

The experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement in the Sedibeng District Municipality

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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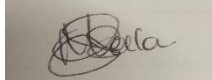
MARCH 2026

DECLARATION

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

Signature:

A small rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Bella'.

Date: October 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I want to thank the Almighty God for giving me the strength and the courage to complete this study. It was not easy, but by His grace, I managed to pull through; without Him this study would not have been completed.

I also would like to thank the following people from the bottom of my heart:

- My academic supervisor, Dr. Sandile Dhludhlu, for his professional support, advice, and patience with me throughout this challenging process of completing this study. May the Almighty God bless you, Sir.
- My husband and beautiful children, Ntate Joas Mosella, Thuto, Reaotlotla, and Tlholo, thank you so much for understanding that I had to study. Your support meant everything. I love you.
- My mom and sisters for believing in me and always encouraging me.
- The Department of Social Development for permitting me to conduct this research, and my colleagues for their valued support.
- Lastly, my wonderful foster parents (the participants), without their participation, this study would not have been possible. Thank you.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to the foster parents who are doing a great job of raising foster children within a related foster care placement. They took responsibility for the foster children and ensured that these vulnerable children were well cared for. I also dedicate this study to my family for their understanding and support.

ABSTRACT

The experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement in the Sedibeng District Municipality

This study aimed to explore and deeply understand the experiences of foster parents raising children in a related foster care placement in the Sedibeng District Municipality. The study adopted a qualitative approach grounded in the interpretivist paradigm and supported by exploratory, descriptive, and contextual designs. Fourteen foster parents from the Sedibeng District Municipality were purposively selected and participated in semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study identified persistent challenges in foster care, including delays in grant payments, limited emotional and psychological support, and minimal social worker involvement. Participants reported feeling unsupported due to infrequent home visits and poor coordination among stakeholders. The findings highlight the need for strengthened foster care services through structured mentorship and counselling for foster parents, increased social worker support, streamlined grant processes, improved interdepartmental collaboration, regular monitoring, and targeted psychosocial interventions.

Key words/concepts: Experiences, foster parent, foster children, related foster children, care or caring.

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ACRONYMS

UK – United Kingdom

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

JCW – Johannesburg Child Welfare

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

ACRWC – African Charter on the Rights and Welfare
of the Child

NCCPP – National Child Care and Protection Policy

NPAC – National Plan of Action for Children

NDP – National Development Plan

FCG – Foster Care Grant

TREE – Training and Resources in Early Education

DSD – Department of Social Development

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provided an overview of the research study focusing on the experiences of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement in Sedibeng District Municipality. It introduces the background and context of the study. The problem statement, rationale, and significance of the study are stated. Furthermore, the chapter includes the goal and objectives, research questions, assumptions of the study, clarification of key concepts, structure of the thesis, and concludes with a summary.

1.2 Background and context of the study

Globally, foster care has been utilised as the main form of alternative care. In various Western communities, foster care is administered by the state to ensure that children who are in need of care and protection are well taken care of. The foster care system is used to provide support to the foster children, to ensure stability, and to safeguard their well-being by ensuring that they grow in a stable home and conducive environment as vulnerable individuals (Gupta-Kagan, 2020:843). In most countries within the United Kingdom (UK), it has been reported that there was a rising number of children entering the foster care system as a result of various reasons like the death of both parents, neglect, abandonment, HIV/Aids, substance abuse, and many other social challenges. Tsoukala (2020:200-203) highlighted various challenges within the foster care system, which included the following:

- **Independent fostering agencies**

There was not enough capacity to look after the number of foster children entering the foster care system, particularly those with specialised placements. As a result, the independent foster care agencies were used, despite efforts to recruit more foster parents (Tsoukala, 2020:200-203). There were not enough local authority placements, and the number of foster children entering and staying longer in the foster care system was continuing to increase.

- **Residential placements**

There were consequences and problems facing local authorities in retaining foster parents, particularly those willing to take the most vulnerable and traumatised foster children. As a result, they ended up being placed outside their jurisdiction for their well-being and safety (Tsoukala, 2020:200-203). The majority of studies found that it was preferable whenever possible to always maintain contact between foster children and their support networks, more especially their relatives, because they knew their background and it would be easy to understand these children. However, this arrangement continues to be a challenge. The following are the types of foster care placements as presented by Tsoukala (2020:200-203): long-term foster care, short-term foster care, family foster care, friends foster care, and emergency foster care placement.

Saber (2017:5) stated that placement breakdowns are common, the reasons being the poor quality of the placement or the wishes and behaviour of the children. In addition, foster children who had many moves or movements in the foster care were more likely to experience placement instability in the long-term foster care than children who had fewer movements. Saber (2017:5) further stated that stability was greater where foster children were younger at the time of placement and with lower levels of emotional and behavioural problems. Therefore, their attachment can be changed by the foster parent over time because foster children find it difficult to form attachments in future relationships due to the previous trauma they may have been exposed to.

Bazalgette, Rahilly, and Trevelyan (2015:12-13) indicated that it was important for foster parents to understand the different patterns of thinking and behaviour of the children they are looking after, and that this could have an impact on their relationship and the security of the placement. In addition, the experiences of foster parents have a greater influence on the outcome of the placement, especially for older foster children. Children's emotional and behavioural difficulties led to rejection by the foster parents, which in turn worsens the children's emotional and behavioural state. Thus, raising the risk of disruption and placement instability (Bazalgette, Rahilly & Trevelyan, 2015:15). It was therefore important to improve stability for the foster children in a related foster care placement by providing support and training to the foster parents.

In Australia, the concept of out-of-home care is defined as an alternative care placement for children who are unable to live with their biological parents and are in need of care and protection (McHugh, Pell & Street, 2013:2). There are two types of accommodation that McDowall (2013:2) spoke about: home-based care and residential care. In home-based care, the foster children were placed in a home of a foster parent who was willing to provide care. In this case, the person is the relative or family member and has a relationship with the foster child (McDowall, 2013:2). Residential care occurred when the placement was in a residential building meant to provide for the children`s needs. In residential care, the facility includes paid staff and a live-in caregiver who is not related to the child (McDowall, 2013:3). In this research study, foster children are placed where there is a form of relationship between the foster child and the foster parent, with the particular surroundings or environment familiar to the foster children.

McDowall (2013:6) highlighted that kinship or family-related placements or accommodation was the best predictor of happiness in placement between the foster child and the foster parent. Foster children in family-related placements are comfortable and feel at home. Most importantly, these children were able to create a positive relationship with other people in the household (McDowall, 2013:6). In addition, they felt loved and cared for. Hearing and listening to the children in out-of-home care is essential and can improve their lives and outcomes in the future. Furthermore, the foster parent understands the challenges that these children experience. As a result, the foster parents provide foster children with the support they need since positive communication and social interaction in decision-making is very important (McDowall, 2013:7).

McHugh, Pell, and Street (2013:2) defined the foster care system in Australia as the vital alternative care for children who cannot live safely in their homes due to risks of maltreatment and other social issues, and it is meant to protect these children as they are vulnerable in the community. McHugh, Pell, and Street (2013:6-11) stated that various reports stressed that the provision of home-based care was in crisis and urgent attention was required due to the fact that recruiting and retaining foster parents was an ongoing struggle. The authors further stated that there was a higher increase in the children who needed alternative care or placement for their safety. Placing foster

children within a home-based care seemed to be a challenge in Australia, and the state has a mammoth task to ensure that several foster parents were recruited and retained to care for the children who were found to need care and protection.

In the United States of America, foster care is a system in which children in need of care and protection are removed from their homes and placed either in an institution, group home, or relative placement with a person who is not their biological parent (Model, 2020: 111). The foster care became the basis for concurrent planning and impacted the system in achieving permanency placements. Lotty, Bantry-White, and Dunn-Galvin (2020: 2) alluded that there are processes and requirements to meet which vary from state to state. This includes the minimum age, verification that the income is sufficient to meet all the expenses, no criminal record within the family, and a record of child abuse or neglect to ensure the safety of the foster child.

Esposito, Chabot, Delave, and Trocme (2015:89) outlined foster care in Canada as a measure of last resort where children in need of care and protection were provided with a safe and stable family structure. The children are placed in foster care with a legal guardian to ensure protection and provision of their needs. There are different types of out-of-home foster care placements in Canada, namely: Kinship foster care where foster children are left with the extended family like grandparents, group home placement where there is a group of foster children living together and a 24hour staff on duty, and residential foster care placement where foster children are placed in a secured home (Hassall, Janse Van Rensburg, Trew, Hawes & Pasalich, 2021:814).

Within the African Continent, Addy (2021:11) indicated that, as much as formal foster care in Ghana is under-researched, there are factors that assist in determining the experiences of foster parents. Ghana had a long-standing tradition of kinship foster care. Formal foster care is a statutory placement requiring the involvement of the Department of Social Welfare, and it refers to the provision of temporary and substitute family care for children when their birth family cannot provide care either temporarily or permanently. Frimpong-Manso (2014:411) explained that foster care placement has always been done with the extended family to provide care for foster children whose parents were unable to do so. However, formal foster care is mostly executed through the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), which are classified as Foster Care

Agencies, and they seem to be doing a wonderful job of ensuring that children are protected and cared for.

Foster parents are able to achieve their personal parenting goals as they feel entitled to foster these children because they have nowhere to go. Likewise, foster children feel a sense of belonging to their foster parents with regard to their wellbeing and care. This was supported by Bengtsson and Luckow (2020:107-108), who reported that children who were treated like the biological children of the foster parents developed a great sense of belonging, keeping in mind that foster children come from broken families. The foster children had to adjust to the new environment and different family setting, and if they are maltreated, they develop stressful and emotional conflicts.

Informal foster care was common until recent times, where the trends were shifting due to migration, social change, and economic pressure. Informal foster care is defined as a placement whereby a child is living with family and friends who do not have parental responsibilities. These relatives are recognised as foster parents and provided care without court involvement, and some have acquired legal custody or legal placement (MacDonald, Hayes & Houston, 2018:74-75). According to Burns, O'Mahony, and Brennan (2021:1205), informal foster care means arrangements where related foster children are under the care of family or relatives who are not their biological parents. This arrangement is facilitated by the social worker but not formalised through a care order or agreement.

Furthermore, Frimpong-Manso (2014:415) indicated that informal foster care is an alternative parental care for foster children and has been used through traditional kinship fostering. In informal foster care, the social welfare workers are not involved as the decision is made informally by family members, and the placement is considered as an extended family obligation. Examining the above definitions of informal foster care, it can be concluded that informal foster care refers to those children who are staying with family members due to their biological parents being absent for neglect, abuse, death, or other reasons. These children were vulnerable and needed a safe place to ensure their development and growth. Informal foster care then becomes effective for them to be nurtured and have their needs met accordingly.

There is a correlation between foster parents' use of corporal punishment on foster children and their biological children (Gilligan, 2013:280). These children consequently used violence on other children, and they tended to resolve conflicts with violence due to the use of spanking by their parents. Foster parents experienced the challenges of catering to the needs of foster children within related foster care placement, as studies suggested that primary caregivers were mostly females and found that mothering in the foster care system revealed struggles to achieve good and positive results. In addition, some foster parents did not get the support they needed from the agencies, as stated by Fisher and Gilliam (2012:199). Consequently, foster care families should be provided with additional support regarding foster children's behaviour management.

Foster care as a child protection system in Zimbabwe remains one of the childcare systems that still requires more attention; the system needs to be strengthened to enhance the plight of vulnerable children in society. Orphans used to be taken care of by the extended families after they have been removed from their families of origin. However, due to the results of Westernisation lifestyle, the placement has led to formal foster care being recognised as an ideal placement simply because it provides these children with a good family setup encompassing values, morals, ethics, and effective socialisation (Muchinako, Mpambela & Muzingili, 2018:39-39). Furthermore, Maushe and Mugumbate (2015:35-36) indicated that orphans and vulnerable children in residential care exhibited a serious lack of proper grooming and values, which led them to have negative behavioural tendencies. The authors further stated that foster children were better placed with extended families like grandparents, uncles, and aunts so that they were provided with a familiar home setup and environment.

According to Chege and Ucembe (2020:2), the measures that are aimed at child protection have been put in place, and the national government is depending on institutional care to make it a success for children who are deprived of parental care. Chege and Ucembe (2020:5) further stated that the social and economic effects played a big part in the institutional model; some families struggled when the model moved from subsidised social services. This caused financial burden on poor families, and foster parents struggled to provide and meet the foster children's basic needs. As a result, space was created for Non-Government Organizations with the aim of

providing public goods, which resulted in the reduction of financial burden on the government.

Chemwende and Mbongo (2021:106) described that foster care placement in Kenya was used to ensure the well-being of orphaned children and that the home stay model was the best alternative placement rather than children's homes, where foster children were vulnerable and prone to different types of abuse. Similarly, Chemwende and Mbongo (2021:108) indicated that related foster care placement was considered to be the best for foster children, as these children were provided with their physical needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing. The authors further stated that related foster care placement ensures that foster children are not isolated from society, and they do not grow up with the stigma, as they are vulnerable. Instead, the placement makes them feel safer and more secure than in foster homes.

