support systems can play an important role in the alleviation of stressful experiences of parenting. This will now be discussed.

2.9 The value of support for parents

Campion (1995) has highlighted that the nature of the individual child, the individual parents or their particular external circumstances may be such that parents need extra support at times to enable them to be adequate parents. Parents face different opportunities and risks in rearing their children. Risks to parenting can come from direct threats and from the absence of normal, expectable opportunities. 'Opportunities for development' that affect parenting refers to interpersonal and institutional relationships in which parents find material, emotional and social encouragement compatible with their needs and capacities as they exist at a specific point in their parenting career (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995:420).

The value of social support, provided during a formative period in child and family development, is that it can serve to buffer children and families and can be a strategy for enhancing parenting (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995). The understanding is that the support provided can be internalised in some way and have an effect beyond the period when it is provided. Carefully designed support systems can be powerful enough to change parenting capacities and styles. Social supports may also be beneficial by encouraging the development of active coping strategies (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995).

There have been a number of studies which have found that greater social support is likely to positively impact parenting (Bonds, 2002; DeGarmo, 2008; Green, 2007 in Respler-Herman, Mowder, Yasik & Shamah, 2012). One of the ways in which this happens was confirmed in a study by Ostberg and Hagekull (2000, cited in Respler-Herman et al., 2012) who found that parents with high social support tended to experience low levels of parenting stress, which leads to more positive and effective parenting.

Social support is described as emotional, instrumental or informational help that other people provide to an individual (Crockenberg 1988, cited in Cochran & Niego, 1995). These three types of support will be discussed below.

2.9.1 Emotional support

Emotional support refers to expressions of empathy and encouragement that convey to parents that they are understood and capable of working through difficulties in order to do a good job in that role (Crockenberg 1988, cited in Cochran & Niego, 1995).

Parent's needs are as important to consider as children needs in order to meet children's best interests. A parent's emotional well-being affects the child's emotional well-being (Campion, 1995).

Emotional support may act in a buffering manner. Emotional support may nurture a parent's sense of self-value and capability of caring for their children. If parents feel successful in managing their children's behaviour, this can also enhance their self-esteem and confidence which may help to resolve many of their own problems and

stresses. There is evidence to suggest that emotional support from a partner moderates the adverse effects of major life stress on mothers' well-being and interactive behaviour with their children (Crnic & Acevedo in Bornstein, 1995). Emotional support thus may not be able to change the stressful event but may serve as a buffer which enables the parent to maintain satisfactory childrearing routines in difficult situations.

Emotional support is primarily offered to parents by their spouses, extended family or friends. Emotional support may also be extended to parents by professionals if the need arises. This would be when parents need marital help or personal help for their own personality and emotional difficulties before they can effectively parent their children (Campion, 1995).

2.9.2 Instrumental support

Crockenberg (1988, cited in Cochran & Niego, 1995) defines instrumental support as concrete help that reduces the number of tasks or responsibilities a parent must perform, typically relating to household and childcare tasks. This involves actual physical support with regard to functions of child-rearing. It includes resources such as quality child-care and education, domestic help, and child-minding services. Instrumental support can reduce the number of stressful events that parents have to deal with and thus may provide relief from daily burdens that might otherwise accumulate to incapacitate the parent (Cochran & Niego, 1995).

2.9.3 Informational support

According to Crockenberg (1988, cited in Cochran & Niego, 1995) informational support refers to advice or information concerning child care or parenting. Ginnott (2003, cited in Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008) proposes that to parent effectively means knowing how children develop, and understanding and effecting appropriate parenting practices. In order to exert appropriate influence and guidance, parents must constantly and effectively adjust their interactions, cognitions, emotions, affections and strategies to the age-graded activities, abilities and experiences of their children (Kerr, Stattin, & Engels, 2008). Helping parents to understand their child's unique characteristics and providing guidance on how to build a mutually

rewarding relationship that facilitates the child's development and promotes a sense of parental well-being are common goals of intervention programmes (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Parents may need to be taught those skills which are deemed necessary for good enough parenting (child development, playing responsively, and appropriate discipline) (Campion, 1995). The goals of most parent-based intervention strategies are to enhance parenting skills or resources with the hope that parents will be better positioned to nurture, teach, or in other ways provide for their children thus enhancing their children's positive growth and development. They seek to improve parents' general knowledge about parenting and child development (Kerr, Stattin, & Engels, 2008). This can be done by teaching parents how to build warm and mutually rewarding relationships with their preschooler, how to teach their children pro-social behaviours, and how to decrease their child's inappropriate behaviours (Kerr, Stattin, & Engels, 2008). Being able to respond effectively to the preschool child's needs requires a sensitivity to the child and an ability to read, interpret, and anticipate what the child needs and how the child is responding to the world (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) conducted research around preschool child care and parents' use of physical discipline. One of their conclusions was that child care providers can offer parents support in the following ways – giving parents information about appropriate parenting, including an understanding of children's developmental needs; and connecting parents to other parents in their community.

Research has been conducted which highlights that informational support is viewed as important by parents and that parents seek information on effective parenting techniques (Radey & Randolph, 2009). Parents receive information and advice about parenting from a variety of nonprofessional, professional and media sources (Goodnow, 2002). Nonprofessional sources include family members, friends and other parents in the community. Parents may also look outside of their personal networks for parenting information such as attending formal parenting information events or talking to their child's teachers either to complement information from family and friends or as an exclusive source of information (Ateah, 2003). The

Internet is a growing resource for parenting information and it provides a wide array of information (Radey & Randolph, 2009). As far back as 1999 Elliot (1999) found that websites about parenting were the second most popular type of family life education website.

Strong and varied support networks can make a big difference to the success of every parent. Society needs to help in the establishment and continued existence of support networks for families. It is important to look at ways of linking parents with support as it is often the parents who struggle the most who find it difficult to make use of support services (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995). Any efforts which are aimed at improving the child-parent relationship may lead to a more stable and satisfying relationship, having numerous benefits for both the parent and the child.

2.10 Conclusion

The literature review presented the theoretical frameworks which underpin the study. It then discussed the developmental stage of the preschool age child. It went on to discuss the parenting role, and the impact of parenting practices on a child's development. The review then addressed challenges to parental role fulfilment and the relationship between stress and parenting. The review finally focused on the value of support systems for parents. The third chapter will discuss the research methodology.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology that was followed in carrying out the research. The research design will be discussed, followed by the sampling and data collection. This will be followed by the data analysis and a discussion of the limitations of the study.

3.2 Research Design

The researcher employed a qualitative research design. Qualitative research attempts to explore in detail themes such as the attitudes, behaviour and experiences of specific groups of people (Carey, 2009). Qualitative research is primarily interpretive and seeks to understand the human experience from the individual's own frame of reference (Thyer, 2010). The following features distinguish qualitative research design from other types: this research seeks to discover what people think and how they act and the reasons why; it is used when we seek to determine the meaning that people give to their lives and actions; there is an orientation to social context and to the interconnections between social phenomena; and there is an awareness of the subjective role of the researcher (Engel & Schutt, 2009).

The specific type of qualitative research used was that of phenomenology, which is a study that describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon, topic or concept for various individuals (Fouche in de Vos, et al., 2011). This is mainly done by identifying individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied, collecting data through naturalistic methods of study and analysing the meanings, themes and general descriptions of the experience within a specific context (Fouche in de Vos, et al., 2011).

Qualitative research was appropriate for this research study as the researcher sought to gain a better understanding of the subjective experiences and perceptions of the participants. The data collected was based on the participant's individual

experiences and the meaning this has for them. This gave the researcher an 'insider's' understanding of the participants' views and experiences around parenting. Gaining a detailed understanding of this specific target group assisted the researcher with being able to draw conclusions regarding specific needs of this target group.

This study may also be referred to as an exploratory study. Exploratory studies are used to make initial investigation into fairly unknown areas of research (Terreblanche & Durrheim, 1999). The research around parenting related to the specific developmental stage of the preschool child has been limited in the South African context, thus indicating the potential need for this research.

The sampling strategy of this study will now be discussed.

3.3 Sampling

According to Kerlinger, (cited by Strydom in de Vos, et al., 2011) sampling means taking any portion of a population or universe as representative of that population or universe. Carey (2009) explains that a sample is a small group of research participants from which a degree of generalisation can be made and sampling is the process by which a sample is gathered.

The researcher made use of non-probability, purposive sampling in order to obtain the sample. Non-probability sampling methods do not use a random selection procedure (Engel & Schutt, 2009). A purposive sample is selected because it is purposeful in that it illustrates features that are of interest for the particular study (Strydom in de Vos, et al., 2011). The sample is purposively selected due to participants' specific experience of the topic under investigation. This type of sampling is important for qualitative research designs where the purpose is to explore experiences of a specific group of people.

This study specifically targeted parents (mothers) of preschool age children who attend St Joseph's Marist College Pre-school. The researcher purposively chose mothers who currently have a child between the age of 3 and 6 years attending the Pre-school and who were listed on the school database as having both parents living

in the home. Mothers who the researcher had worked with therapeutically were excluded from the sample.

3.3.1 Sample size

Selection according to the set criteria resulted in a list of 35 potential participants. On the basis of this number as well as the parameters of the study it was decided to make use of a sample size of 18 participants i.e. half of the potential population as representative of the population. The researcher initially made email contact (see Appendix A) with all possible participants and then followed up telephonically to schedule appointments with those who expressed interest. Face-to-face interviews were then held with these participants. A profile of the participants can be found in Chapter Four.

The data collection method will now be discussed.

3.4 Data collection

Data were collected in the following manner:

3.4.1 Semi structured face-to-face interview:

The data collection approach was a semi-structured face-to-face interview. According to Greef (in de Vos, et al., 2011), researchers use this tool in order to gain a detailed picture of a participant's beliefs, perceptions or accounts around a particular topic. Depth interviewing is a qualitative method of finding out about people's experiences, thoughts and feelings (Engel & Schutt, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are suitable when one is interested in complexity or process as they allow the interviewer to follow up interesting areas arising within the interview (Greef in de Vos, et al., 2011). This is important as the participant is seen as the expert on the subject being studied and the researcher is interested in finding out about the participants from their own point of reference and within their own context (Carey, 2009).

The aim of this research was to gain a detailed picture of parental perceptions and experiences. The use of face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to establish rapport with the participants, and facilitated the gathering of data through exploration

and observation. The researcher was able to convey a sense of viewing the participants as the experts on the subject being studied.

The researcher conducted individual interviews with eighteen participants. The interviews varied from 45 minutes to an hour. Twelve of the interviews were conducted in the researcher's office at the school and the rest at a place decided on by the participant. The researcher's aim was to accommodate the participants and thus gave them the option of choosing the venue.

3.4.2 Interview schedule:

The interview schedule is a questionnaire of predetermined questions which is used to guide the interview. The schedule allows the researcher to ensure that the topic will be covered thoroughly and to think about possible difficulties that may be encountered (Greef in de Vos, et al., 2011). It is important to ensure that the data collected will answer the research questions (Carey, 2009). It is important to include a formal introduction to recite prior to the interview which details the purpose of the study and clarifies what will be done with the data collected as well as a formal thank you at the end of the interview (Carey, 2009).

The researcher made use of an interview schedule which was used to guide the interview. The schedule was constructed using the research objectives as the guideline for the main themes to be explored (see appendix A). The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions. The interview schedule was semi-structured so as to allow for participants to raise other ideas which the researcher had not paid attention to.

3.4.3 Use of a tape recorder:

Carey (2009) points out that taping and transcribing may be indispensable for qualitative interviews because all of the verbal details of the interview are captured. The disadvantages are that it can be intimidating for participants and it is time-consuming to transcribe interviews (Carey, 2009). According to Carey (2009), it is often ideal to do a combination of note-taking and recording but the researcher needs to bear in mind that participants may find the note-taking distracting for the interview process.

The interviews were recorded (with permission) so as to gain a more accurate verbatim account of the interviews. This also freed the researcher to observe participants non-verbal behaviour. The researcher also took notes during the interviews and made use of a combination of her notes and transcribed material.

3.5 Pilot study:

A pilot study allows the researcher to test the measuring instrument by trying it out on a small number of persons having characteristics similar to those of the target group (Singleton in de Vos, et al., 2011). A pilot study was conducted with two people to test the interview schedule and to explore any limitations in the research questions. This allowed for some changes to be made affecting the flow of the interview and the specific wording of a number of questions making them more easily understandable.

3.6 Data analysis

The process of analysis is one in which the researcher attempts to generate explanation, understanding and meaning from the research findings (Carey, 2009). Data were analysed using Tesch's method (1990 in de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 1998)). The steps are as follows:

- a. the in-depth interview is recorded and transcribed for data analysis;
- b. the researcher reads through transcriptions carefully and makes notes on important issues raised by participants;
- c. researcher reads through the transcriptions again , making notes of main themes and listing them into categories and sub-categories;
- d. researcher re-reads the transcriptions, looking for new themes and categories;
- e. main themes are abbreviated into codes so as to analyse which categories fall into particular themes;
- f. topics which relate to each other are grouped together so as to identify if there are too many categories and sub-categories;

- g. final decisions are made on the categories;
- h. a preliminary analysis is made in a systematic manner;
- i. the researcher revisits the transcriptions so as to recode existing data if necessary.

3.7 Data Verification

Data verification relates to ensuring that the research is truthful and honest, and focuses on removing any bias that can influence the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Poggenpoel, 1998). The authors (1985, cited in Poggenpoel, 1998) have developed four constructs through which data must be verified in order to ensure that the results are trustworthy, namely, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Transferability will not be discussed as this study sought the experiences and opinions of the participants and not results that could be generalised.

Credibility requires that the researcher correctly defines and identifies the subject in great detail and depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Poggenpoel, 1998). Within this study, credibility was supported by an in depth literature review. Dependability involves a sense that if a similar study was done and participants in the repeated study shared similar characteristics, within a similar context, then similar results would be obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Poggenpoel, 1998). For this study, the researcher's supervisor had authority to assess the quality and dependability of work produced. Confirmability is used as a strategy to assess the possibility of researcher bias on the findings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Poggenpoel, 1998). Confirmability in this study was dealt with by the researcher applying a process of reflexivity and through the process of supervision offered by the university supervisor. The limitations of the study will now be clarified.

3.8 Limitations of the study

The limitations will be discussed in relation to the following:

3.8.1 Research design

Qualitative research design lacks generalisability as the findings are only a true representation of the participants interviewed and not the larger population that they have been selected from (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of the parents of preschool age children within particular parameters ie. the setting(St Joseph's Marist College Preschool) and a specific context (two parent families).

3.8.2 Sampling

The use of purposive, non-probability sampling results in the researcher playing an active role in the sampling process which results in bias (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). The researcher made use of purposive, non-probability sampling due to the purposes of the research. The use of this type of sampling was important as the parameters of the study resulted in specific criteria for selection i.e. participants needed to be mothers of preschool age children attending SJMC who currently live with the other parent of their child. The specific criteria used for selecting the sample will also limit generalisation of findings as this results in a very specific group of participants being targeted. The method of approaching participants in this study i.e. by requesting potential participants to respond to an email invitation, may also limit generalisation of the findings as it may result in a particular type of participant responding. Within this study both of these factors resulted in the selection of a fairly homogenous sample which became a key limitation in the generalisation of findings as well as highlighting diverse findings. The small sample size also limits generalisation of findings. It could have been helpful to include additional criteria for the sample selection such as asking teachers who would be aware of non-coping children to identify suitable participants.

3.8.3 Data collection strategy

The use of face-to-face interviews may result in participant bias. This happens when participants withhold information; present facts differently than other observers would perceive; forget or block information; or feel it necessary to present themselves in a positive manner (Thyer, 2010). This was countered by the researcher through the

use of a questioning process that required participants to provide in-depth answers and allowed the researcher to explore certain answers. It was also countered through the researcher's use of interviewing skills so as to be able to explore, observe and build rapport with participants.

The use of a voice recorder may also be a threat to participants for fear of having information recorded and may result in less accurate responses being given (Carey, 2009). The researcher dealt with this by assuring participants of confidentiality and obtaining their permission to record the interviews.

3.8.4 Data analysis

This is dependent on the accurate interpretation by the researcher. Qualitative data analysis is subjective as the researcher may bring out themes that they are more familiar with and it is difficult to generalise these findings to the larger population due to them being based on the subjective opinions of the participants (de Vos in de Vos et al., 2011). To counter this limitation, the researcher used Tesch's (1990 in de Vos et al., 1998) method of data analysis as a guideline to ensure that the themes were representative of the data collected from the research. The researcher also followed Thyer's guidelines for data analysis (Thyer, 2010) by staying close to the descriptive, verbatim accounts and subjective meanings of the participants and supporting statements about the data with exact quotes from research participants.

3.8.5 Researcher

The researcher's own biases may influence her interpretation of data. It is easy for researchers to ignore information that does not support their conclusions (Thyer, 2010). There may have been role confusion between the researcher in her role as researcher and as Social Worker employed at the school. The researcher dealt with these limitations by applying a thorough data analysis method; by giving thought to her own biases prior to the research process; and by communicating clearly with participants regarding her role as researcher. The researcher also received supervision from the University which assisted dealing with these issues.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methodology applied to the research process. It outlined the research design, the sampling strategy and the method of data collection. It then discussed the data analysis and the limitations of the study and how these were countered.

The penultimate chapter will present the findings of the research.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Four

Discussion of Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings. It will begin with a profile of the participants, followed by the framework of analysis. The findings will then be discussed using the research objectives as headings.

4.2 Profile of the participants

The following table provides a profile of the participants.