The number of foster children or children placed in the foster care system in South Africa has drastically increased since the late President Dr Nelson Mandela took an oath as the first black South African President in 1994. It was reported that these children were left by their biological parents at a very young age due to the death of one or both parents (Ntshongana & Tonga, 2018:14). Relatives such as maternal and paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings (in a child-headed household), therefore assumed the role of caring for these children as caregivers or foster parents. Some of these children were being removed or placed temporarily in foster care with the relatives due to the dire situations at home. According to Ntshongana and Tanga (2018:15), being a foster parent can be rewarding, and have both positive and negative experiences or outcomes, especially when the placement is related.

This research study, therefore, focuses on the experiences of foster parents caring for foster children related to them and residing in the Sedibeng District Municipality. In addition, the study explored the foster parents' lived experiences to give a much clearer and deeper understanding of their emotional needs. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 described foster care as a temporary arrangement intended to care for the children whose biological parents were not able to care for them due to various reasons such as death, neglect, abandonment, or any other psychosocial challenge (Republic of South Africa, 2006:79). When the biological parent of the child passed away, relatives are often there to take care of the child and provide for their needs.

Related foster care placement is common in South Africa, and in the Sedibeng District Municipality, there were several cases reported monthly. Immediately after the funeral of the deceased parent or any case that may lead to foster care, the family members decide amongst themselves who will be the primary caregiver of the children whose parents have passed on.

The application for foster care placement is then made by the prospective foster parent, followed by the designated social worker investigating the application to determine whether the child needs care and protection as stipulated under Section 150(1) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Republic of South Africa, 2006:78). If the child was found to need care and protection after the proceedings from the Children's Court in terms of section 47, 151, 152 or 154 (Republic of South Africa, 2006:81), then the Commissioner of the Children's Court Inquiry may make an order in terms of Section 156 and place the child or children with the prospective foster care parent legally for a period of two years (Republic of South Africa, 2006:82). In other instances, the foster child or children were legally placed with the foster parent until they reach the age of eighteen. This provision was made under Section 182 (2) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Republic of South Africa, 2006:93).

Children who are abandoned or neglected are removed and placed in temporary safe care placement while they are waiting for a permanent foster care placement. These children would probably have suffered in their biological parents' care or caregivers, and to ensure their safety, foster care placement or preferably family-related foster care becomes an alternative care for their well-being (Bengtsson & Luckow, 2020:115).

Related foster parents are needed in every community so that foster children remain close to what they are familiar with. In addition, they provided them with a safe and caring environment so that foster children continued to receive their basic needs such as education, medical care, and support. Foster parents also played an important role in helping foster children recover from the trauma and neglect they had experienced from their biological families. According to Kaasboll, Lassemo, Paulsen, Melby, and Osborg (2019:33), foster parents are expected to care for the children and understand their background. Furthermore, Kaasboll et al. (2019:33) stated that the foster care process is hard work because foster parents have taken on the responsibility of caring

for these foster children, although it is a process that is worth it. Foster care aims to minimise disruptions in the foster children's lives as much as possible during a difficult time. It takes patience, perseverance, and passion to be a good foster parent, as the system comes with both negative and positive rewards.

Financial support (foster grant) is provided to foster parents to provide for all the needs of foster children as outlined in the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004, and this assistance was meant to ensure the well-deserved upbringing of foster children and that their basic needs were met without any difficulties (Republic of South Africa, 2004:10). This research study therefore explored the experiences of foster parents caring for children within a related placement in Sedibeng District Municipality. The study therefore sought to achieve or establish a standardised model that assists social workers to render effective foster care services to foster parents caring for foster children within the related foster care placement. Based on the above introduction, the problem statement will be discussed below.

1.3 Problem statement

McGaghie, Bordage, and Shea (2012:923–924) defined a problem statement as the important aspect that expresses the issues that gave rise to the study. The purpose of the problem statement was to provide a logical study that would educate the reader about the study and orientated about what to expect.

Children were placed in foster care for different reasons, which included abuse, deliberate neglect, and exploitation, among other reasons. Foster care was a form of alternative care for a child who was in need of care and protection and is in the care of a person who was not his or her biological parent (Republic of South Africa, 2006:86). In addition, the purpose of foster care was to temporarily protect and nurture a child in need of care and protection by providing a safe and healthy environment with positive support until the child can be reunited with his or her family of origin (Schofield & Ward, 2013:110). Like in any other legal placement, foster parents who are to care for these vulnerable children are screened to determine if they are fit and proper to care for children. This service is rendered by a designated social worker, even though they have knowledge or background of the foster parents. According to a report released by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), many children aged between zero and eighteen years and female-headed households lived in low-income

situations, hence there were many children depending on the foster care system for survival (Mmusi, Malan & Herbst, 2022:2-3). Furthermore, the numbers are rising each and every day because there are many social problems in our community.

Foster parents are expected to ensure the safeguarding, health, and well-being of related foster children. In addition, foster parents are expected to protect the related foster children from maltreatment, abuse, emotional, and mental harm. Gilligan (2013:275) stated that it was important for foster parents to work hand-in-hand with the foster children's case manager by communicating any changes in the circumstances of the child's life in order to maintain their connections. However, there were many challenges that resulted from the trauma that was experienced by the foster children, and it was for this reason that foster parents needed support in dealing with that trauma so that the children were not exposed to any further (Gilligan, 2013:280).

This research study aims to examine the life experiences of foster parents, as this has both positive and negative effects on them. Social workers need to be aware and understand the role foster parents play in the lives of these vulnerable children and provide foster parents with relevant services to help them cope with any challenge they might experience while caring for the foster children (Schofield, 2013:490). Foster parents tend to think that they were obliged to care for their loved one's children once they passed on because it was the right thing to do. However, a question remains if they were ready to take over the role of being parents to the vulnerable children with everything they could. Every child deserves to be provided with a safe place to stay, and it comes with challenges, and everything must change at home just to ensure that the child is accommodated (Thoburn, 2012:200). This study, therefore, focused on the challenges faced by foster parents who are raising foster children within the related placement regardless of their age and gender.

According to Kelly (2015:155), the majority of foster parents reported that foster children had serious problems when it comes to their behaviour and that sometimes the foster children did not care about other people's feelings but their own, which led to them being disrespectful. Foster parents were therefore faced with many challenges, like foster children who were aggressive, delinquent, and others struggle with emotional disturbance (Kelly, 2015:155). In a study conducted by Thoburn

(2012:179), it was found that foster children with maltreatment experiences had a higher risk of developing mental disorders, and they often showed developmental delays.

Furthermore, Perkins (2013:97-98) stated that there are various parenting models and practices, and these were defined as functional and dysfunctional parenting styles. Functional parenting can be seen within the dimensions of responsiveness and control, which includes the provision of warmth and appropriate setting of boundaries (Perkins, 2013:97). In addition, it also encourages related foster children's competencies. The dysfunctional parenting is defined as either overly strict or unclear and inconsistent parental behaviour, which therefore misses the appropriate orientation towards foster children's needs (Perkins, 2013:98). Foster parents tend to control the children's behaviour and, in the process, undermine their emotional or sense of self.

Perkins and Flynn (2018:109) indicated that aged foster parents faced numerous challenges that have impacted their own well-being, the foster children's development, and the ability to continue with their roles when coming to issues of discipline. According to Blakley (2020:48-49), parenting related foster children is demanding and requires a higher level of attention than parenting biological children. Foster parents are expected to understand foster children with behavioural and emotional issues like trauma, attachment, and negative self-concept. Foster parents are also expected to identify that these behaviours are responses from the foster children's previous lives.

The problem statement of this study was formulated as follows: In South Africa, there was a huge number of foster care studies conducted, however, there seemed to be an absence or little scientific information on the experiences of foster parents raising foster children related with them (foster parents) within Sedibeng District Municipality, as noticed by the researcher while she has been practicing as a statutory social worker from 2016 to date. The researcher, therefore, sought to conduct a study to explore the experiences of foster parents caring for children in a related foster care placement. Below, the researcher discusses the rationale of the study.

1.4 Rationale and significance of the study

The foster care system has provided many children with alternative care arrangements to help them to grow and develop. In addition, the foster care system seeks to provide

for the emotional and physical needs of foster children who are in need of care and protection according to Section 150 of the Children`s Act 38 of 2005. The researcher was of the view that had it not been for the foster care system, several foster children would have ended up in the streets with no proper care and support from the state, foster parent, or caregiver.

The researcher`s ten (10) years of work experience in the field of social work, especially in child protection services, has exposed the researcher to working with foster parents, primarily those who are looking after the foster children who are related to them. During the intake, the majority of foster parents reported that related foster children were demanding a lot from them and that they became stressed when having to care for them. In addition, their stress was associated with financial strains, and they at times struggled to maintain or provide for the foster children`s needs.

Pac, Waldfogel, and Wimer (2017:9) stated that foster parents or families were often single parents and were living in low-income households. For that matter, it may be confirmed that these children were coming from disadvantaged environments. Foster parents seemed to be doing a great job in caring for foster children who have been found to be in need of care and protection. These foster parents acquired new knowledge and skills and changed their parenting practices. Foster care comes with a lot of challenges, and despite those challenges, foster parents did their best to provide care for these children (Flykesnes et al., 2017:199). The factors brought by the foster care system are either positive or negative. Looking at some of the positive factors, foster parents feel the need to care for the related foster children because some of the parents did not have their own children, and the foster care system seemed to close that void. Whereas the negative factors are that foster parents are faced with a huge task of disciplining these related foster children, because these children were raised differently from their parenting styles by the biological parents, and some have had behavioural problems that needed to be dealt with.

Table 1.1 below presents studies conducted in South Africa related to the proposed topic

Author(s)	Year	Title and the goal of the study.
Kidman, R. & Thurman, T.R.	2014	Caregiver burden among adults caring for orphaned children in rural South Africa – To

		explore the experience of foster parents and their coping strategies.
Msebenzi, H.	2017	Psycho-social experiences of aged parents - To explore the psycho-social experiences of foster parents as they are faced with numerous challenges.
Hendricks, E.A.	2021	The view of foster parents on the adequacy of the foster care grant in meeting the needs of the recipients in the Amathole District - To provide for the basic needs of foster children, the adequacy, and the financial impacts of the grant for foster parents.

This study therefore, looked at various experiences faced by foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement. Keeping in mind that it was not their duty nor were they obliged to provide care for them, but because most of them were doing it out of love and needed to ensure that each child grows up in a loving environment. It was anticipated that the study findings would contribute more to the manner in which foster care in a related placement is handled. The foster parents' experiences give insight into perceptions that need to change when we look at this kind of placement.

1.5 Goal and objectives

This section presents the goal of the study, which helps the researcher to reach an outcome of the study. In addition, the specific objectives will be discussed and indicate how the researcher plans to attain the aim of this study.

- **Goal**

Maxwell (2013:97) defined a goal as an objective or target that someone is trying to reach, or an end point of a race or something that a player is trying to put as part of a game. A research goal can be defined as an aim or objective that the researcher works towards with effort and determination. A research goal also represents a balance between what would be a satisfying outcome and an achievable outcome for a specific study (Zander, 2018:10). According to the researcher, a research goal refers to the

outcome that answered the proposed study, investigating and understanding everything that the foster parent was going through to ensure the well-being of foster children in a related placement. The aim was also to see if the outcome would be able to assist foster parents in providing emotional, social, and financial support.

The goal of this research study was formulated as follows:

- To explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of foster parents who are raising foster children within a related foster care placement.

- **Objectives**

Hunt, Pollock, Campbell, Estcourt, and Brunton (2018:2) alluded that research objectives are more specific and that they are a clear indication of the purpose and direction of research. In addition, research objectives provided additional information on the research question. Furthermore, research objectives operationalised the question and are therefore instrumental in enabling the research objectives to evolve into an actual study. On the other hand, Saber and Keeney (2015:1144) described research objectives as fit-for-purpose, meaning the objectives needed to be transparent, specific, relevant, interconnected, answerable, and measurable because they were expected to add or provide new knowledge.

The specific objectives of this research study were set as follows:

- To explore the experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement.
- To explore the expectations of the foster care system regarding foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement.
- To describe the social support mechanisms available to foster parents caring for foster children within a related foster care placement.
- To examine how foster parents discipline foster children in comparison to their disciplinary approaches with their biological children.
- To explore how foster parents manage their emotional well-being while caring for foster children within a related foster care placement.
- To investigate the financial implications faced by foster parents when providing care for foster children within a related foster care placement.

- To address the challenges of foster parents while caring for foster children who are related to them.

1.6 Research questions

According to Maxwell (2013:90), the research question provides direction regarding the data that needs to be collected, and the conclusions based on the study findings. Alternatively, McGaghie, Bordage, and Shea (2012:924) described the research question as a detailed expression of the problem statement and that the research question was either specific or more generalized. However, the reader should be able to understand and look forward to what will be revealed in the study. It was important to have a good understanding of what was going to be researched in the beginning and formulate a clear research question. The answers found through the research study provide new knowledge about the topic.

In this research study, the research question was formulated as follows:

- What are the experiences of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement in Sedibeng District Municipality?