PARTICIPANT NUMBER	AGE	WORK STATUS	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	NUMBER OF YEARS MARRIED	AGE OF PRESCHOOL CHILD
1	37	Employed full-time	3	10	4 and 6
2	39	Employed full-time	1	14	4
3	35	Employed full-time	2	9	4 and 6
4	29	Employed full-time	1	6	5
5	31	Employed full-time	2	15	4
6	31	Employed full-time	2	8	4 and 6
7	29	Employed full-time	1	6	5
8	32	Employed full-time	2	9	5
9	30	Homemaker	2	9	4
10	33	Employed full-time	3	6	4
11	37	Employed full-time	1	13	4
12	37	Homemaker	2	8	5
13	33	Employed full-time	1	3	4
14	36	Employed full-time	2	9	5
15	30	Employed full-time	1	6	5
16	46	Employed full-time	1	6	4
17	32	Employed full-time	2	11	4
18	38	Homemaker	3	13	6

4.3 Framework of analysis

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	THEMES AND SUB-THEMES
How mothers perceive their parental role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caregiver • Nurturer • Teacher / guide • Disciplinarian
Major challenges to role fulfilment.	<p>Factors related to the child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Striving for independence • Resistant behaviour • Limited communication abilities • Level of dependence <p>Factors related to the parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of own personality • Intense nature of parenting • Struggle to discipline effectively <p>Broader social context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of working life <p>Impact on the parent child relationship</p>
Availability of and perceived needs for support.	<p>Available support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional • Instrumental <p>Lack of support</p>
Sources of parenting resources used and what resources are needed.	<p>Resources used</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other parents • Internet • Child's teacher <p>What resources are needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding children's behaviour. • Skills for effective discipline. • Skills for dealing with resistance and the development of independence. • Skills for promoting effective communication. • Affirmation and reassurance of oneself as a parent and connecting with other parents.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings will be presented using the research objectives as headings.

4.4.1 Objective One: To determine how mothers of preschool age children perceive their parental role.

There were four major roles identified by participants when examining this objective.

4.4.1.1 Caregiver:

This was a role identified by the majority of participants. This involves the actual physical care of the child and the meeting of all of their physical needs. Key words which emerged related to this role were: provider, providing what you may not have had, giving the best of everything, giving the best education possible. Participants' descriptions indicated their desire to provide the best that they can for their child. An important aspect of caregiving also relates to providing routine and consistency for the child as well as a sense of security and stability. This role was also identified as a challenge at this age due to the need for the parent to still be very 'hands-on' in terms of practical care.

Participant 4: "It is important for me to give my child what I didn't have."

Participant 13: "Routine is very important because it helps him to know what to expect."

Participant 3: "Parenting is essentially about being a caregiver – meeting all the basic needs."

The role of caregiver links to the dimension of general welfare and protection as identified by Mowder (2005). The tasks of caregiving which were identified by the participants can be seen to link with Mowder's (2005) description of general welfare and protection which is that parents need to ensure that children are protected from harm and that their basic needs, such as adequate clothing, food, safety and shelter are met.

4.4.1.2 Nurturer:

The majority of participants also described their role as that of nurturer. This was expressed by the participants as loving unconditionally, providing emotional support, giving attention and affection, being present, positive interaction, comforting, caring, providing emotional security. This dimension of role functioning was also identified by the majority of the participants as being one of their strengths as a parent and as being easier to fulfil. In relation to this, many participants identified the affection which they received from their child as a major source of fulfilment in parenting this age group.

Participant 9: “A child needs to feel loved and nurtured and be given a sense of belonging.”

Participant 16: “This age needs lots of affection and nurturing.”

Participant 3: “You need to be a nurturer, giving affection and attention.”

This finding concurs with the literature which states that the role of nurturer links with the dimension of bonding, responsiveness and sensitivity (Mowder, 2005). Rafferty and Griffin (2010:143) also report that research indicates that “supportive parenting is essential for positive developmental outcomes in young children and that parental sensitivity; responsiveness and emotional support are the major determinants of supportive parenting”. This highlights the importance of this dimension of role functioning at this stage of development.

4.4.1.3 Teacher / guide:

Many participants also described their role as that of teacher or guide. This involves teaching their children the difference between right and wrong, teaching cognitive skills, teaching self-expression and how to manage their feelings, teaching manners, teaching appropriate behaviour, teaching empathy, teaching values, teaching about how the world works, and answering questions.

Participant 8: “You have to be the child’s moral compass and teach them what is expected.”

Participant 12: “You have to teach the difference between right and wrong, and manners.”

Participant 6: “It is important to provide developmental support by reinforcing all the things that are taught at school.”

A third of participants also identified themselves as both teachers and role-models for their children. Their emphasis was on how they taught their children specifically through what and how they as parents presented themselves as role-models. The role-modelling specifically related to their own behaviour, living out of their values, expression of and dealing with their own feelings, moral behaviour, and dealing with difficult situations. The participants also identified this as a challenge of parenting due to their heightened awareness of their child constantly watching and learning from them.

Participant 17: “I have to teach him how to identify and understand his emotions. He also learns this primarily through watching how I deal with my emotions.”

Participant 8: “We are role models for our kids because they mirror us.”

The role of teacher / guide links to Mowder’s (2005) dimension of education. This finding is supported by the literature which identifies the parenting role of teacher / guide as fundamental at this stage of development. Wilson, Havighurst and Harley (2012) have highlighted that the parent-child relationship provides the major early context for the child’s emotional development with parents acting as teachers, role-models and attachment figures. De Witt (2009) further highlights the importance of this aspect of role by stating that it is through parental support that the child is gradually made physically, linguistically, affective-socially and cognitively ready for school entry.

4.4.1.4 Disciplinarian:

The final role to be discussed is that of disciplinarian. This aspect of role functioning was identified by half of the participants. It was described by participants in various ways such as setting boundaries, reprimanding, being firm, and providing structure

and routine. It was also identified by participants as a particularly challenging task and as an area where parents need help.

Participant 1: "I need to help my child to learn to adhere to boundaries."

Participant 6: "I need to deal with stubbornness and defiance by setting and maintaining strong boundaries."

Participant 4: "I want to know how to discipline my child in a loving way, in a way that is not going to break his spirit. I need to know how to deal with power struggles in the moment."

The role of disciplinarian links to Mowder's (2005) dimension of discipline. This also links with the monitoring / surveillance function as identified by Winnicott (1965) as one of the two aspects of parental role. Research has shown numerous links between effective discipline of children and positive child developmental outcomes. This is illustrated in a study carried out by Denham and colleagues (2000), who found that proactive parenting (instruction, support, and limit setting) for preschoolers is related to low levels of externalising problems over time. Brotman and colleagues (2005) determined that with regard to parenting practices, coercive parenting and harsh discipline are the strongest predictors of child conduct problems.

This role was highlighted by fewer of the participants. It is possible that this is a result of the challenging nature of discipline for parents as identified by participants later in the study. Parents may also have misperceptions around the meaning of discipline resulting in it not being identified by the majority of participants as an important role. This finding highlights the need for this area to be dealt with in parent education so as to help parents to develop an appropriate understanding of the importance of the role and to empower parents to feel more capable of performing this dimension of role functioning.

It is evident from the above that these findings link with the six dimensions of role functioning as identified by Mowder in the Parent Development Theory (Mowder, 2005). The findings indicate that the participants have given thought to their parenting role and this supports the notion that parenting involves the performance

of a social role with associated behaviours and is not just a biological function (Mowder, 2005).

These dimensions of parenting role which were identified can also be seen as corresponding to the developmental needs of the child at this age. According to Erikson (1963) this stage of development is the stage of initiative vs. guilt in which the successful outcome results in the child developing strong initiative to face their expanding social environment. This needs to develop out of a solid relationship between parent and child. This relationship is formed through the parenting roles of caregiving, nurturing, and being responsive and sensitive to the child's needs. The parent links the child with the outside world through the role of educator. By making use of effective discipline (limit setting and responses to behaviour) the parent is able to create an environment in which initiative can flourish.

The findings regarding role functioning have been discussed and the following section will focus on participant's perceptions regarding their challenges to role fulfilment.

4.4.2 Objective Two: To explore the major challenges to parental role fulfilment.

This objective will be dealt with according to three headings: factors related to the child, factors related to the parent and factors related to the broader social context. The impact of stress on the parent's relationship with the child will also be discussed.

4.4.2.1 Factors related to the child:

Four areas will be discussed, namely, the child's striving for independence, resistant behaviour, limited communication abilities and the child's level of dependence.

4.4.2.1.1 Striving for independence:

One of the major challenges of parenting this age group relates to the child's assertion of autonomy and striving for independence. Many of the participants identified the struggle to find the correct balance between acknowledging their children's needs for autonomy by allowing them to explore and establish control in their environment versus the parent needing to maintain a certain level of control due

to the child's limited abilities. This was highlighted as being difficult as the child is not fully aware of their own limitations and lacks certain abilities yet has a fierce desire to be independent.

Participant 2: "It is a challenge to strike a balance between controlling his environment and allowing him to explore and establish control in his environment, to achieve a balance between your fears and his abilities."

Participant 5: "Their striving for independence while not knowing their limitations is stressful. You feel like you have to constantly watch out for them and allow but not impede."

This finding relates to the literature which indicates that one of the important developmental tasks of the preschool age child relates to their developing assertiveness, their desire to assert their own independent judgement and their desire to feel that they are in control of their lives (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). It is important for children at this stage to negotiate the transition from external to self-regulation which includes learning to regulate one's own emotions, behaviours and attention (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The authors identify that the challenge for parents at this stage is to be able to encourage co-operation while also fostering feelings of control and self-determination. This finding also links with Erikson's theory (1963), which highlights that at this age the child shows initiative and purposefully seeks valued goals and confidence in its own abilities.

4.4.2.1.2 Resistant behaviour:

Another area of challenge related to the above is the way in which the child's struggle for independence manifests in behaviour such as constant resistance, stubbornness and temper tantrums. There is a constant testing of boundaries and power struggles.

Participant 13: "He is very strong-willed. 'No' to him means let's start negotiating."

Participant 12: "They are constantly testing the waters – how far can I push mom?"

Participant 1: “I struggle to deal with the constant resistance from my child.”

These findings link with Erikson (1963) who indicates that the child’s newly found initiative often leads to confrontation with its parents. This can also be supported by Gralinski and Kopp (1993), who explain that preschool age children tend to comply more but they also show a greater tendency to refuse before they comply and to negotiate, compromise and show other indicators of self-assertion. Parental use of prohibitions and sanctions may lead to many conflicts of will due to the preschoolers need to assert themselves (Biringen et al., 1995).

4.4.2.1.3 Limited communication abilities:

A third area of challenge relates to the preschool age child’s limited communication abilities. The majority of participants indicated that they struggle with the child’s lack of adequate expressive skills. There is a sense that the child is not always able to adequately communicate what they would like to. There is also a sense that there is a lack of understanding from the child’s side of parental explanations. Participants indicated that they find it difficult to explain themselves adequately to their preschool age child in a way in which the child understands. Linked to the struggles with communication, parents struggle with the need to constantly repeat themselves regarding important issues. Participants indicated that they find it difficult to reason with their preschool age child. Also linked to communication is the child’s difficulty in dealing with their own emotions. Participants identified that preschool age children struggle to cope with their emotions and easily become overwhelmed by them.

Participant 14: “Communication is difficult. Their vocabulary is not yet big enough to describe their experiences. They are exposed to so much that they don’t understand and it is difficult to help them to make sense of things.”

Participant 2: “They struggle to communicate adequately and make themselves understood.”

Participant 6: “It is a challenge to explain in a way in which they can understand.”

Participant 5: “My child easily becomes overwhelmed by her emotions and then becomes frustrated that I can’t understand what is wrong.”

It has been identified by Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) that a second major developmental task of this age group involves acquiring the capabilities that relate to the early development of language, reasoning and problem-solving. Being able to respond effectively to the preschool child’s needs requires a sensitivity to the child and an ability to read, interpret and anticipate what the child needs and how the child is responding to the world (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The finding also links with literature which indicates that a child’s emotions are particularly intense during this period, they can easily be aroused to emotional outbursts and they need to learn to experience and deal with a broad range of emotions (de Witt, 2009).

4.4.2.1.4 Level of dependence:

A fourth area of challenge identified by participants is the continued extent of their preschool age child’s dependence on the parent for most aspects of their care, and their need for hands-on attention as a result of this.

Participant 15: “My child doesn’t understand the concept of space. Everything is mommy-related.”

Participant 10: “Parenting is very hands-on; you need to do everything for them.”

This finding can be substantiated by de Witt (2009) who highlights that adequate care of the preschool age child demands much time and attention as well as quality time. Schonkoff and Phillips (2000) have highlighted that parents need to provide the experiences, supports and encouragement that will enable children to take over and self-regulate in one area of functioning after another.

Belsky’s (1984, cited in Heinicke, 1995) determinants of parenting refer to factors within the child which have an impact on parenting. This includes developmentally appropriate behaviour as well as the child’s temperament. The challenging behaviours which were identified by the participants are developmentally appropriate behaviours and this supports the literature which indicates that developmentally

salient behaviours of children challenge the parenting system (Crnic & Acevedo, 1995). They have highlighted that the particular developmental period of the child may be a critical determinant of the everyday stressors associated with parenthood. This finding also links to the literature around 'parenting daily hassles', explained by Crnic and Acevedo (1995) as the normal events which characterise some of the everyday transactions that parents have with their children and which involves the normal challenging behaviours that children display in their daily activities.

4.4.2.2 Factors related to the parent:

This will be dealt with by looking at three areas, namely, the impact of one's own personality on parenting, the intense nature of parenting and the ability to discipline effectively.

4.4.2.2.1 Impact of own personality on parenting:

A number of participants identified that they were aware of the impact of their own personality struggles on their parental role functioning. They could identify a clear link between personal challenges and issues which they struggle with and the effect of this on their parenting ability, either occasionally or on an ongoing basis. These were primarily described as personality factors which make it more challenging for them to parent at times, such as; an anxious temperament, being a perfectionist, being short-tempered, struggling to deal with stress effectively and an extremely introverted personality.

Participant 11: "My personality hinders me in my parenting as I tend to easily become preoccupied and distracted and I struggle to let go of my work."

Participant 17: "I am a perfectionist and I tend to become anxious about everything."

Participant 6: "It is important for me to be aware of and work on improving the weak areas within myself in order to improve my relationship with my child."

The second set of challenges highlighted by participants, links to Belsky's (1984, cited in Heinicke) determinants of parenting in which it is highlighted that parenting may be directly influenced by forces from within the parent such as their personality. He found that this was often related to parent's own developmental histories. This has been supported by Crnic and Acevedo (1995) who highlight that parental factors which affect parenting can be seen as prebirth functioning, personality, mood and beliefs with regard to child development and rearing. This finding also supports the literature which indicates that some parents may need personal help for their own personality and emotional difficulties before they can effectively parent their children (Campion, 1995).

4.4.2.2.2 The intense nature of parenting:

A number of participants identified as a challenge to parental role fulfilment, the fact that parenting effectively is an intense and full-time commitment. It was evident that it was a commitment which participants wished to fulfil but which was made more difficult due to competing demands on their time and energy.

Participant 16: "Consistency in parenting takes lots of energy and hard work. You can't sit back."

Participant 13: "You have to keep reminding yourself that you are doing it for their good as it often feels easier to give in but this puts you two steps back."

Participant 8: "It is a challenge to have to constantly be a role-model, to constantly be on-guard in terms of what she is learning from you. You also have to be aware of the negative impacts from the day and try to undo these."

The finding regarding the challenge of the intense nature of parenting is supported by de Witt (2009) who states that parenting the preschool age child demands much time and attention which is often lacking in families who are rushed for time due to many demands. The term, 'parenting daily hassles', has been developed by Crnic and Acevedo (1995), to refer to the typical, normal events that characterise some of the everyday transactions which parents have with their children which includes the

multiplicity of time consuming tasks associated with routine care-giving and child-rearing responsibilities. They highlight that this may become a source of stress for parents.

4.4.2.2.3 The struggle to discipline effectively:

The majority of parents identified their struggle to discipline this age group as a key challenge. It has been included as a factor within the parent as it is seen as a skill which can be learnt and it can relate to personality factors within the parent as well as their own experiences of having been disciplined. The challenges included maintaining consistency in disciplining, developing a balance between permissive and authoritarian discipline, knowing how best to discipline in various situations, and disciplining children in public.

Participant 7: "I struggle to discipline in public. I am embarrassed by my child's behaviour but also embarrassed to discipline."

Participant 16: "It is difficult to set boundaries and be consistent without becoming too authoritarian."

Participant 14: "Discipline is difficult. I allow my child to get away with too much."

Muslow (cited in Magnuson, 2005) points out that parenting stress refers to a parent's perception about whether they have sufficient resources to meet the demands of parenting. It has been highlighted by Campion (1995) that parents may need to be taught the skills which are deemed necessary for good enough parenting and these may include child development, playing responsively and discipline. This also links with the literature around effective parent intervention strategies which highlight that the goal of this is to enhance parenting skills or resources with the hope that parents will be better positioned to fulfil their parenting role (Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008).

The third area which challenges parental role fulfilment relates to the broader social context and this will now be discussed.

4.4.2.3 Broader social context:

Belsky (1984, cited in Heinicke) describes the third major impact on parenting as relating to the impact of factors in the environment. The biggest challenge identified by participants related to the impact of being a working parent.