The way forward to this question will provide social workers with the information on how to render services to foster parents caring for foster children within a related foster care placement. The following are the sub-questions that need investigation with the foster parents:

- What are the expectations of the foster care system from the foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement?
- What are the experiences of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement?
- What are the social support mechanisms that are available for foster parents caring for foster children within a related foster care placement?
- How do foster parents discipline foster children as compared to disciplining their biological children?
- How do foster parents deal with their emotional well-being?
- What are the social support mechanisms available for foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement?
- What are the financial implications when having to provide care for the foster children within a related foster care placement?

- How are the challenges of foster parents caring for foster children in a related foster care placement addressed?

1.7 Assumptions of the study

- Foster care is supposed to be safe for children being ill-treated by their biological parents.
- Foster care is harmful for children.
- Foster children are troubled children; they bring all kinds of issues and anger.
- People assume that foster children did something bad to be in the system.
- Most foster parents are fostering for the sake of money.
- Foster care is good and does not have any challenges.
- Most people believe that foster parents are to be complimented, whereas situations in reality are hurtful.
- Children in foster care placement are not happy.

1.8 Clarification of key concepts

- **Experience(s)**

Bedogni, Fusco, and Campisi (2012:621) defined experience as the best teacher, in the sense that having an experience is the best way or perhaps the only way of coming to know what that experience is like. That means one could not know what something was until they had gone through it. Contrastingly, Forster (2015:65) described experience as a feeling and that in order for someone to have experience of something, they had to know the feeling of that particular situation. The different situations that people go through leave them with the experience to know what it feels like and what to do next. The foster parents have the experience of raising related foster children because they are staying with these children; their experiences were not the same.

- **Foster parent**

According to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 a foster parent is a person who has been ordered by children's court to care for the child and who is not the biological parent of the child concerned (Republic of South Africa, 2006:16). Saber (2017:5) also defined a foster parent as a person who accepted the responsibility for a child who has been officially placed with them by an order of the children's court (this placement can be

either with related or unrelated person). According to the researcher, foster parents are people who provide care to children who have lost their biological parents. Also, foster parents provided care to vulnerable children who, for various reasons like neglect, abuse, or abandonment, could not stay in their families of origin and had to be removed and placed in alternative care. Foster parents are doing a great job in providing for the children's needs because these children are still young and are removed from their biological parents due to difficult situations at home.

- **Foster children**

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Republic of South Africa, 2006:91) defined foster children as children who are not staying or living with their biological parents due to not having any means to care for themselves. For example, some of the children were removed from their biological parents due to social problems and placed in foster care, where it was believed that their needs would be taken care of. Seltzer, Henderson, and Boss (2016:190-191) described the term foster children as children under the age of 18, living in households with neither their biological mother nor their biological father, and who were considered young to provide for their own needs. These children are vulnerable and have no visible means of support, and thus need an adult to provide for their needs. Therefore, foster children are those children who have lost their biological parents for some reason and cannot stay with their biological family. Some foster children were not with their family of origin due to death, neglect, and abuse. Hence, these children were removed for the sake of their safety because of being in a vulnerable state.

- **Related foster children**

According to Seltzer et al. (2016:191), related foster children are children who were removed from their home and placed with a family relative to provide for their needs, and that foster parent becomes a certified caregiver. Pac, Waldfogel, and Wilmer (2017:12) described related foster children as children who are placed with grandparents, aunts, brothers, and sisters through formal foster care arrangements or placement, and this was done through the child welfare system, while other children were living informally with their relatives without the involvement of the child welfare system. Related foster placements do not require a lot, and it was easy for foster children to be placed with relatives when they were going through difficult situations at

home. These children are familiar with the foster parents and the family setup, so it becomes easy to adjust to the new environment.

- **Care or caring**

Care or caring can be defined as looking after or protecting someone and providing for the needs of others (McComick & Hayes, 2017:99). In relation to this study, foster parents were the ones protecting these foster children and providing care so that their needs were met and their best interests were kept at heart. Brummel-Smith and Butler (2016:15) defined caring as a safety and quality of life from one individual to another by providing care that is respectful and assures the needs and values to ensure the person-centered approach.

Bazalgette et al. (2015:13) also mentioned that if one cares about something, they feel that it is important and are concerned about it. For instance, every child's well-being is of paramount importance in society, and the foster parents feel a lot of affection towards foster children. Therefore, there was a need to look after these children and keep them in a safe environment due to various reasons that had led them to be in the foster care system, such as biological parents being unable to look after them. Foster parents caring for related foster children provided them with love more than anything, and they ensured that they did not feel uncomfortable and lonely because they had been separated from their biological parents due to death and, at times neglect. The love and care they provided ensured a good upbringing of the foster child or children.

1.9 Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation was structured into six chapters. Chapter one provides the general overview of the study, problem statement, rationale and motivation of the study, goal and objectives, research questions, assumptions of the study, definitions of key concepts, structure of the thesis, and the summary.

Chapter two includes the literature review, while Chapter three focuses on the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter four focuses on research methodology. Chapter four specifies the research paradigm, research approach, research design, research methods, population, sampling and sampling methods, data collection methods, pilot testing, data analysis, and data verification, as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter five presents the discussions and the findings of the study. Whereas Chapter Six deliberates on the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

1.10 Summary

This chapter has introduced the research study where the background and context of the study were defined and discussed, followed by the problem statement, rationale, and significance of the study, goal and objectives of the study, the research questions, assumptions of the study, clarification of the key concepts, as well as the structure of the dissertation. Chapter two will focus on the literature review, whereby the outcome of the study will be outlined or drawn.

CHAPTER TWO: THE EXPERIENCES OF FOSTER PARENTS RAISING CHILDREN WITHIN A RELATED FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT OF SEDIBENG DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY

2.1 Introduction

Chapter two discusses literature that was associated with the experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement. In addition, it explores the breadth, depth, and complexity of the foster care system in South Africa. The foster care system must be understood as a multifaceted institution that functions within a wider political, cultural, and social framework. This chapter firstly provides a history of foster care in South Africa, followed by the experiences of foster parents. Furthermore, it discusses different types of foster care placement in South Africa, the purpose of foster care, policies, and legislations guiding the foster care system globally, regionally, and in South Africa. Challenges and issues inherent within the foster care system, support structures available for foster families, and the effect of foster care on the psychological and emotional well-being of foster children. Lastly, this chapter discusses comparative studies on how the foster care system in South Africa is functioning relative to other global models.

2.2 History of foster care in South Africa

There is a rich background of the foster care system in South Africa that reflects the country's social and political climate. In particular, the colonial era, when familial and communal structures were severely disturbed (Liming, Akin & Brook, 2021:64). In addition, one of the key elements of alternative care was the involvement of numerous departments and organisations, including the Department of Social Development, the Department of Basic Education, the Department of Justice, the Department of Health, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as role players in providing a family life for children who are unable to live with their parents (Gudula-Koyana & Khanye, 2019:2). This may be considered as the genesis of foster care in South Africa. Consequently, childcare was frequently left to one of the family members and other members of the community, laying the groundwork for what would eventually become official foster care. In South Africa, these family members would be the maternal grandparent, paternal grandparent, maternal aunt, paternal aunt, maternal uncle,

paternal uncle, and, in exceptional circumstances, it would be children in a child-headed household.

Post-apartheid South Africa has formed the social welfare structures, legislation, policies, and practices. It was critical to note that foster children needed a stable home for them to enjoy the right to a family. In addition, foster children need to be protected and develop their full potential. Child welfare agencies were established with the intention of providing foster care services to vulnerable children (Schmid & Patel, 2016:246). As foster care placement was the chosen alternative type of care in the 19th century, churches like the Dutch Reformed Church, which was a leading institution at a congregational level, assumed responsibility for caring for the vulnerable children (Van der Westhuizen & Swart, 2015:5-7). Non-profit organisations and a group of women from the Eastern Cape Province's Anglican Church responded to the difficulties of meeting the needs of orphans, these were religious groups that provided various services to their communities (Tucker, 2022:94). Furthermore, an annual report for 2022/2023 stated that Johannesburg Child Welfare (JCW) which was one of the oldest non-governmental organisations, has been committed to supporting children in need of care and protection since 1909 and has been a source of hope for those youngsters (Republic of South Africa Johannesburg Child Welfare, 2023:3). According to Statistics SA, there were approximately 500,000 children in foster care and receiving social grants in May 2023, indicating that South Africa had a sizable number of foster care programs. Foster care serves as a safety net for children who were abused or neglected and when their biological relatives were unable to care for them (Font & Gershoff, 2020:42).

The foster care system became more regulated and structured during the apartheid era, but it remained highly uneven. White children in need of care and protection were frequently placed in residential homes, whilst children of colour were primarily placed in foster care (Vanderfaeillie, Gypen West & Van Holen, 2020:8765). According to Ntshongana and Tonga (2018:14-15), maternal or paternal relatives undertake the role of caring and providing for the foster children's needs. This was dependent on different reasons and the situation at hand, like neglect, abandonment, abuse, and death. Due to this separated system, children from marginalised groups had limited access to competent foster care.

Efforts have been made in post-apartheid South Africa to change the foster care system into a more inclusive and equitable structure. The Child Care Act of 1983, which was replaced by the Children's Act 38 of 2005, attempted to correct previous imbalances in the system. It emphasised the value of family-based care over institutionalised care and advocated putting foster children with family members and extended relatives (Emovon, Gutura & Ntombela, 2019:676). In addition, the South African government adopted the developmental approach to social service delivery, and it was based on the growth capacity strengths of the individual, groups, and community (Schiller, 2015:55).

The execution of this progressive legislation has unfortunately been faced with difficulties. Vanderfaeillie, Gypen, West, and Van Holen (2020:876) emphasised that there was enormous strain on the system as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which was increasing the number of orphans. Consequently, this adds to the lack of required resources by social workers in order to render effective foster care services to the foster children. It was also emphasised that the lengthy legal processes associated with foster care placements frequently result in delays and children living in limbo for extended periods of time (Gypen, West, Van Holen & Vanderfaeillie, 2020:876). Despite the hurdles, the evolution of South Africa's foster care system demonstrates the country's resilience and commitment to childcare and protection. Nonetheless, the historical context of the system cannot be disregarded as it continues to impact its current functioning and future paths.

2.3 Foster parents' experiences of foster care

Foster parents experience a wide range of complicated emotions, from delight to severe sadness. Their responsibilities were frequently characterised by constant uncertainty and upheaval. The foster parents' psychological well-being may have been significantly impacted by these irregular emotional sensations (Vanderfaeillie, Gypen, West & Van Holen, 2020:456). In addition, social support was of paramount importance to foster parents as it enables them to manage the uncertainty associated with emotions; they feel stressed at some point, and when faced with such situations, they need coping strategies (Meysen & Kelly, 2017:227).

Foster parents frequently confronted significant obstacles in their efforts to give the foster children in their care stable and supportive surroundings. These difficulties

include handling the children's trauma histories, resolving conflicts with birth parents, and overcoming structural problems in the foster care system (Hill, 2017:876). Palma (2015:2345) noted a repeating issue of role ambiguity and the difficulty of nurturing relationships that are meant to be short-term but are nonetheless intense, emotional, and intensely personal.

Flykesnes, Iversen, and Lennart (2017:199) indicated that foster parents endured more than just obstacles and hardships; caring for others often led to profound feelings of satisfaction, joy, and self-improvement. Foster parents frequently shared their delights of seeing positive changes and growth in foster children they look after, promoting a sense of purpose and accomplishment (Vanderfaellie, Gypen, West & Van Holen, 2020:890). From the above discussions, it was clear that fostering children or being a foster parent was not a simple, static task, but rather a dynamic endeavour with its fair share of challenges and triumphs. An in-depth comprehension of foster parents' perspectives is essential for developing policy and programmes that meet their needs.

2.4 Different types of foster care placement in South Africa

Many different initiatives exist within South Africa's foster care system to meet the wide variety of needs of children who are currently in need of care and protection. They included cluster foster care, non-relative foster care (residential care), and kinship foster care. Each type has benefits and drawbacks that have an effect on both foster parents and children's experiences. According to Schiller (2015:654), kinship foster care is a traditional practise in South African communities whereby children are cared for by family members or close family friends when their biological parents are unable to do so. This may be as a result of death, neglect, abandonment, illnesses, and/or substance abuse. Despite its informal beginnings, kinship foster care has recently received legal recognition because of its alleged advantages for the child's cultural identity and continuity of relations. However, according to Liming, Akin, and Brook (2021:234), the legal acknowledgment of kinship foster care has brought about several complications, including the mingling of family duties and the possibility for exploitation of kinship carers as a result of insufficient governmental support.

Another common form of foster care placement in South Africa is non-relative foster care, in which children are assigned to foster parents who have no prior familial or

close contact with them. According to Vanderfaeillie, Gypen, West, and Van Holen (2020:9876), this kind of foster care placement gives foster children the chance to experience a secure and supportive home setting. The irregular nature of these placements might give children a sense of instability and insecurity. Schiller (2015:56) stated that this placement comes with the uncertainty of self and instability, which made it hard for the foster child's development. For instance, it might be hard for foster children to adjust to the new environment and to people they are not familiar with.

Cluster foster care, which is exclusive to South Africa, is a cutting-edge strategy in which teams of foster care parents provide residential care for a maximum of six children (Emovon, Gutura & Ntombela, 2019:456). Even though this model encourages foster parents to support one another and share resources, Vanderfaeillie, Gypen, West, and Van Holen (2020:4566) expressed concerns about the potential institutional aspect of these placements.