4.4.2.3.1 Impact of work:

The majority of the participants interviewed have full-time jobs. All of these participants indicated their greatest challenge as having the time and energy to meet the challenges of both the work and the home environment. The stress seemed to relate to two main areas: firstly, having to find a balance between and cope with the demands of the working environment as well as the family and secondly, the busy lifestyle which results from this. The specific ways in which their working status impacts their parenting was expressed as: not having enough time to do all that is required, struggling with a sense of constant busyness, feeling tired and drained as a result of work and having to parent under these circumstances, no adequate time to de-stress between their job and their role as parent, and having to meet high demands from the work situation including having to take work home.

It must be noted that the employed participants interviewed are professional people who are following careers and they indicated that their working life plays an important part in their lives. There were a number who indicated that despite being their biggest source of stress, their work is also a source of self-expression and fulfilment and helps to keep them balanced.

Participant 8: “We follow tight time schedules and there is always a daily rush. Sometimes I have to tell my child to keep her questions for tomorrow.”

Participant 6: “I take my daily work frustrations home with me and there is no time to de-stress.”

Participant 14: “Work is very pressured at times and my employers have high expectations.”

Participant 13: “Work is two sides to the same coin. It makes parenting difficult but it also keeps me sane.”

This finding can be linked to Bronfenbrenner’s model of the Ecology of Human Development (1973, cited in Garbarino and Kostelny, 1995). In terms of this model, the exosystem relates to specific social structures which influence the immediate setting in which the child is found. The parent’s workplace is an example of an exosystem. Parents are treated in ways which enhance or impoverish their behaviour in the Microsystems which they share with their children. The findings suggest that there are ways in which parent’s workplaces provide a major source of challenge to their parenting. This relates specifically to high workplace expectations in terms of working hours, expectations of overtime work and stressful working environments.

The struggle of participants to find a balance between meeting the demands of both a work and family environment can lead to a sense for parents that the demands placed on them exceed their coping resources. This is supported by literature which indicates that the multiplicity of time-consuming tasks associated with routine care-giving and child-rearing responsibilities can be a source of daily stress for parents. This has been termed, ‘parenting daily hassles’ by Crnic and Acevedo (1995) who have highlighted that the cumulative impact of this over time may present a meaningful source of stress for parents. This may eventually have an adverse influence on the quality of parenting, the parent-child relationship and eventually, child functioning.

The above has explored the challenges to parental role functioning as identified by the participants. The findings will now go on to explore the impact of heightened stress levels on their parent / child relationship.

4.4.2.4 Impact on the parent / child relationship:

The majority of participants highlighted an awareness of the negative impact of a lack of coping with high stress levels on themselves and their relationship with their child. Many of the participants indicated that lack of coping with heightened stress led to negative parenting behaviours such as lack of patience, irritability,

inconsistency in parenting, becoming withdrawn, or becoming more authoritarian. Participants also highlighted that this often correlated with an increase in negative behaviour from their child and an increase in the child's neediness.

Participant 8: "When my stress levels are too high I become a 'soldier-mom', barking orders at everyone."

Participant 10: "I become irritated and edgy, I shout more and am more easily angered and the children pick it up."

Participant 16: "I become really irritable as a parent. I can't compromise the quality of my work so something has to 'give' and it becomes my home life."

Participant 13: "My child picks up on the energy in the house and plays up more if we are stressed."

The findings related to the impact of the stress resulting from these challenges is supported by the literature. Crnic and Acevedo (1995) highlight that parenting stress affects the quality of parenting given as well as the satisfaction that parents receive from the process of child-rearing and the nature of the parent-child relationship. If the parent-child relationship becomes more conflictual as a result of parenting stress, this can set up a dynamic and circular process which results in less competent, responsive and satisfied parents and children with more behavioural difficulties. Douglas (1989) points out that being preoccupied with stress may detach parents from their children. As the parent becomes more involved with their own problems, they may lose sight of their child's needs and become emotionally erratic and inconsistent in reacting to their child. This can lead to control and discipline problems.

The participants have identified factors within the child, factors within the parent and the work environment as providing the major challenges to their parental role fulfilment. This correlates with Belsky's process model of the determinants of parenting (1984, cited in Heinicke, 1995). The participants have also identified the impact of these challenges on the parent / child relationship.

The findings related to objective three will now be discussed, namely to determine parents' availability of and perceived needs for support.

4.4.3 Objective Three: To determine parents' availability of and perceived needs for support.

This objective will be dealt with in two sections. The first explores the support that the participants have available to them. The second explores what support is lacking.

4.4.3.1 Available support:

In this section available support was explored in terms of emotional and instrumental support. The theoretical application to these findings will be discussed for the two sections together, following the findings.

4.4.3.1.1 Emotional support:

The majority of participants highlighted their spouse as their main source of emotional support in relation to parenting. A number also highlighted friends and extended family. The majority of participants felt adequately catered for in terms of emotional support.

It was interesting to note that two of the participants who indicated that they and their spouse had conflicting ideas around parenting also identified this conflict as a source of stress and identified a lack of support from their spouse.

Participant 11: "A big source of support is that my husband and I stand as a united front."

Participant 16: "My main source of emotional support is my husband. We have similar views and he helps me to keep things in perspective."

4.4.3.1.2 Instrumental support:

The majority of the participants indicated that they receive instrumental support from members of their extended family and that this is a great source of help. This finding highlights the value of extended family support for parents. Support offered by extended family included: emotional; advice; and instrumental (child-care, assisting with lifting of children, baby-sitting, and help within the home).

Participant 14: “My own parents are like a second set of parents for my children.”

Participant 17: “Having my mom enables me to work as she cares for my son in the afternoons. She gives him some of the pampering which I am not able to give him.”

Participant 3: “My parents play a big role. They are amazing. They live with us and provide a lot of help.”

The majority of participants also highlighted their spouse as a key source of instrumental support for them in their role as a parent. Factors which contributed to this support included their husband being ‘hands-on’ and involved in parenting and husband and wife standing together as a united parenting team.

Participant 17: “My biggest support is my partner. I can walk away because he will catch the ball.”

Participant 16: “My husband is very hands-on and he takes over when I need him to.”

Belsky (1984, cited in Heinicke, 1995) believed that strength in one of the determinants of parenting can buffer against stresses from the other two sources. He suggested that the psychological well-being of the parent may have the greatest potential for buffering because of its direct effect on parental competence. He also found that child risk characteristics can be buffered where personal resources and support systems function effectively. This has been illustrated by the findings that the participants rated emotional and instrumental support from their spouses and their extended family as a major support of their parenting efforts. The findings concur with the literature in indicating that good social support is a protective factor in parenting and can provide the following help: relief from daily burdens, nurture the parent’s sense of self-value and capability, buffer the effects of daily parenting stressors, and provide encouragement in parenting (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1995). These findings also support the notion that extended family form part of the child’s microsystem and can play an important role in the child’s development when parents work outside the home (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992). Positive support offered by

extended family and friends can also be seen as an opportunity for parenting provided by the exosystem (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004).

The above has looked at available sources of support for the participants. The following section will focus on where support is lacking.

4.4.3.2 Lack of support:

The majority of participants felt adequately supported by their support systems. There were a number of participants, due to their specific circumstances, who felt the need for more instrumental support.

The participants who indicated that they do not have extended family to provide instrumental support all indicated a need for more instrumental support. They indicated a reluctance to rely on 'outsiders' for instrumental support such as babysitting for this age group and felt constrained in terms of this. One of the participants compared life away from extended family and then after having moved closer to extended family.

Participant 12: "We never used babysitters and we only went to places where the kids could go. Now that we have moved to Cape Town we have some adult time and we feel as though we have been able to reach a bit more of a balance."

Participant 8: "Instrumental support is lacking for me as I do not have any family in Cape Town. Because we are new in Cape Town we don't have many support systems. We don't have anyone to help to babysit the children as I find it difficult to trust strangers."

Participant 2: "We have very little support from outside the family and time together as a couple has become very difficult. The other day we were able to go to a movie together for the first time in four years because we went while he was at school."

These findings are supported by de Witt's (2009) analysis of the areas of vulnerability of the modern day South African family. She refers to the implications of the loss of the extended family structure for families which includes a lack of

emotional, social and instrumental support. The findings also link with Belsky's (1984, cited in Henicke, 1995) determinants of parenting which identifies the impact of the broader social context on parenting. This includes the existence or lack of support systems for parents.

The above has focused on the sources of emotional and instrumental support available to participants as well as what areas of support participants found to be lacking. The next section will explore the types of informational support available to parents as well as their perceived needs for informational support.

4.4.4 Objective Four: To determine what sources of parenting resources are currently used and what resources are needed:

This objective will be explored by looking at the resources currently used by participants. This will include other parents, internet resources and the child's teacher.

4.4.4.1 Sources of parenting resources currently used:

The first resource to be explored is that of other parents.

4.4.4.1.1 Other parents:

The majority of participants indicated that they seek the advice of other parents in the form of friends and colleagues as a resource for parenting. There was a sense that they could identify with other parents, that they could learn from shared experiences, that the advice given was more 'real', and that it is reassuring to realise that other parents face similar struggles.

Participant 15: "As work colleagues we share information. We are different to the previous generation as we are more open to talking about the fact that parenting is not an easy job."

Participant 14: "Colleagues at work are able to give more real advice and we know each other and our children. You do need to be careful as colleagues may not always be well-informed and are not always objective."

Participant 13: “Talking to friends with kids of similar ages is helpful. Our friends on Facebook are similar ages as well as their kids. We call it ‘mommy call’. We pose questions to each other. As a parent you don’t always know what is normal and what isn’t. We can reassure each other about this.”

This finding links with research which shows that parents receive their information about parenting from a variety of professional and nonprofessional sources (Goodnow, 2002).

The second resource to be explored is internet resources.

4.4.4.1.2 Internet resources:

Just over half of the participants indicated that they make use of the internet as a parenting resource. This included: becoming registered with an official parenting website where one is regularly sent information and updates; using Google to research specific questions and concerns; following blogs and participating in chat rooms around parenting issues; and using Facebook as a medium to pose parenting questions to other parents.

Most of the participants who make use of the internet were of the opinion that a filtering process needed to be used in terms of deciding which information is valuable and which isn’t. Out of the participants who do not make use of internet resources, the majority had made a conscious decision not to due to a concern that the information was not relevant and due to a concern of becoming overwhelmed by the information.

Participant 7: “I enjoy chat rooms as you can pose a specific question and read answers related to your concern.”

Participant 1: “When my children were born I registered them on a website. They send regular updates according to their developmental stage. It helps to get the information to see that one is on track as my biggest fear is that I am doing something wrong or going to miss something. It also helps to know that I am not alone.”

Participant 17: “I don’t like the one size fits all approach as it doesn’t work for my child. I hardly use the internet because I don’t know how to take the information and relate it to my child. The information is also not specific to our South African situation. Kids in the UK or USA face different challenges to those that our kids face and the information is not necessarily applicable.”

These findings link with the literature that highlights that informational support is important to parents and that parents seek information on effective parenting techniques (Radey & Randolph, 2009). In their study (Radey & Randolph, 2009), they found that the internet is a growing resources for parenting information and it provides a wide variety of information.

4.4.4.1.3 Child’s teacher:

There were only a few participants who identified the child’s teacher as a valuable source of information and support regarding their child.

Participant 11: “Now that she is older I rely more on support from the school. Too much information can be bad as it can cause one to stress too much. I have decided to be more relaxed. If I have a question then I speak to the teacher.”

Participant 2: “My relationship with the teacher is important. I like to think that I can trust her and rely on her to inform me should she be concerned about anything.”

Participant 12: “The teachers are able to provide a different perspective on things which can be very helpful.”

This study is particularly interested in the type of support which can be offered by the pre-school setting. According to the literature, the pre-school can be seen as a microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, cited in Garbarino and Kostelny, 1995). The mesosoytem refers to the interrelations between the major Microsystems in the child’s life and its richness is measured in the number and quality of its connections. The finding that some parents seek advice from the child’s teacher is an indication of

the ability of the pre-school to have a positive impact on the microsystem of the family system, but it is clear that this is an underutilised resource.

In a study conducted by Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) it was concluded that child care providers can offer parents support in the following ways – giving parents information about appropriate parenting, including an understanding of children’s developmental needs; and connecting parents to other parents in their community.

The above has explored the parenting resources which the participants make use of. The following section will look at what participants have identified as their needs for parenting resources.

4.4.4.2 What is needed in terms of parenting resources?

There were five major areas which were highlighted in terms of what parents need from parenting resources, namely, information related to understanding children’s behaviour, information related to effective discipline of children, information related to dealing with resistance, information related to promoting effective communication and lastly, affirmation and reassurance of oneself as a parent as well as opportunities to connect with other parents. The first four areas all relate to the developmental stage of the preschool age child. Due to this, theory will be presented for all four following the highlighting of the findings.

4.4.4.2.1 Information related to understanding children’s behaviour:

A large number of the parents indicated that they would like to develop a better understanding of the meaning of their child’s behaviour and how to respond appropriately. Linked to this was a desire to better understand the impact of their own behaviour on their children. The desire was to be able to improve the parent-child relationship through developing a better understanding of the child and themselves and the interaction between the two.

Participant 1: “I need a handbook to my son’s brain.”

Participant 17: “I would like explanations about my child’s behaviour. I don’t want to necessarily study child psychology but it would be good to have some basic information.”

Participant 1: “It is important to try to understand my child’s behaviour, for example, if I know that my child can’t look into my eyes because he is feeling guilty and not because he is being defiant or stubborn, then I will respond differently.”

Participant 15: “I would like to understand my child’s behaviour better. I don’t want to understand her in the wrong way.”

4.4.4.2.2 Information related to effective discipline:

The second major area related to gaining advice regarding effective discipline of their children. This included age-appropriate information as well as specific tools for maintaining effective discipline.

Participant 3: “I need more information on effective discipline for children.”

Participant 4: “I want to know how to discipline my child in a loving way, in a way that is not going to break his spirit. I need to know how to deal with power struggles in the moment.”

4.4.4.2.3 Information related to dealing with resistance:

This area is closely related to effective discipline. The majority of participants identified ‘continuous resistance’ as a characteristic of this age-group and were concerned about how to respond effectively to this resistance. The parents’ concerns related to knowing how to establish a balance between allowing the development of independence and character in their children while still getting them to listen to them as parents. Parents also identified the need for some ‘quick-fix’ solutions for dealing with resistance especially when it arises at time-pressured moments.

Participant 1: “I need some quick-fix solutions to the constant resistance, especially if I am feeling at the end of my tether. I need to know how to deal with it quickly without having to do a lot of guesswork.”

Participant 4: “He is so stubborn and we have so many power struggles. If he is shrieking at me about the wrong colour socks, how do I deal with it without breaking his spirit?”

4.4.4.2.4 Information related to promoting effective communication:

The majority of participants indicated the challenge of communicating with the preschool age child, particularly related to being able to understand what their child may be trying to communicate to them. This is related to the fact that their verbal abilities often are not well-developed enough for them to adequately communicate their needs. This also related to being able to communicate from parent to child in a way in which the child adequately understands.

Participant 14: “It is a difficult age-group to parent. Their needs are simple but it is difficult to communicate with them about complex things. How does one communicate what seems beyond their ability to comprehend?”

Participant 6: “They are so ego-centric that it is difficult to explain things to them in a way that they will understand.”

The above findings support the literature which indicates that parents may need to be taught the skills deemed necessary for good enough parenting (Campion, 1995). Bornstein (in Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008) states that in order to exert appropriate influence and guidance, parents should constantly and effectively adjust their interactions, cognitions, emotions, affections and strategies to the age-graded activities, abilities and experiences of their children. This implies an awareness of child development and parenting practices. This is also confirmed by Bornstein (in Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008) who highlights that the goals of most parent-based interventions are to enhance parenting skills or resources in order to help parents to be better able to nurture, teach and provide for their children. They report that this can be done by teaching parents how to build warm and mutually satisfying relationships with their preschooler, how to teach their children pro-social behaviours, and how to increase their child’s inappropriate behaviours (Bornstein in Kerr, Stattin & Engels, 2008).

4.4.4.2.5 Affirmation and reassurance of oneself as a parent and connecting with other parents:

It was clear from the majority of participants that they need more affirmation and reassurance in their role as parent. It was also evident that participants value the opportunity to connect with other parents so as to share experiences and ideas.

Participant 17: “I need someone to talk to about parenting, to know what is normal and what I can expect. I know very little about four year olds. What is expected? How does he measure up?”

Participant 1: “My biggest fear is whether I am doing something wrong it is good to know that one is not alone and to realise that others are also struggling.”

Participant 3: “It is helpful to connect with other parents and know that I am not alone and not making a mess of things.”

Participant 12: “When we fetch the kids a few of us moms sit together and compare notes. It is helpful because we find out how each other deal with situations. It also helps to realise that you are not alone. You can think that your child is being a total monster and another mom can say that her child has the same outbursts.”

These findings are supported by Douglas (1989) who identifies that parents frequently express concern about their child’s behaviour during the pre-school period and they need reassurance and guidance about normal behavioural development. The findings confirm Sorenson’s (2005) statement that parents need understanding, support and skills to help them to reach their goals as parents.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research findings were presented and discussed. This was done through presenting, a profile of the participants, and a framework of analysis, followed by a discussion of the findings. The key findings related to how the participants perceive their parental role was that of caregiver, nurturer, teacher / guide, and disciplinarian. The major challenges to role fulfilment were discussed

according to factors within the child, factors within the parent and the broader social context. The availability and perceived needs for support were discussed according to emotional and instrumental support. Participants identified their parenting resources as other parents, the internet and their child's teacher. The findings around what resources are needed focused on specific developmental information as well as the need for affirmation and reassurance and connecting with other parents.