In conclusion, it was important to comprehend the various kinds of foster care placements that exist in South Africa in order to create child protection laws that are tailored to the various requirements of children who need to be placed outside of their homes. Knowing the advantages and disadvantages of foster care can help create better support systems for foster parents and foster children's outcomes.

2.4.1 Kinship foster care

Kinship foster care maintains a significant place in South African foster care placement, profoundly intertwined in the social and cultural fabric of the community. This type of care, in which a child was placed with extended family members or close family friends, was seen as a soothing bridge between tradition and the needs of children (Vanderfaeillie, Gypen, West & Van Holen, 2020:45). The intimate family relationships inherent in kinship foster care offer a sense of continuity for the foster child, preserving cultural and familial connections and aiding in the child's sense of self-security (Hill, 2017:78).

On the contrary, Palma (2015:90) provided a somewhat disagreeing viewpoint, arguing that the recent formalisation of family care inside the legal system introduces new obstacles. These included the possibility of exploitation due to a lack of proper state support, as well as the burden of navigating bureaucratic impediments. Vanderfaeillie, Gypen, West, and Van Holen (2020:43) echoed by Goemans, Breda,

and Kessi (2020:78) who lament the economic hardship experienced by kinship carers as a result of inconsistency in government financial assistance.

While noting the controversies surrounding kinship foster care, it was critical to embrace its potential in South Africa as a culturally sensitive approach to foster care. According to Palmieri and La Salle (2016:56), the implementation of kinship foster care act as a healthy support structure for vulnerable children inside their familiar surroundings. It was in this study's framework to understand that policies and practices surrounding kinship foster care ought to be further investigated and developed.

2.4.2 Cluster foster care

Cluster foster care is a relatively new concept that originated in South Africa, and it is another form of alternative care for children who were in need of care and protection. The children in that type of care lived with multiple foster families in one residence, similar to a group home (Masie, Khosa & Morojele, 2015:34). Cluster foster care was an alternative placement to standard foster care models that aimed to offer care to larger groups of children in need of care and protection by utilising a collaborative approach (Du Toit & Van der Westhuizen, 2016:67).

It seemed there were concerns with this model, as Schiller (2015:56) points out that children in this placement face various challenges, such as dealing with traumatic situations that resulted in their placement and having to cope and adjust to the alternative care. Some children experience personal and emotional challenges, mood swings, and conflict with peers. In such circumstances, institutional care was regarded as the best option, and the worry was that the impersonal character of these arrangements would perpetuate the problems that affected conventional daycares by lowering the quality of care provided to each child. Jamieson, Proudlock, and Guthrie (2017:65) expressed concern that individual children's needs may be overlooked in favour of group demands.

While these concerns warrant attention, one must not lose sight of what makes the cluster foster care model unique. As a result, more children can be cared for effectively, which is excellent for the group as a whole. We can ensure that these models emphasise the needs and welfare of each child in the system by considering the criticisms of Liming, Akin and Brook (2021:89) and Jamieson, Sambu and Mathews, (2017:78). These results may be used to improve the South Africa's cluster

foster care network, which is one of the country's best tools for protecting children from abuse.

According to Thomas and Scharp (2017:15), cluster foster care ensures that foster children are kept in their communities where they are familiar with the environment, and they can easily adjust to the placement. It helped to keep families, siblings, and groups together. Also, systems were put in place to provide support to one another. Cluster foster care prioritises having children with the family and follows the community-based family preservation model (Schmid & Patel, 2016:302).

2.4.3 Residential foster care

Children who are not fit for kinship and cluster foster care families have another alternative in South Africa, and that is residential foster care. Social workers, carers, and other support professionals helped these children in residential care by ensuring their well-being and that their needs were met (Vanderfaeillie, Gypen, West, Van Holen & Vanderfaeillie, 2020:45). The capacity to reach more children and provide them with comprehensive services like counselling, tutoring, and life skills training was one of the numerous advantages of this kind of care (Emovon, Gutura & Ntombela, 2019:76).

One of the critics of residential foster care, according to Krugmand (2017: 27) was that a community that does not care hurts a child's emotional development by discouraging close relationships and customised care. This was in accordance with Gypen, West, Van Holen, and Vanderfaeillie (2020:456) when they indicated that children in residential care may be exposed to a depersonalised, institutional setting that was not optimal for their complex developmental needs. Considering these factors, it was clear that residential foster care was a complex strategy with advantages and disadvantages, since it helped youngsters who have nowhere else to go, but being mindful of the potential for depersonalisation. This perspective emphasises the need for comprehensive training, adequate funding, and child-centered legislation in residential foster care to guarantee the health and development of every child in the system.

2.5 Purpose of foster care

Foster care exists to give children who have been removed from their homes due to issues like abuse, neglect, or the death of a parent a safe place to live (Vanderfaeillie, Gypen, West & Van Holen, 2020:234). The purpose of foster care is to improve children's health and well-being (Hill, 2017:456). Based on the arguments presented above, foster care placement aims to ensure that children who are in need of care and protection are protected by being provided with a safe, healthy environment and positive family support.

But that was not all; according to Palma (2015:908), reuniting a child with his or her biological family should be the priority for every foster care programme. Vanderfaeillie, Gypen, West, and Van Holen (2020:456) shared that permanent placement or adoption should be explored when reunion is not possible to provide stability for the child. They may not be reunited with their family of origin if it is anticipated that they will be at risk or exposed to danger if returned to their homes; in that case, permanency placement will be considered.

After considering these various perspectives, foster care should be both protective and adaptable, thus meeting the needs of each child in its care. It has to strike a balance between helping people in dire need at that particular point in time and encouraging them to work towards more long-term goals like reuniting them with their loved ones. Every child in foster care deserves to have their health, happiness, and future secured by a reliable and adaptable system of care.

2.6 Policies and legislations guiding foster care globally, regionally, and services in South Africa

2.6.1 The Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

The United Nations established the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, and it was a seminal piece of law that supported the concepts of foster care across the world. According to Tobin (2019:45), the CRC gives a legally enforceable list of children's rights, including the right to life, the right to development, and the right to be free from violence, abuse, and neglect. The child's right to have their voice heard in matters affecting them was underlined, and the best interests of the child were given a top priority.

The cultural, economic, and political contexts in which these ideas work make it difficult to grasp and apply them, as pointed out by Alston and Tobin (2019:567). The phrase "best interests of the child" can be construed in a number of ways, including the parent's attitude toward the child and the child's personal relationship with the parents or foster parent. The capability of the legal system to accept such rules, as well as community norms and practices, determines whether children can be heard in matters that directly impact them. The CRC provides an essential framework for child rights and foster care when evaluating these points of view. However, the difficulties of implementation it had in the real world were linked to its influence. As a result, it was the responsibility of the governments and policymakers to interpret and apply the CRC in a manner that upholds the convention's principles while considering the socio-cultural realities of their respective communities.

2.6.2 The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1979

A regional, culturally considerate answer to child welfare is the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Polonko, Lombardo, and Bolling (2016:789) emphasised that the ACRWC was an addition to the CRC, which focused on the issues relevant to the African context, such as child labour, military recruitment, and detrimental social practices. Farran (2021:456) further pointed out that in keeping with societal norms in Africa, the ACRWC places an even greater focus on the roles that families and communities played in raising children.

Isaacs and Triggs (2018:234) disputed this optimistic viewpoint, claiming that the ACRWC runs the risk of normalising harmful traditional practices despite being culturally sensitive. Due to resource limitations and socio-political unrest in several African nations, ACRWC also confronts implementation difficulties. This led one to the conclusion that the ACRWC offered an essential regional viewpoint on child welfare. However, it must be carefully handled to stop the continuation of unfavourable practises and successfully deal with implementation issues.

2.6.3 The White Paper for Social Welfare 1997

The South African foster care system was significantly impacted by the White Paper on Social Welfare (1997). It detailed the government's post-apartheid goal for a transformed, integrated social service delivery system (Farran, 2021:87). According to Polonko, Lombardo and Bolling (2016:78), the policy placed a high emphasis on

community-based, preventative, and developmental welfare services which had a direct impact on the country's foster care policies and practises. Despite its revolutionary intent, implementation has been slow and unequal due to a lack of resources and coordination, as argued by Isaacs and Triggs (2018:567).

According to Martin, Hall, and Lake (2016:114), the goal of the White Paper on Social Welfare was to enhance social welfare procedures, addressing people's needs and enabling them to fully engage in social, economic, and political life, as well as guaranteeing that everyone had equal access to welfare programs that advance national development. Furthermore, as noted by Rade and Naidoo (2018:2), the White Paper for Social Welfare placed a strong emphasis on the variety of family structures and offered families support and service delivery to help them care for their loved ones appropriately. It can be concluded that the White Paper for Social Welfare was created to enhance people's social welfare and guarantee their active involvement in socioeconomic advancements.

2.6.4 National Child Care and Protection Policy

The National Childcare and Protection Policy (NCCPP) in South Africa is dedicated to the safety and well-being of children. According to O'Reilly (2021:190), the NCCPP played a key role in the court system's change from punitive to restorative approaches to dealing with juvenile offenders. Jamieson, Sambu, and Mathews (2017:16) mentioned that while the NCCPP has the potential to make a positive influence, it falls short due to inadequate inter-sectoral coordination and a lack of committed resources. According to Schmid and Patel (2016:296), the majority of child welfare services were directed to white children, although other population groups were served. However, the services tended to be inadequate, and children who were needy, neglected, and in need of care and protection were placed in foster care. In addition, the Sustainable Development Goal recognises the economic and social development which depends on realising the children's rights, family care, social security, protection, and education. This involves providing the required services to ensure that those who need them can access them (Martin, Hall & Lake, 2016:113).

2.6.5 Children's Act 38 of 2005

South Africa's landmark Children's Act 38 of 2005 was a game changer for the protection of children's rights (Im & Kim, 2020:456). Equally important was the legal

foundation for foster care that was established by this Act. The Act is lauded by Tobin (2004:987) because it acknowledges a wide range of childcare and protection services. Polonko, Lombardo, and Bolling (2016:56) indicated that the Act was not always effectively implemented due to budgetary constraints and bureaucratic inefficiencies, placing children at danger. Even though the Children's Act 38 of 2005 was a great piece of legislation for children, our research showed how critical it was to keep pushing for proper implementation.

The importance of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 was that it ensured the child's safety and well-being, it simply stipulated that the child be placed in foster care with a court order whereby the child was placed with a non-family member or a family relative who was not the child's parent (Gudula-Koyana & Khanye, 2019:4). The children's Act also determined the duration of the placement because foster care placement was not a permanent placement, after two years the placement was reviewed to monitor whether the placement was still effective for the child or not.

2.6.6 Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004

Distribution of social contributions or assistance in South Africa is governed by the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004 (2004:456). The Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004 has been important in lowering poverty and enhancing the welfare of foster children, according to Farran (2021:897). The Social Assistance Act was criticised by Isaacs and Triggs (2018:678) for its severe means-testing, which excludes children from low-income parents. The social assistance grant was initiated to assist foster children who were removed from their families and placed in alternative care, and it forms part of the child protection system, as these children are in need of care and protection. The purpose of this grant was to support foster children's social, academic, and nutritional needs in order to safeguard their future (Hendricks, 2020:42).

2.6.7 National Plan of Action for Children 2012

The National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC) was an all-inclusive plan that combined the government's obligation towards children's rights in the country, to ensure the promotion and protection of their rights. According to Harrison (2017:47), the NPAC was developed with the idea that, as a country, all departments work together to ensure the children's safety and support. The NPAC ensures that the children are healthy, educated, and happy. It also sought the full involvement in

matters that affected them. In addition, the NPAC, according to Harris and Phatudi (2017:203), was developed to realise the children's rights and implement them through the legislative frameworks, policies, strategies, and programmes. All government departments were supposed to cooperate and work together. The well-being of children is very important in South Africa to raise their living standards. For instance, to promote the children's lives, to provide quality education, and to protect the children against abuse and any form of violence.

2.6.8 National Development Plan 2012

The National Development Plan (NDP) in South Africa views families broadly and acknowledges that families are different, for example, single-headed families, child-headed families, and foster care placement. The NDP sees the family as building social cohesion and tolerance in society, whereby a supportive and safe environment is provided (Martin, Hall and Lake, 2016:114). Furthermore, Cumming, Shackleton, Foster, Dini, Khan, Gumula, and Kubiszewski (2017:255) described the NDP as support services to families, and these support services included proper health care, water, sanitation, housing, household food security, and creating a safer environment for all to decrease poverty and inequality. The plan aimed at ensuring that foster children and their families were provided with services and that they function well within their community. The NDP additionally ensured that the foster children's basic needs were also taken into consideration to promote their well-being.

2.6.9 White Paper on Families 2021

The white paper on families in South Africa focused on the family's functioning as a key development that sought to secure the government support to families and contributed effectively to the country's development (Rade and Naidoo, 2018:4). Martin, Hall and Lake (2016:114) stated that the effectiveness of the execution of the White Paper on Families involved different government departments such as the Social Development, Health, Basic Education, Trade and industry as well as International Relations. The purpose of such collaborations is to enable families to provide a loving, supportive, and safe environment with non-racialism, non-sexism, and high-level partnership between government and the private sector. The White Paper on Families ensured that most of the different departments worked together to deliver services to families, ensured the proper placement of foster children, ensured

secured future and good health. A supportive and safe environment is of paramount importance so that each family is able to function.

2.7 The challenges and issues inherent within the foster care system in South Africa

The lack of accessible and qualified foster parents, which is a substantial barrier in the foster care system due to strict standards and red tape, is worsened (Pretorius, 2017:243). Potential carers may be put off by the demanding and lengthy process of becoming a foster parent as well as the difficulty of the position itself (Goemans, Breda & Kessi, 2020:90). Pretorius (2017:245) emphasised that the system frequently overlooked the more general socioeconomic realities in South Africa, such as high unemployment rates and economic inequality, which deter potential foster parents. Related foster parents depended on the assistance to care for these children because they were mainly unemployed. The socioeconomic status influences how foster children will be provided with proper care.

Lack of sufficient resources and support for foster parents and foster children in their care is another major issue (Palmieri & La Salle, 2016:987). The foster parents' capability to care for foster children may be hampered by this lack of financial and psycho-social support, which results in negative outcomes for the children's behavioural issues, poor academic performance, and mental health issues (Goemans, van Geel, & Vedder, 2015:502). Considering these concerns, the researcher's analysis revealed an obvious requirement for legislative changes to address the major obstacles to becoming a foster parent and to strengthen support systems. These reforms were necessary to expand the foster care system in South Africa and fulfil its mission of providing safe and loving homes for children in crisis.

2.8 The social support structures available for foster care families

When proper resources are made available to foster care families, the system may be an effective way of child protection. Financial support was available in the form of a monthly Foster Care Grant (FCG) from the South African government for families caring for children in foster care (Department of Social Development, 2018:11). The resource has been criticised for being insufficient considering the rising expenses of living and more complicated care needs, as Jamieson, Sambu, and Mathews (2017:789) pointed out.

Some programmes gave psychological and social help in addition to financial aid, such as the 'Training and Resources in Early Education' (TREE), its purposes was to equip carers with the knowledge and tools they needed to support foster children through any emotional or behavioural challenges they encountered (Du Toit, Van der Westhuzen & Alpaslan, 2016:345). However, given the specific dynamics of fostering, Coetzee and Greyling (2019:77) stressed the need for more individualised support. This support is particularly needed in the areas of managing the bond between biological and foster care families and addressing possible attachment difficulties and trauma histories in foster children.

Since this was the case, the findings suggested a more comprehensive approach to foster care as necessary. Help on many fronts is essential and includes monetarily, instructionally, psychologically, and socially. In South Africa, foster care is complex; services must be adapted to each family's requirements and situation.

2.9 The effect of foster care on the psychological and emotional well-being of children

Foster care and its effects on children's mental health are complex and complicated. It has been found that it was possible for children who were fostered to have behavioural and emotional issues more than children who were not (Smees, Rinaldi & Simner, 2020:123). In addition, foster children who end up in foster care placement lack trust, and sometimes they disregard other people's feelings. These children tend to be disrespectful, and some struggle with their emotional disturbances (Kelly, 2015:155). However, this should not be used to decrease the potential advantages of a safe and loving foster care home.

A qualitative study by Sebola and Thamuku (2018:44) paints a more complex picture, revealing that children in foster care frequently had feelings of rejection and displacement at first. However, with the existence of supportive, stable relationships and counselling services, those feelings faded over time. The quality of the foster care placement was an important aspect, with higher results associated with placements that were stable, longer lasting, and where the foster parent was experienced and helpful (Smees, Rinaldi & Simner, 2020:123).

The role of therapeutic interventions in the South African setting has not been adequately investigated, and more research is needed to understand how therapy

programmes targeted to foster children's needs improve their emotional and psychological well-being. While foster care poses obstacles to children's emotional and psychological well-being, the correct support systems can assist in reducing these issues. The value of solid caring relationships cannot be overstated, and foster care regulations and support services needed to reflect this in South Africa.

2.10 Comparative studies on how the South African foster care system is functioning relative to other global models

Comparative studies shed important light on how South Africa's foster care system functions in a global context. The foster care systems in several nations including the US, England, Norway, and South Africa, were compared in one study by Berrick, Dickens, Poso and Skivenes (2015:26). The study discovered that while the US and South Africa shared a family preservation strategy, their resource allocation was noticeably different (Berrick, Dickens, Poso & Skivenes, 2015:26). In contrast to the US, which had a more organised and well-funded system, South Africa's overburdened system found it difficult to keep up with the high demand for foster care and limited resources.

The European models, particularly the Norwegian model, differed greatly from the South African system. According to Skivenes and Thoburn (2016:384) it was discovered that Norway focuses mainly on early intervention and family support programmes to prevent child removal wherever possible, but it was vital to remember that these systems were based on quite distinct socioeconomic environments. In addition, Drennan (2017:345) presented a cautionary viewpoint, stating that South Africa may not benefit most from adopting Western models in full. They demanded a more in-depth comprehension of the local situation, considering elements like the prevalence of kinship care and cultural customs that might not be as common in Western contexts.

Thus, it was important to take historical, cultural, and socioeconomic variables into account when assessing how the South African foster care system is performing. Although there were lessons to be learned from other countries' foster care systems, a custom model that takes into account the particular circumstances of South Africa was crucial.

2.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, there was a comprehensive picture of the South African foster care system because of this literature review. The complexities of many foster care models, the rules that regulated them, and the inherent obstacles that they encountered demonstrated the diverse character of foster care. This review was significant for emphasising the systemic consequences of foster care which extended beyond immediate care provision to larger dimensions of children's well-being. The Ecological Systems Theory provides a strong opinion or view through which to interpret the findings and their consequences. It identifies knowledge gaps in the current literature and explains the need for this study. It emphasises the significance of using a comprehensive and integrated approach to understanding and improving foster care, a viewpoint that guide the ensuing research process.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focused on the theoretical framework(s) as it was very important for the researcher when conducting the study. It connects the researcher to the existing knowledge on the experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement in Sedibeng District Municipality. Crotty (2012:39) defined theory as an analytical and interpretive framework that helps the researcher to make sense of what is going on in the social setting being studied. It is useful in the sense that one tells an enlightening story about some phenomenon (Crotty, 2012:39). In addition, it is a story that gives new insights and broadens understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, it can be defined as any empirical theory of social process at a variety of levels to be applied to the understanding of phenomena.

Anfara and Norma (2015:47) stated that theories in social science research exist at a variety of levels, and the most common levels are individual theories, organisational theories, group theories, and social theories. Individual theories focused on the individual's development, cognitive behaviour, personality, learning and interpersonal interactions (Anfara & Norma, 2015:47). Organisational theories focused on institutions, organisational structures and functions and effectiveness or excellence in organisational performance (Anfara & Norma, 2015:47). In addition, group theories deal with family issues, work teams and interpersonal networks (Anfara & Norma, 2015:47). Social theories focus on group behaviour, cultural institutions, urban development, and marketplace functions (Anfara & Norma, 2015:57). To steer this study, the Social Support Theory as well as the Ecological System Theory were adopted by the researcher. The two theoretical frameworks assist the researcher in exploring the experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement. Understanding and integrating Social Support and Ecological Systems Theory provided a comprehensive framework for addressing individual, group, and community needs. By recognising the interconnected and multi-layered influences on development, more effective support systems that promote holistic well-being and resilience of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement in Sedibeng District Municipality. This integrated approach is essential for fostering sustainable growth and enabling individuals to thrive within their environments.

3.2 Social Support Theory

The term social network or support refers to the web of social relationships that surround the individual, and this is one of the most important functions of social relationships as it is the linkage between people that may provide social support (Cohen & Syme, 2013:4). Heaney and Barbara (2018:190), stated that social support theory is defined as the resources provided by other persons, and the support may have positive as well as negative effects on health and well-being (this may include physical, mental, and social well-being). Social support theory, therefore, refers to an exchange between two individuals with the intention of enhancing their well-being.

The significance of social support may vary throughout the life cycle of the participants, as there are different types and functions of social support at different periods in life. For example, during childhood and adulthood, as well as the changing roles of family, friends, spouse, and children at different points in the life cycle. Heaney and Barbara (2018:190-192) stated that social support can be provided by many types of people, both in informal and formal settings. Informal settings include family, friends, and neighbours, whereas formal settings include health professionals, social workers, and teachers. The effectiveness of social support provided may depend on the source of support, whether short-term or long-term. Social support and how it is communicated are important, and it matters because it is the cornerstone for the quality of human life, supportive interactions, and the presence of supportive relationships in people's lives. Social support has been shown to play a major role in physical and emotional well-being. It enables people to manage the uncertainty associated with stress and to increase a sense of personal control over the environment. It is therefore critical that people experience supportive communication in everyday life (Heaney & Barbara, 2018:193).

As highlighted by Heaney and Barbara (2018:191), social support is the functional content of relationships that can be categorised into the following behaviours or acts: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support.

- **Emotional support**

Emotional support involves the provision of empathy, love, trust, and care. Everyone faces stress at some point when faced with certain situations and needs coping strategies. This is a conscious effort to solve a personal or interpersonal problem that

will help in overcoming or tolerating the situation at hand (Meysen & Kelly, 2017:227). Emotion-focused coping strategy addresses the emotional needs of an individual and it is centered around comfort (Heaney & Barbara, 2018:190). When stressful situations are not feasible, it reduces the negative emotional response that the foster parent feels because of their current situation. Instead of doing something drastic since the circumstances could not be changed, people would rather talk to others or engage in activities that shifted their minds. For example, foster parents let off the steam by venting to friends and other family members, keep themselves busy to keep their minds off the stressor, and do something like sports to distract attention from the situation.

- **Instrumental support**

Instrumental support involves the provision of tangible aid and services that directly assist a person in need (Heaney & Barbara, 2018:191). A foster child grant is provided to foster parents so that they can provide proper care to the financial needs of related foster children. However, some of the foster parents seemed to be misusing the grant for their own needs and not what it was meant for. Some foster parents were grateful to the government for this kind of social assistance because it helped them a lot in meeting all the necessary needs of the foster children (Heaney & Barbara, 2018:191). The foster parents also highlighted that had it not been for the grant, they would have been unable to properly provide care because some of them were unemployed.

- **Informational support**

Informational support is the provision of advice, suggestions, and information that a person uses to address problems (Heaney & Barbara, 2018:191). Foster parents are faced with many challenges, such as related foster children who are aggressive, delinquent, struggle with emotional disturbance, have special learning needs, and development delays. For foster parents to deal with all these challenges, they seek encouragement, moral support, sympathy, and understanding from others, especially from professionals like social workers, teachers, and psychologists. Foster parents did this simply because they wanted what is best for related foster children (Meysen & Kelly, 2017:225).

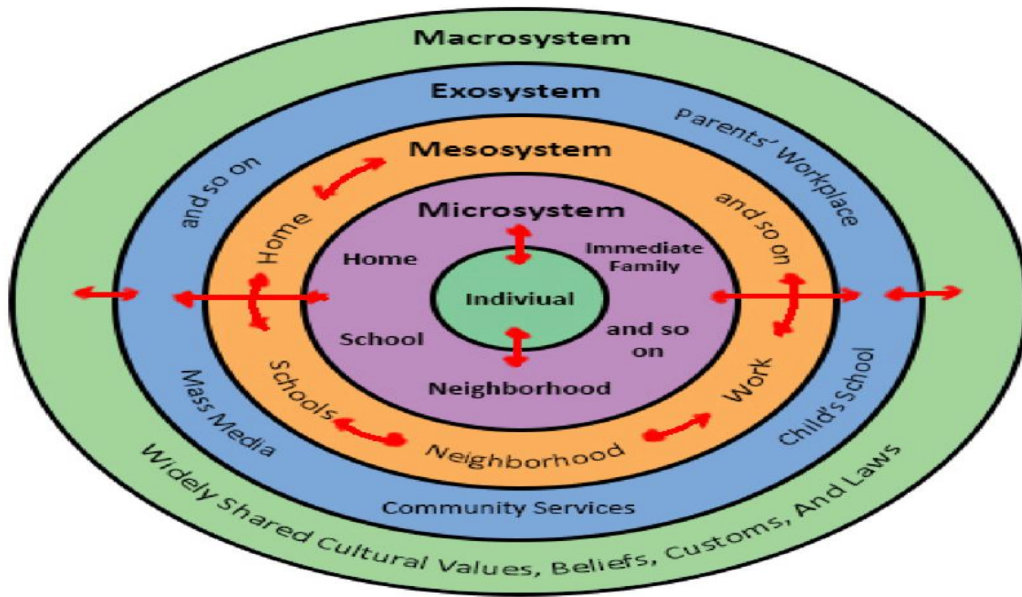
- **Appraisal support**

Appraisal support implies the provision of information that is useful for self-evaluation, constructive feedback, and affirmation (Heaney & Barbara, 2018:191). As revealed, the foster children's behavioural problems affected the well-being of foster parents, and it also created tension within their families. Managing this behaviour was tiring, stressful, and led to foster parents having anxiety and feeling depressed as they wanted what was best for these children. Also, foster parents sometimes lacked the confidence to perform the role successfully, because of the fear of dealing with challenging behavior and the perceived financial difficulties arising from caring for foster children (Kelly & Salmon, 2014:225).