The final chapter will consist of the main conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Chapter Five

Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The final chapter of this dissertation will present the main conclusions of the research as well as the recommendations. The conclusions will be presented using the research objectives as headings. The recommendations will be made to St Joseph's Marist College, followed by recommendations for future research and a concluding comment.

5.2 Main conclusions

The main conclusions will be discussed according to the research objectives.

5.2.1 Objective one: To determine how mothers of preschool age children perceive their parental role in respect of their child.

It is evident from the research findings that the participants perceive four main dimensions of parental role functioning. These include that of nurturer, teacher or guide, caregiver and disciplinarian.

It was interesting to note that the role of nurturer was also identified by the majority of participants as being one of their strengths as a parent and thus being an easier role for them to fulfil. The fact that many participants also identified the affection which they receive from their child as a major source of fulfilment in parenting this age group can lead one to conclude that there is a reciprocal relationship of affection and physical displays of love and care between the parent and the preschool age child. This spontaneous affection and care can be seen as a buffer against some of the more difficult tasks of this age group. It can also be seen as a potential area for strengthening between parents and their children as it seems to occur more naturally and easily at this age. One could conclude that this would be an important factor for professionals working with children to be aware of if it is noted to be absent from the parent child relationship.

It was evident from the findings that the role of care-giving and physical care was identified as an important dimension of parental role at this age and the challenge of

the need to be very 'hands-on' was identified due to the limited independence of this age-group. Providing adequate physical care is time-consuming and it can be concluded that this could be a source of stress for parents who have to juggle work and family demands.

The finding that participants perceive their role as that of teacher or guide can lead one to conclude that they are aware of the vital role which they play in actively guiding the development of their children. This conclusion is important from the school's perspective as the education of a child needs to be a joint effort between the parent and the school. One can conclude that the participants' perceptions of the importance of this role may make it easier to facilitate a cooperative relationship between the school and parents. It is important to establish this type of relationship at this stage as it can be the starting point for future schooling.

It can possibly also be deduced that a lack of a co-operative relationship between parent and school with regard to the development of the child may be due to other factors such as a lack of adequate communication between the parent and the school or the parent being hampered in the fulfilment of this role through stress, and not necessarily due to ignorance on the parent's part.

While the majority of participants viewed the importance of their role as teacher or guide, there were only a small number of participants who were acutely aware of the way in which they guide or teach their children through how they present themselves as role models. It can be concluded that the participants who see themselves as role-models are more aware of the way in which the child learns about themselves and the world indirectly through observing their parents. These participants were also acutely aware of the challenge this places on them as parents. The conclusion can be drawn that it will be helpful to make parents more aware of the specific way in which children learn from observing and copying their behaviour.

It is evident from the study that the role of disciplinarian was identified by fewer participants, indicating either that parents have misperceptions around the meaning of discipline (i.e. seeing it as punitive and something done only in response to misbehaviour) or due to the challenging nature of discipline which may result in parents not wanting to think about it. This dimension of role functioning is an area for parent education.

The link between the findings and the dimensions of role functioning as identified by Mowder's Parent Development Theory (Mowder, 2005) indicate that the participants have given thought to their parenting role and that they acknowledge parenting as the performance of a social role with related behaviours. Due to the understanding that parents' behaviour is generally consistent with their role perceptions, it can be concluded that it may be helpful for parent interventions to focus on increasing awareness around the role of disciplinarian and educating parents around effective discipline.

5.2.2 Objective two: To explore the major challenges to parental role fulfilment.

This objective was explored according to three areas of focus and the conclusions will be discussed in the same way. The first area of focus related to factors within the child. From the findings it is clear that certain developmentally appropriate behaviours of preschool age children can be seen as challenging for parents. These include the child's quest for autonomy, their resistant behaviour, their limited communication abilities and their continued level of dependence. It can be concluded that it may be the participants' experience and evaluation of these normal behaviours which may become a source of stress for them. It is possible that parental perceptions around these behaviours may change if parents are aware of the purpose of the behaviours. It is also evident that these normal developmental behaviours are particularly challenging for parents to handle. This conclusion highlights the potential value for parents of being given parenting tools to understand and learn to deal with these behaviours.

The second area of focus related to factors within the parent. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that there are times when participants feel ill-equipped within themselves to adequately parent their children. This can become a source of parenting stress. It is evident that parents are aware of the link between their own functioning and their ability to parent, and that they are aware of the impact of a lack of parenting skills on their parenting abilities. Based on these conclusions one can see how integral parent support is to help parents to deal with various personal issues as well as to equip them in areas where they feel ill-equipped. In this study the area of effective discipline was highlighted as an area of difficulty for parents.

The third area of focus related to the impact of the broader social context on participants' parental role functioning. It is clear that the parent's work environment and circumstances has a definite impact on parental role functioning. There were positive impacts which were identified but the negative impacts were identified as having a substantial impact on parenting and the parent-child relationship. The demands of a parent's working environment can lead to increased stress within the home environment which can impact the quality of parenting and the parent-child relationship. This conclusion highlights the value of quality child-care facilities for children and the importance of strengthening the role of the pre-school, and also the potential value of equipping parents with effective stress-management skills through parent education as well as being aware of assisting parents to strengthen their support systems.

5.2.3 Objective three: To determine parents' availability of and perceived needs for parenting support as parents of preschool age children.

It was evident that participants rely heavily on emotional and instrumental support from their spouses and extended family. The participants in the study were all parents within two parent families and it can be concluded that spouses can play an important role in providing support for parenting. The extended family can also play a very important role in providing support for parenting, which includes both emotional and instrumental support. The participants valued the support offered to them by spouses and extended family and felt that it made a difference to their parenting. There was also a link drawn by participants between their being able to cope with the stress of the work context and the intense nature of parenting the preschool age child and the support offered to them by their support structures.

For a few participants, conflict with a spouse around parenting issues resulted in a perceived lack of support from spouses. This lack of support resulted in parenting being more challenging. It is possible that parent education programmes could play an important role in helping to resolve this conflict by helping parents to explore their parenting. Participants without accessible extended family support identified a lack of instrumental support as a result of this, and this was identified as making parenting more challenging.

On the basis of this it can be concluded that good social support can be seen as a protective factor in parenting. The researcher is also of the opinion that a lack of adequate social support can be seen as a risk factor for parenting and this is an important issue to address.

5.2.4 Objective four: To determine what sources of parenting resources are used and what resources are needed.

The majority of participants seek the advice of other parents as a resource for parenting as well as making use of internet resources. It can be concluded that parents feel most comfortable consulting with others who are in a similar position to themselves. This highlights the valuable role which parents can play in supporting and advising one another. This also indicates the possible ripple effect of providing educational support for parents as the information gained may then be shared by them with other parents.

The potential of internet resources as a valuable resource for parenting can be seen in the findings. It is important to note that some, but not all of the participants were aware of the need to filter information found on the internet. It will therefore be useful to give parents information regarding which websites provide the most accurate and helpful information.

There were only a minority of participants who indicated that they make use of their child's teacher as a parenting resource. This can be seen as a potentially underutilised resource for parents, indicating that efforts can be made to strengthen this relationship. It was also evident from the findings that parents generally access information around parenting from non-professional as opposed to professional sources, indicating the potential value of parent support groups where parents are brought together to provide support to one another.

The participants were able to identify key areas of need which they would like to be addressed by parenting resources. These were highlighted as: information related to gaining a better understanding of children's behaviour, information related to effective discipline, information related to dealing with resistance, information related to promoting effective communication in children and affirmation and reassurance of oneself as a parent.

It can be concluded that participants seek information related to the developmental stage of the child, related to developing an understanding of children's behaviour and related to developing specific parenting skills. It can be highlighted that these areas correlate with the specific challenges identified by parents as factors within the child which challenge parenting. The participants recognise the need for information and skills and do not view parenting as something which 'just happens'. It can also be concluded that even although these are developmentally appropriate behaviours, they present as challenging, which highlights the pre-school stage of development as a challenging stage. Participants would also like to improve and equip themselves in their parenting role.

Participants also seek for resources to provide affirmation and reassurance of themselves as parents which can lead to the conclusion that parents are uncertain of themselves in their parenting role and they will find it helpful to be affirmed and encouraged in their role as parents.

5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations based on the above-mentioned conclusions will now be discussed.

5.3.1 Recommendations to St Joseph's Marist College Pre-school Management

The findings of the research will be conveyed to the management of the school in a summary document because it will be helpful for management to be reminded or made aware that parents do feel challenged by various aspects of this developmental phase as well as by the broader social context in which they find themselves. It is important for management to bear this in mind when making decisions relating to aspects of the overall functioning of the pre-school such as opening and closing times of the service, and provision of aftercare facilities for children.