According to Social Support Theory, human relationships are important for building resilience, overcoming adversity, and enhancing well-being in a variety of settings and cultural contexts. In this study, Social Support Theory helps the researcher to understand how foster parents build their resilience, overcoming challenges of raising foster children and strengthening wellbeing in a number of settings, including the cultural contexts.

3.3 Ecological System Theory

The Ecological Systems Theory also serves as the foundation for this study. This theory was first put forth by O'Reilly (2021:53), and it provides a thorough analysis of the interconnection of the child's environment on all scales from micro system to macro system. Ecological Systems Theory emphasises that children are not isolated individuals but rather exist within a complex system of interactions that have an impact on their development in the area of child development and welfare (Im & Kim, 2020:56). Figure 1 below shows how connected the child is with the environment and how they interact.



The following are the various environmental layers that affected how the child develops, as outlined by Peron (2017:199-201) and Crawford (2020:2-3):

- **Microsystem**

Microsystems are the factors within the immediate environment of the child and have an impact on them, such as people and events at home. When growing up, children are influenced by caregivers (foster parents) and the environment they are in, which most likely shape their future (Peron, 2017:199). The microsystem is also defined by Crawford (2020: 2) as activities and interpersonal relations, which include the individual's personality and beliefs; it also includes people they are in contact with daily, like family. It is a process that influences the psychological development and behavioural changes for children, and this system may be schools, day care centres, and the immediate family.

- **Mesosystem**

Mesosystem refers to the interconnections between the child, family, teachers, and peers, and it also fosters development due to its influence (Peron, 2017:200). According to Crawford (2020:3), the mesosystem is a system of microsystems, meaning it is the linkage between different microsystems, such as when the child's home interacts with his/her school. In this study, the mesosystem includes the foster parents, the school, the learners, as well as the teachers. These interactions influenced the child's development and growth.

- **Exosystem**

Exosystem are the factors between the child's experiences at home that may be influenced by their parent's experiences at work and that had an indirect impact on child's life (Peron, 2017:200). An individual is not the center of this system, the workplace of a parent may influence the child if a parent is required to work longer hours or come home stressed from work. Due to the child not being part of the workplace, the workplace cannot be part of his/her micro or mesosystem; hence, an exosystem at this level where the neighbourhood, mass media, child's school, and parents' workplace were the influential factors (Crawford, 2020:3).

- **Macrosystem**

Macrosystem includes the larger societal factors such as cultural values, laws, customs, and resources to the child's development (Peron, 2017:201). Furthermore, Crawford (2020:2) defined macrosystem as the overall cultural elements and societal structure. The manner in which the family's culture develops is influenced by the mesosystem and exosystem factors. For instance, because of school and socialisation within the microsystem and mesosystem, the child may speak other languages, unlike their parents. However, this depends on the situation, the time, and the place where the child found him/herself.

3.4 Conclusion

The above highlights the importance of Social Support Theory, its interventions, and the Ecological Systems Theory. Enhancing existing social network linkages, developing new social network linkages, enhancing networks using indigenous natural helpers, and enhancing networks at the community level through participatory problem-solving processes (Heaney & Barbara, 2018:199–203). It can be concluded that several foster parents had the best interest of the foster children at heart, and the aim is not to hurt or make foster children feel uncomfortable, such as not welcoming them at home. It should always be kept in mind that things change at home once another member is added (foster child), and the change at home comes with many challenges. This approach becomes effective in ensuring the well-being of everyone in the household. Utilising Social Support Theory permits a focused analysis on how support systems assisted foster parents, helping to identify areas for strengthening

support networks. Ecological Systems Theory provides a broad, systemic view of the influences on foster parents and children, taking into account multiple contexts and their interactions. Together, these theories offered a robust framework for understanding the complexities and needs of foster parents in related foster care placements, ultimately guiding better support mechanisms and policy interventions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four focuses on the research methodology that the researcher used. As alluded to by Mishra and Alok (2017:1), research methodology provides the research design, guidance, and direction that the researcher followed when conducting the study. In addition, Hignett and McDermott (2015:120) described the research methodology as a specific research approach, meaning that it is an approach that studies the research topic. Furthermore, it includes all the techniques and methods which were taken for conducting the research study. The research methodology helps the researcher to structure the way the proposed topic will be studied, how the researcher intends to carry out the research, as it is a logical and systematic approach to resolve a research problem, and to keep track to ensure the process is smooth, effective, and manageable.

4.2 Research approach

The research approach is the procedure that the researcher undertakes when conducting the research and gathering more relevant information, as well as understanding of the research study (Bryman, 2016:3). Trainor and Graue (2013:12) described the research approach as the method that seeks to understand the phenomena and the meaning or interpretation of the concepts that are being studied. The research approach that will be used incorporates the relationship between the researcher and the participants by understanding the findings of the dynamic realities encountered as they are observed.

There was a variety of research approaches that could be used by the researcher, namely, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research approaches. However, for the purpose of this research study, the researcher used the qualitative research approach. A qualitative research approach, according to Fruhauf, Hardy, Pfoestl, Hoellen, and Kopp (2017:11), was associated with words, sounds, feelings, emotions, and other elements. This approach aims to ensure the level of understanding of the data collected through interviews, questionnaires with open-ended questions, observations, or case studies to examine issues/or problems in detail. In addition, Hignett and McDermott (2015:119) stated that a qualitative approach was used to lead and support human factors. Furthermore, it is also concerned with the understanding

of meaning and how participants make sense of their own world and their different experiences. In conclusion, the qualitative approach focuses on the use of words and pictures; no numerical data or statistical analysis was used.

Qualitative research approach was conducted in a natural setting and involved a process of building a complex and holistic picture of the phenomenon of interest (Trainor & Graue, 2013:12). The effectiveness of the qualitative research approach depended on the area of the research and the nature of the research aims and objectives. Its goal was to understand a social or human problem from multiple perspectives, as it involved looking at non-numerical data, and it was more naturalistic (Mishra & Alok, 2017:3).

The following are the characteristics of the qualitative research approach as highlighted by Cypress (2015:356-357):

- “Qualitative research methodology contributes to the growing discipline to uncover the nature of the person’s experiences in context-specific conditions. Data is collected face-to-face where participants share their experiences and should be conducted in a way that does not disturb the natural setting.
- It enables the researcher to study social and cultural phenomena and contributes to the social sciences. It is used to explore, describe, and understand what lies behind any phenomenon.
- It is an inductive approach for discovering or expanding knowledge and includes the researcher’s involvement in the identification of the meaning or relevance of a particular phenomenon to the individual.
- It is useful for exploring facts and developing concepts about an area of interest that has received little research attention. The researcher does not rely on a single source. Hence, interviews, observation, and examining documents are used to collect data.

By utilising the qualitative research approach, the researcher will be provided with the opportunity to question participants and listen to their responses while the study is being conducted. The foster parents will be able to share their different experiences about raising related foster children.

4.3 Research paradigm

A research paradigm is an approach or a pattern to conduct the research. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51) stated that it is a theoretical framework or understanding within which theories operate. It is a process of creating a blueprint or design of research. Furthermore, Rahi (2017:1) defined research paradigm as a research model in conducting the research that has been verified and has been in practice; it is a set of agreements about how the phenomena was understood and viewed by researchers. The interpretivism/constructivist paradigm was used in this study.

- **Interpretivism/constructivist paradigm**

This paradigm believes that human behavior was complex and could not be pre-defined by probabilistic models, it depended on situations, and it was determined by environmental factors (Rahi, 2017:2). This meant that this paradigm believed in studying human behavior in daily life rather than in the controlled environment because human behavior was affected by various factors (Rahi, 2017:2). Furthermore, Rehman and Alharthi (2016:55) indicated that interpretivism approach was subjective by nature and that truth and reality were created and not discovered. This means that the researcher interacted with the participants to understand their interpretations about the social phenomena they are interested in. As already mentioned above, the interpretivism approach was chosen for this study because the researcher received information directly from the participants, due to their experiences. The researcher then viewed the data collected from the participants' point of view and understood what they were going through daily.

4.4 Research design

Pandey and Pandey (2021:18) defined a research design as the framework that provides the study with the structure and direction of how all aspects of the research address the research question and how data will be collected and analysed. Therefore, having a research design as the researcher was very important for the question to be answered. In addition, Ranjit (2020:129) defined research design as the plan that guides the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing the needed information. This plan aims to generalise the findings of the sample of the population. The following are the purposes of the research design as outlined by Pandey and Pandey (2021:18-20):

- To minimise the expenditure (the research will be as effective as possible by providing maximum information with minimum spending of effort, money, and time).
- To facilitate smooth scaling (by providing the smooth scaling of various research operations, the research became efficient, reaching maximum information while minimising costs).
- To collect the relevant data and techniques (poor planning sabotages the entire research; research design required planning for relevant techniques to be utilised when collecting data).
- To provide direction (the research design provides the direction of the process as the researcher studies available literature and gathers new alternative approaches for the study).

This study explores the experiences of foster parents looking after related foster children, and thus the following types of research designs will be adopted by the researcher.

4.4.1. Explorative research design

Exploratory research design was described as an important part of any marketing or business strategy, and the focus was to discover insights as opposed to collecting statistically accurate data (Swedberg, 2020:18). The aim was to discover something new and interesting. In addition, an exploratory research design can be used to explore a topic that has not been researched before. An already existing topic is explored in order to produce new ideas and hypotheses (Ponelis, 2015:539). There were many different experiences that foster parents went through, and by using exploratory design, the researcher gained new hypotheses of the researched study from the foster parents' perspectives, so that more can be learned on the topic, as the situations and challenges are not the same.

4.4.2 Descriptive research design

Nassaji (2015:129) described descriptive research design as a pre-planned and structured design so that the information collected can be statistically inferred on the population. The survey is considered conclusive in nature due to its qualitative nature. Furthermore, Armowardoyo (2018:198) indicated that the goal of descriptive research

design is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. It is used to describe the existing phenomena as accurately as possible. In addition, it is more concerned with what has happened rather than how it happened. The participants were allowed to describe their experiences and challenges of raising related foster children, and the researcher was provided with more understanding of the phenomenon.

4.4.3 Contextual research design

Contextual research design is different in its attempt to explain the cause and the effect of the relationship between variables. To understand and determine the nature of the variables and the effect to be predicted, the participant's perceptions in this regard were very important because this was a user-centered design process (Holtzblatt & Beyer, 2014:1-2). Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017:111), on the other hand, described contextual research design as a step-by-step process for collecting participants' data. This design adds techniques to analyse data and provides contextual understanding of the participants in their own context. As it is the core of contextual research design, the researcher utilised that understanding and developed deep insight into the participants' lives and applied that information to the study. The foster parents were in their own setting when data was collected.

4.5 Research methods

Research methods, as described by Atmowardoyo (2018:197), are systematic procedures or tools that the researcher uses for the research study and to collect data. According to Patten and Newhart (2018:4), a research method is defined as a building block of the scientific enterprise, and they are used for building systematic knowledge and directed to prove a hypothesis. In this study, information has been collected from the foster parents who are raising related foster children. The experiences of foster parents added to the existing knowledge, and the researcher proved a theory relating to the topic.

Under the research methods, the following will be defined: study population, sampling, and sampling techniques.

4.5.1 Research population

The study population refers to the participants that the researcher is interested in when conducting the research. In any research, it is important to investigate the problem in the whole population. However, that was not possible due to a lack of time and funding, hence sampling was used to represent the entire population. Pandey and Pandey (2021:41) described the study population as a well-defined collection of individuals known to have similar characteristics. Furthermore, Majid (2018:3) defined the study population as a group of individuals who share a common characteristic that the researcher intends to study. In this study, the population referred to the foster parents who are raising related foster children. This group has been studied to get their views on the experiences and challenges they face in caring for related foster children.

When the researcher chooses the population, it should be related to the research question so that the population yields the anticipated results. This study has been conducted with the foster parents raising related foster children in Sedibeng District Municipality, located in Evaton and Sebokeng. Since the researcher could not include the entire population, a sample was drawn from the population.

4.5.2 Sampling

Sampling refers to the method of selecting representatives of the population, and it makes the research study more accurate (Parveen & Showkat, 2017:3). Whereas Thompson (2012:2) indicated that sampling refers to the subset of the population to be used as intended by the researcher. The sample for this study was the foster parents raising related foster children.

4.5.2.1 Sampling methods

In this study, the researcher drew purposive sampling from non-probability sampling to understand the experiences of foster parents raising related foster children. Purposive sampling was regarded as the most used method, and the researcher used her judgment when selecting participants (Parveen & Showkat, 2017:8). In addition, the participants were selected for a particular purpose, and they matched the characteristics of the research problem that was studied. According to Campbell, Greenwood, and Prior (2020:659), the researcher chose the participants relying on /her judgement, keeping in mind that the purpose of the study and the sampling

process ends when the total number of participants was reached. This is referred to as data saturation. Purposive sampling is one of the types of non-probability sampling.

Non-probability sampling refers to the utilisation of non-randomised methods to draw the sample, and it involves judgement, unlike probability sampling, where participants are selected because they are easily accessible (Parveen & Showkat, 2017:7). This method is considered less expensive and complicated. The researcher engaged with the Gauteng Department of Social Development (DSD) for data gathering, and the DSD Head of Department granted permission for the researcher to conduct the study. Therefore, DSD played a critical role in ensuring that data was collected from the foster parents. The researcher requested a list of foster parents within the database of the DSD and then made contact with the foster parents who were willing and interested in being part of the study.

The researcher used the following inclusion criteria to collect data

- All interested foster parents between the ages of 25 and 60.
- All foster parents who were willing to be part of the study.
- Foster parents caring for related foster children.
- Foster parents residing within the Evaton and Sebokeng Townships.

Below is the exclusion criterion

- All foster parents were below the age of 25 and those above the age of 60.
- Foster parents who were looking for children within a temporary safe care.
- Foster parents raising non-related foster children.
- Foster parents not residing within the Evaton and Sebokeng Townships.

4.6 Data collection

Data collection is a process of collecting information and finding answers to the research problem (Atmowardoyo, 2018:197). The information was carefully read to identify the research method that was used; this procedure was a comprehensive plan for collecting information (Atmowardoyo, 2018:197). Data collection methods can be divided into primary and secondary methods of data collection. The primary data collection method is the type of data collection that has not been around; it is unique and requires more time and effort to conduct the research (Nayak & Singh, 2021:61-

65). The secondary data collection, on the other hand, is the type of data that has been published in books, journals, and online (Nayak & Singh, 2021:61-65). It is always available, and because it does not require more time, this method offers a range of advantages such as saving time, effort, and expenses (Nayak & Singh, 2021:61-65).

4.6.1 Preparation for data collection

Preparation for data collection entails the workflow of gathering data from start to finish through interviews, and spending time on the preparation led to better quality of data (Zina, 2021:11). Furthermore, the process of preparing for data collection involves clear guidelines and protocols for primary data collection, either using surveys or interviews. The researcher follows those protocols before starting with the process of collecting data, which also involves the institutional review board, whereby the board either approves or disapproves the process of collecting data before it can even start (Taherdoost, 2021:21).

In preparing for data collection, the focus will be on coordinating with other stakeholders, being specific, and contracting. The researcher had to coordinate with the Scientific Review Committee to accept the proposal before collecting data, and the College Research Ethics Committee for the researcher to obtain the ethics clearance certificate. The permission to collect data from beneficiaries was granted by the Deputy Director in the Research Unit of the DSD. The purpose and aim of conducting the study were explained, which was to get the experiences of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement. Due to the fact that the researcher was collecting data alone, there was no need to train other people. The researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the interview and that the session would be audio recorded. A consent form was completed and signed by the participants. The participants were also informed that they had every right to withdraw from the interview at any time if they did not wish to continue.

4.6.2 Methods of data collection

Igwenagu (2016:4) stated that the researcher requires many tools and techniques when gathering or collecting data, and these tools vary in interpretation, design, and administration. In addition, methods of data collection were all suitable for the collection of a specific study or information. The following are the techniques or tools

that the researcher make use of: interviews, schedules, observation and techniques, rating scales, and listening.

- **Interviews**

An interview is a two-way method where information and ideas are exchanged, and it is a fundamental process of social interaction (Rinjit, 2020:144). Ritchie, Lewis, Nocholls, and Ormston (2013:55) further explained that the interview created a social situation between two people by which a person enters the inner life of a stranger. During the interview, a rapport was established between the interviewer and the interviewee, where they were both on the same level in a manner that the physical, social, and cultural barriers were removed, and there was an emotional attachment between them. The interviewer probes into causal factors to discover the origin of the research problem, and deals with delicate, confidential, and even intimate topics (Igwenagu, 2016:9).

- **Schedules**

Rinjit (2020:145) described a schedule as a set of questionnaires for interview purposes used by the researcher. These questions were asked and filed by the interviewer in a face-to-face situation. In addition, Jun-yan (2012:1843) also described a schedule as a list of questions formulated with the specific purpose of obtaining answers or information. The author further stated that the success of using a schedule is determined by the ability of the interviewer rather than the quality of the questions posed. It is also regarded as a risk analysis method to incorporate vagueness.

- **Observation and techniques**

According to Rahma, Rizkiyani, and Kurniasih (2017:440), observation determines what people think and do by watching them as they express themselves in various situations and activities. It was based on the visual observation whereby the behaviour of the next person was observed in a natural situation, and the social institutions were evaluated. According to Rinjit (2020:128), observation is the most direct means of studying people when the researcher is interested in their behaviour. It was recognised as a natural way of gathering information; in this case, the researcher watched and listened to an interaction as it took place.

- **Listening**

Listening to the participants as an interviewer was very important. Active listening requires the interviewer not to be passive but to listen and understand responses and note relevant information. Igwenagu (2016:4) stated that active listening allows the researcher to ask questions during the interview, rephrasing what was said and reflecting by using phrases and capturing key words when the participants answer.

There were three main instruments that were used for data collection, namely, structured, semi-structured, and focus group interviews. However, for this study, the researcher utilises a semi-structured interview, also known as an in-depth or open-ended interview. According to Raworth, Sweetman, Narayah, Rowlands, and Hopkins (2012:1), semi-structured interviews focused on specific themes through a conversation, and often the best way to learn about the phenomena and the motivation behind people's choices or behaviour. Furthermore, Paine (2015:474) described a semi-structured interview as a way of providing valuable information that was not anticipated by the researcher. This valuable information includes the participant's attitudes, beliefs, and the impact on their lives. The semi-structured interview allows both direct and indirect questioning. The researcher chose a semi-structured interview to get a clear understanding of the foster parents' experiences, their emotions, the financial impacts, and life in general, which was only achieved effectively through having a detailed conversation.

4.7 Pilot testing

A pilot study refers to a small scale of participants who were gathered to take part in a study, and that scale allows the researcher to analyse the feasibility before performing the main study (In, 2017:601). Doody and Doody (2015:1074) described a pilot study as the first step of the entire study, and it was often a smaller population; this assisted in planning the main study as it contributed valuable information. The researcher will be able to assess the success of the study to determine if there might be any challenges and if anything needs to be changed before a larger scale of participants is recruited. Two participants were interviewed from Evaton and Sebokeng before the main study; the same approach was utilised for the main study to collect the data. It was very important for the researcher to conduct the pilot study to allow necessary

changes to be made, to be certain that the tools used were correct and that they would be effective for the main study.

4.8 Method of data analysis

Data analysis is the process that involves engaging and recording information or data provided to gain an understanding of the phenomenon (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2018:14). The manner in which data is stored, organised, and processed affects analysis. Furthermore, Krishmankutty, Bellary, Kumar, and Moodahadu (2012:168) defined data management as the practice of collecting, keeping, and using data securely and cost-effectively. The goal of data management is to help researchers use data within the bounds of policy and regulation so that the decision was made to benefit the study. It was very important for the researcher to keep records and other information safe to protect the participants. Data should be kept confidential and not disclosed to anyone; this ensures that ethical considerations like privacy and confidentiality are adhered to.

In this study, data have been analysed using the thematic analysis method. This method, according to (Hignett & McDermott, 2015:123), is used as the realist method to report experiences, the meaning, the reality of the participants, as well as the way events occurred. This allowed the researcher to organise and identify themes to populate answers to the research question. While according to Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016:103-107), thematic analysis is a qualitative method of analysing data and allowed the researcher to organise, form patterns and identify relevant themes and steps of thematic analysis. In this study, the researcher utilised thematic analysis from Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, and Snelgrove (2016:103-107) as outlined below:

Step 1: Familiarising with data

- The researcher analysed data by transcribing, re-reading, and listening to the recording, then she noted down and highlighted the interesting ideas.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

- The researcher generated initial codes by coding interesting features of the data systematically; this was done manually and in portions.

Step 3: Searching for themes

- The researcher searched for themes from the information by gathering all data relevant or similar to each potential theme to provide meaning.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

- The researcher revised themes by checking if the themes related to the coded data or not. If they related, then capturing of data was done, and if they did not relate to the coded data, then re-coding was required.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

- This has been an ongoing analysis. The researcher ensured that there was no repetition when refining the specifics of each theme, and generating clear definitions and names for each theme was necessary.

Step 6: Producing the report

- Producing the report is the final step for data analysis. The researcher went back to step 1 and checked if all was done correctly, then the researcher analysed the research question and produced a report.

4.9 Methods of data verification

Data verification and validation are very important in the research process and assist in avoiding the entry of wrong data. It is the process of confirming that reliable and accurate information collected from the participants has been successfully reported (Houston, Probst & Humphries, 2015:108). In addition, data verification, according to Houston, Probst, and Martin (2018:26), is the process of comparing source data that is recorded or entered electronically or in a database. This process was done through different monitoring techniques, which are useful. Trustworthiness and authenticity are the best approaches to measure the firmness of the research study. The following concepts were a point of focus when verifying the data collected, and these are credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

- **Credibility**

Credibility involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are believable or not from the perspective of the participant. It was believed that the participants were

the best judges to determine whether the research findings have been able to reflect their opinions and feelings accurately, and credible research rely on interpersonal factors (Hellmueller & Trilling, 2012:3). Furthermore, Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017:110) indicated that credibility referred to the suggestions that employ both approaches (qualitative and quantitative) to enhance the integrity of findings of the study. The participants were the ones with the experiences thus the researcher listened and understood the phenomena from their perspectives.

- **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results can be generalised and transferred to other settings (Munthe-Kaas, Nokleby, Lewin & Glenton, 2020:2-5). It might have been difficult to establish transferability because of the approach adopted, and the aim of the transfer approach was to support review in developing systems. In addition, it provides guidance on how to consider and assess transferability. It was also used to measure the effectiveness of an intervention in another setting (Munthe-Kaas, Nokleby, Lewin & Glenton, 2020:2-5). Contrastingly, Anney (2014:12) defined transferability as supporting reviews systematically and transparently from the get-go, and this was achieved by providing structured guidance on how to collaborate with other stakeholders to assess transferability. As it was intended for the use of all types of reviews, the researcher explained to the participants that the findings could apply to other studies similar to the current study.

- **Dependability**

According to Hellmueller and Trilling (2012:7), dependability refers to whether the results can be the same if the study could be observed twice. Since qualitative research advocates flexibility and freedom, it might be difficult to establish unless you keep an extensive and detailed record of the process for others to establish the level of dependability. In addition, dependability as defined by Anney (2014:13) refers to the stability of findings over time and involves the participant's evaluation, interpretation, and recommendation of the study so that data can be supported. The researcher evaluated and determined the reliability of the study if measured by other participants. Through a thorough process with each participant, the researcher had a detailed discussion during the interview while collecting data. Information such as names, age, and physical address was provided. Open-ended questions were asked to confirm or

summarise what the participant had said. Digital recordings were used, and extensive notes were taken. By so doing, the researcher was able to determine dependability with the consistency of the findings or the results from different participants.

- **Conformability**

Conformability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. Conformability is similar to reliability in quantitative research, and it is only possible if both researchers and participants follow the process identically for the results to be compared (Anney, 2014:12). Conformability as stated by Wilson (2014:74), refers to other researchers confirming that the findings were valid and reliable and whether the data collected or obtained from participants were not influenced. During the process of the study, the researcher compared the participants' information in order to corroborate and confirm the results and ensured that the information was not influenced in any manner. In order to give the data meaning, there had to be a clean, organised, and structured way that allowed for easy access to the findings. Without access to accurate records, the results or findings may be costly, and the researcher may struggle with poor insight and ineffective work.

4.10 Ethical considerations

According to Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013:78), ethics are defined as a set of principles that the researcher always follows as a guideline and conduct. It is concerned with how the participants were treated and good ethical practices performed. Ethical considerations are regarded as the most important factor in conducting a research study due to the moral principles that the researcher has. The researcher, therefore, considers this factor to ensure that the rights of the participants were protected (Govil, 2013:17). It was always crucial to remember that participation in the research study should not be forced but should be voluntary to ensure effective contribution. Informed consent, voluntary participation, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and data management were the ethical considerations that the researcher adhered to.

- **Informed consent**

According to Nijhawan, Janodia, Muddukrishma, Bhat, Bairy, Udupa, and Musmade (2013:134), informed consent is an ethical code and regulation that requires

participants to be provided with enough information about the study before they agree to be part of the research study. The participants needed to have knowledge of the investigation and that there was a possibility that it could influence their decision-making before they participated in the study. In this study, the researcher provided in writing to the participants information such as the risk of the study, what the study was aiming to achieve, the duration of the interview, the benefits of participating, and assurance of confidentiality and privacy. This enabled the participants to provide their knowledge fully and eagerly to the study. Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013:83) stated that to participate and provide an effective investigation, participation should not be forced but should rather be voluntary, and participants have the right to not answer a question if they do not want to and withdraw at any time if they feel they do not wish to continue with the research. In this study, participants were informed of any changes; they were willing and agreed to those changes. The researcher ensured that participants were not harmed by the researcher. In addition, counselling and debriefing had been provided as some information was traumatising while the participants shared their experiences. The researcher's aim has always been to protect and avoid any harm, and she has always been sensitive to some issues.

- **Avoidance of harm**

McCormick (2012:24-27) stated that in order to avoid harm, the researcher should obtain informed consent from the participants, they should always be protected, and information kept safe to ensure their safety. Furthermore, the researcher implements specific protections to minimise all forms of discomfort and harm to align with the principle of beneficence and doing the right things (Markham, 2018:3). Beneficence refers to the ethical principle of doing good and avoiding harm, and in some way or another it made the lives of other people better (Martela & Ryan, 2019:116). As expected, the researcher has been truthful towards the participants for the benefit of this study.