It is important for management to be aware that advice and support offered to parents at this stage of their child's schooling may serve as a preventative measure and protective factor against future problems. It is thus recommended that management be educated by the School Social Worker regarding the potential value of teachers being a source of support and advice for parents. This can be done

through the summary document as well as verbal feedback presented to management by the School Social Worker. If management are able to see this as an important part of the teacher's role, then structures could be put in place to facilitate this.

Management needs to see the potential value of the role of the School Social Worker in having time allocated to consult with pre-school staff around ways in which they can be more supportive to parents and time to offer parenting resources to parents in the form of parent education and support programmes. The School Social Worker should also have time allocated in the role to provide support and advice to parents of the pre-school children on an individual basis. These recommendations can be communicated to management by providing written and verbal feedback on the research and encouraging them to include this in the School Social Worker's job description.

5.3.2 Recommendations to St Joseph's Marist College Pre-school staff

The findings of the research will be shared with the pre-school staff in a summary document. The aim of this will be to highlight the insights gained around parenting the preschool age child. This will be done with the purpose of helping the teachers to develop a better understanding of the needs of the parents of the children who they teach and the particular challenges which they face.

It is recommended that teacher's, with the support of management, should be encouraged to see themselves as a resource for parents and parenting. The School Social Worker can educate and equip the teachers to see this as an important part of their role, helping them to become aware of the potential benefits of it to the child in the short-term as well as the long-term. Teachers are generally equipped with knowledge around the developmental needs of children as well as basic strategies for promoting effective communication with children and dealing with difficult behaviour. It will be helpful for teachers to be aware that this is information that parents would value and that would benefit the child. If this is seen as part of the teacher's job description then they would actively make use of opportunities to engage with parents regarding normal developmental behaviour, the developmental needs of this age-group as well as basic parenting strategies for dealing with this behaviour. This could be done on a formal as well as an informal basis. There are

usually classroom assistants in each class and these staff could be made use of at a specific time each day which could free the teacher to be available for face-to-face communication or email contact with parents.

It would also be helpful for teachers to be aware that parents do face uncertainty in their parenting role and it would be valuable, in their view of themselves as a potential resource for parents, to take opportunities to affirm and encourage parents in their parenting role. This would not necessarily involve more work but rather a mind-set which allows the teacher to be intentional in their interactions with parents with regard to these factors.

It is recommended that communications with parents as well as informative talks which are organised by the pre-school be mindful of the specific needs as identified by the participants and seek to address these in their outreach to parents. It is further recommended that the pre-school be aware of the value of creating opportunities for parents to meet and share with one another on a formal and informal basis. They will be informed of this through the feedback provided by the researcher in the summary document.

5.3.3 Recommendations for the School Social Worker

The School Social Worker could play an important role in supporting the pre-school teachers in their support of parents. It will be helpful for the School Social Worker to provide guidelines for teachers regarding information which could be shared with parents and how this information could be shared. This can be done at a meeting arranged for this purpose. It is also important for the School Social Worker to strengthen her working relationship with the pre-school staff. This could be achieved through weekly visits to the pre-school.

The School Social Worker needs to increase her availability to the pre-school parents as a source of support and advice. This could be done by making sure that parents are aware of the services offered through various means.

The research highlights key areas for the development of parent education programmes as well as aspects of the parent child relationship which need to be supported. It is recommended that parent education programmes aimed at parents of preschool age children address issues such as the developmental needs of this

age group, developmentally appropriate behaviour and how to deal with it, developing an understanding of children's behaviour, the role of discipline and tools to carry it out effectively, the importance of the parent as a role-model, and stress-management skills. Parent Education programmes should be run by the School Social Worker. The School Social Worker can also create opportunities for offering support to parents through organising parent support groups.

5.4 Future research

This research has focused on the perspective of mothers. It is recommended that research be carried out with fathers of preschool age children so as to gain insight into their experience of parenting this age-group. This would be important as the father's experience of parenting this age-group may lay the foundation for their future role as a parent.

This research has been carried out with mothers within two parent families. A study focussing on the experiences of single parents is also suggested.

Future research can also focus on the impact of the age of siblings on the preschool parent's experience of this developmental stage as well as the impact of having more than one child in this developmental stage concurrently.

Research from the perspective of pre-school teachers, so as to explore their experiences of providing support to parents and their needs around this area, can also be done. It would also be valuable to carry out research following a period of intentional support offered to parents through the pre-school setting so as to determine the impact and value of this support.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the main conclusions of the research as well as the researcher's recommendations. The recommendations have been made to the management of St Joseph's Marist College, to the teachers at the pre-school and to the school social worker. Ideas for future research around parenting and the preschool age child have also been presented.

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APPENDIX A

Dear Parent,

I am employed at SJMC as the school counsellor. I am currently studying towards my Masters in Clinical Social Work and need to complete research for this. I am doing my research study about the experiences of mothers of pre-school age children. My sample will be limited to the SJMC community and I would thus like to ask whether you would be willing to participate in this. The research has been endorsed by Mr Skea.

I would like to find out more about your experience as the parent of a preschooler as well as your specific needs as a parent of a child of this age group. The outcome of the research would be to look at ways of developing appropriate support for parents at the school. My focus is on mothers who are currently married or living with a second parent.

The data collection for the research will take the form of a 45 minute interview with each mother. This will be arranged at a time which is suitable for you. It can be done at the school or I can come to your home. The questions in the interview will focus on your understanding of your role as parent to a preschooler, what you find most stressful in parenting this age group and what your needs are as a parent of a child of this age.

All information received will be treated with ABSOLUTE CONFIDENTIALITY (as a Social Worker I am legally bound to this). The information received will be collated to form conclusions for the research but there will be no reference to any names within the research. The outcomes of the research will be presented in a summary form to the school as general recommendations.

I would like to record the interviews so that I can obtain an accurate picture of what you have said. These recordings will be destroyed once I

have transcribed the information. During the interview you have the right not to answer a question or to limit the amount of personal information you give. The questions require you to give thought to your role as a parent and what difficulties you may experience. You will be in control of how much information you wish to share.

I am studying through UCT where there is strict control over all ethical aspects of research. This is my third year of working at the school and the SJMC community is very special to me. I have two children of my own, age 16 and 12 years. It is quite some time since they were preschoolers but I do have some memories of the challenges and joys of this period.

I would like to request you to be involved with this research. As I have said, it will involve a once-off 45 minute interview scheduled at your convenience. I hope that this research will help us, as a school, to provide appropriate support to you as a parent.

Please could you email me if you are willing to be involved, with a contact number so as to be able to set up the interview? If you have any questions or concerns please contact me via email, at the school on 021 685 6715, or on 072 843 8452.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Angela Wessels.

APPENDIX B

Interview schedule

The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of parenting as it relates to the preschool age child. The researcher would like to make use of this time to find out more about your experience of being a parent of a preschooler and to determine your specific parenting needs as the parent of a preschool age child. All of the information collected will be treated with confidentiality. You have the right to chose not to answer a question and to withdraw from the process at any time should you wish to.

Identifying information:

1. Age.
2. Number of years married or in relationship with partner.
3. Current work status.
4. Number, age and sex of children.
5. Area of residence.

Part 1:

Objective 1: How would mothers describe their perceived parental role with regard to their preschool age child?

1. How would you describe the role of a parent?
2. Which specific parenting roles do you think are important for the preschool age child?
3. Do you have specific goals in mind for parenting your preschool child? What are these?
4. If we had to look specifically at different areas of a child's development, how would you describe your role in these areas?
 - Cognitive development
 - Social development

- Emotional development
 - Physical development
 - Moral development
5. What would you describe as the needs of the preschool age child?

Part 2:

Objective 2: What are their current challenges to fulfilling their parenting roles in relation to their preschooler?

1. What do you find fulfilling about being a parent of a preschooler?
2. What do you find challenging about being a parent of a preschooler?
3. What are your strengths as a parent?
4. What would you like to improve in yourself as a parent?
5. What currently supports / helps you in fulfilling your role as a parent?
6. What currently hinders / blocks you in fulfilling your role as a parent?
7. How would you describe your current levels of stress?
8. What are your main sources of stress?
9. What is most stressful for you as a parent of this age group?
10. How does your stress level impact your relationship with your child?
11. In which parenting situations do you feel most confident as the parent of a preschooler?
12. Which aspects of parenting preschoolers are most difficult for you as a parent?

Part 3:

Objective 3 and 4: What sources of parenting support and resources are utilised and what is needed?

1. What are your needs as the parent of a preschooler?
2. What sources of support do you, as a parent, have available to you?
(explore emotional, instrumental and informational)
3. In which areas do you need more support?
4. Which parenting resources have you previously made use of?

5. Can you think of anything that would help you to be a more effective parent to your preschooler?
 6. What 'tools' would you like that you don't have?
 7. What information would you like?
- Thank you for sharing your time and experiences with me.
 - Is there anything which you would like to discuss further or gain more information about?
 - Do you have any questions?
 - Would you like me to put you in contact with any particular parenting resources?
 - Explain that the research will be written up by the end of the year and explain how and with whom the research findings will be shared.