Participants were provided with a debriefing to assess the level of trauma while they were sharing their experiences, because it often happened that traumatic events were triggered during the interview. The information and curriculum vitae of the debriefer is included as annexure 1. Debriefing, as described by Sawyer, Eppich, Brett-Fleegler, Grant and Cheng (2016:209), is a process in the form of reflective practice where a

discussion or assessment of what happened and how that thing took place. It is a conversation that follows an interview session.

- **Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality**

Rosler (2018:17-19) defined privacy as keeping information between two people, and that information is not intended for other purposes or to be analysed by another person. According to Pfisterer (2018:727), privacy is a fundamental right and the protection of human dignity, and it helps to set or limit boundaries to certain information. To ensure the privacy of the participants, the researcher kept ethical considerations in mind. The participants were treated with respect as privacy was a fundamental right, and their identity and information were kept for the purpose of the study.

According to Unguru (2018:155-156), anonymity is being able to always keep the participant's identity, if they wish to remain anonymous throughout the study, and the findings must not be linked to their identities. Therefore, it was important for the researcher to respect participants and consider their full participation. Swan and Hobbs (2017: 1075) described that anonymity means there was no way for anyone to personally identify the participants in the study, including the participants' personal identifying information such as names, addresses, and contact numbers. In order to ensure anonymity, the researcher did not use the correct names of participants; instead, pseudonyms have been used in order to identify the participants.

Confidentiality is defined as information that is obtained in a privileged manner during the conversation (Kaiser, 2012:457). It is an agreement between the two parties to ensure the other person's privacy; no other person should know who participated other than the researcher (Kaiser, 2012:457). In addition, confidentiality refers to a condition in which the researcher knows the identity of participants but protects them from being discovered by others (Unguru, 2018:156). Maintaining confidentiality is an essential principle and a key measure to ensure the protection of private information. Confidentiality and privacy are very important; it has been ensured that whatever the participants shared remained between them and the researcher. The participants were informed and provided with information regarding revealing their personal information for the public's access if the need arises. The researcher ensured that she maintained that principle every step of the way; by so doing, the participant's identity, names, and

addresses were not disclosed for the purpose of the study, and in agreement with the researcher, the participants were required to sign the consent form.

- **Data management**

Data management is the process of storing, organising, and maintaining data that was collected by the researcher. This helps the researcher to keep records and other information safe, mainly to protect the participants. Data was kept confidential to ensure adherence to ethical considerations (Tripathi, Shukla & Sonkar, 2017:418). Furthermore, data management, as defined by Forschungsdaten (2018:7), is the process of gathering and preserving data in an efficient manner to guard against loss and corruption. It also serves as a tool for organising, analysing, and documenting any pertinent information that has been gathered. Security matters when it comes to managing data. The information collected was stored on a laptop with a labelled folder or a file system that is user-friendly, like standardised file names that will be easy to find. Data was stored on a flash drive as well to ensure that the researcher has a backup document.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, AND ANALYSIS OF STUDY FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter five reports on the results of this study conducted and information collected from interviewing participants (foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement in the Sedibeng District Municipality). In a related foster care, a child is placed with a relative, like a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or older sibling, when their biological parents are not present, either because they have passed on or are not able to care for them. This study's main goal was to better understand the experiences of foster parents as they raise foster children in both related foster care placements and family settings.

In this study, fourteen (14) interested participants were interviewed. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the description of the participants' biographical information (for example, the age, gender, race, marital status, year of becoming a foster parent, number of foster children in the foster parent's care, and relationship to the foster child/children). This is followed by the presentation of the themes and sub-sub-themes that emerged throughout the process of data collection. These themes and sub-themes are supported by the direct quotes. Lastly, this chapter discusses the findings and integrates them with existing literature.

5.2 Demographic profile of the participants

Before the researcher commenced the procedure of data collection, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were considered. The participants included in this study met the following criteria:

- Foster parents were aged between 25 and 60 years.
- Foster parents who had a willingness to participate in the study.
- Currently caring for related foster children.
- Residing in Evaton or Sebokeng Township.

Participants who met the following criteria were excluded from the study:

- Foster parents who were younger than 25 or older than 60 years.
- Temporary safe care for parents.

- Foster parents caring for non-related foster children.
- Foster parents residing in Evaton and Sebokeng Township.

The participants who participated in this study were fourteen (14) foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement in Sedibeng District Municipality.

Table 5.1 that follows provides a summary of the demographic profile of the participants. The table below presents age, gender, race, marital status, year of becoming a foster parent, number of foster children in the foster parent's care, and relationship to the foster child/children.

Table 5.1: Demographic profile of the participants

No.	Age	Gender	Race	Marital Status	Year of becoming a foster parent	Number of foster children	Relationship to the foster child/children
1	36 years	Female	Black	Single	2021	2	Maternal aunt
2	49 years	Female	Black	Single	2023	2	Maternal aunt
3	44 years	Female	Black	Widower	2023	1	Maternal grandmother
4	34 years	Female	Black	Married	2020	1	Biological sister
5	40	Female	Black	Married	2021	1	Paternal aunt
6	34 years	Female	Black	Single	2022	1	Biological sister
7	60 years	Female	Black	Single	2010	1	Maternal grandmother
8	52 years	Female	Black	Married	2023	1	Maternal grandmother
9	28 years	Female	Black	Single	2022	3	Biological sister
10	55 years	Female	Black	Married	2021	2	Maternal grandmother

11	60 years	Female	Black	Single	2014	2	Maternal grandmother
12	60 years	Female	Black	Single	2015	2	Maternal grandmother
13	31 years	Female	Black	Single	2024	1	Maternal aunt
14	28 years	Female	Black	Single	2021	2	Biological sister

5.2.1 Age

The researcher interviewed fourteen (14) participants between the ages of 28 and 60 years. Of the fourteen participants, five were between the ages of 25 and 34, and three were between the ages of 35 and 44. Two were between the ages of 45 and 54, and lastly, four were between the ages of 55 and 60. The study revealed that the majority of the participants were between the ages of 25 and 34. According to Kiraly and Humphrey (2016:1), foster parents can be of any age, demonstrating the intergenerational nature of care. If a family member is ready to foster and meets the requirements of the foster child, then related foster care placement will not discriminate based on the age of that family member. In a study conducted by Johan, Marijke, and Femke (2015:71), it was found that the participants' experiences are not the same. For instance, younger participants found it hard to balance their personal and professional lives with foster care duties, and older participants reported that they are more stable in handling foster care children, although their age caused them to have health and money problems, since foster care is a full-time parental care. Table 5.2 below presents the age of the participants:

Table 5.2: Age of the participants

Age range	Total	Percentage
25-34	5	36%
35-44	3	21%
45-54	2	14%
55-60	4	29%

Total	14	100
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5.2.2 Gender

As shown in the pie chart below, of the fourteen (14) participants, all of them were females, and none of the participants were males. This shows that gender affects caregiving in the South African society, as highlighted by Mokomane and Rochet (2019:724). The authors shared that women are more likely than men to be the main caregivers in foster care, especially in related foster care placements, whereas Vanderfaeillie, Van Holen, De Maeyer, Gypen, and Belenger (2016:1520) stated that there is no difference between the foster mother and the foster father regarding their roles and experiences. Other studies suggested that gender-based perceptions of caregiving may still influence the dynamics within foster care families. Some research studies show that foster mothers are often regarded as primary caregivers and may experience different emotional and practical difficulties compared to foster fathers, who might be perceived as secondary caregivers (Johan, Marijke & Femke 2015:77). Understanding these nuances can provide deeper understanding into the dynamics of foster care and highlight areas where support systems may need to address gender-specific needs and expectations in foster care parenting. With that being said, it is evident from the study conducted that most foster parents are females because traditionally females are likely to take care of children, not to say males are not capable of caring for children, but they are limited and not as many as women. Figure 5.1 below presents the gender of the participants:

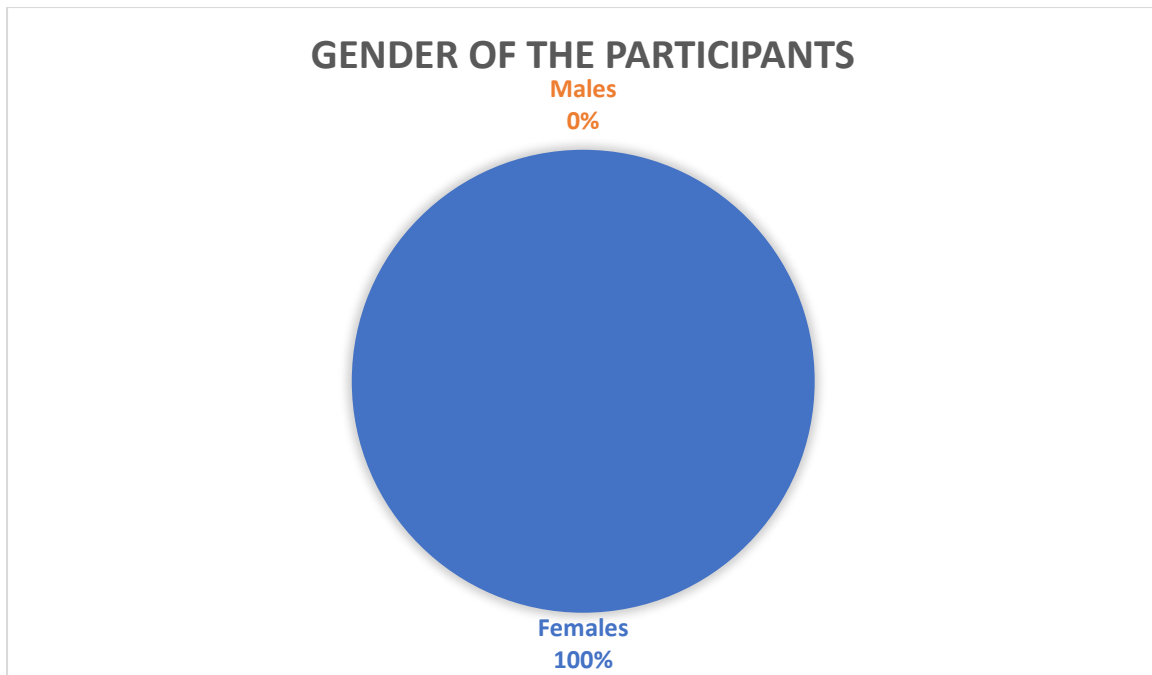


Figure 5.1: Gender of the participants

5.2.3 Race

Of the fourteen (14) participants who participated, all fourteen participants were Black Africans. This is because Black Africans are the most dominant race in the areas that were targeted, such as Evaton and Sebokeng in the Sedibeng District Municipality. According to the annual report 2023/2024 Sedibeng District Municipality is the second largest municipality in the Gauteng Province with Blacks/Africans consisting of approximately 81.52% (697 000), Whites 14.77% (126 000), Coloureds 2.61% (22 300) and Asians/Indians 1.10% (9 430) (Sedibeng District Annual Report, 2024:22). The race of the participants is presented in figure 5.2 below:

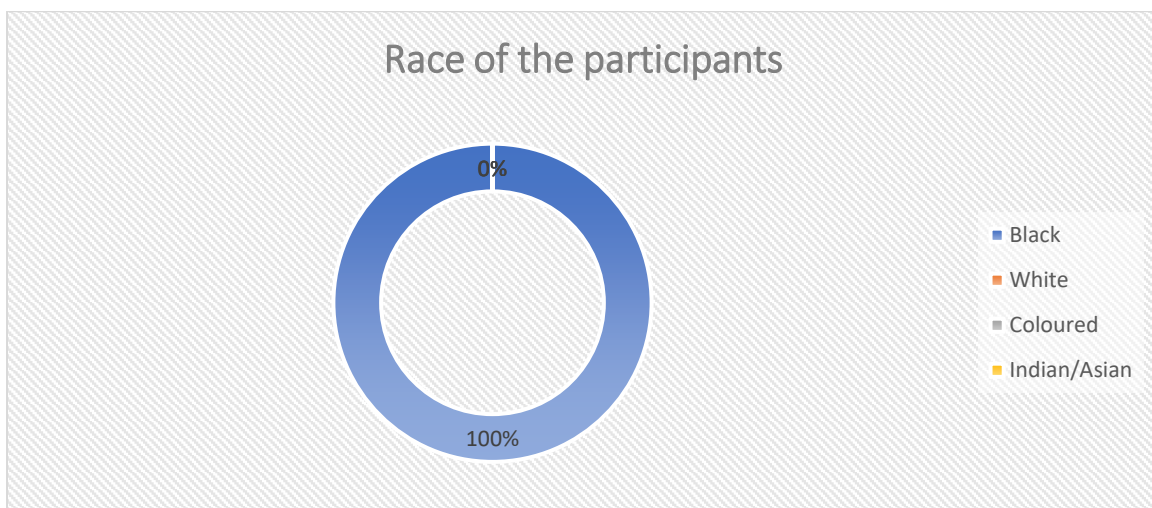


Figure 5.2: Race of the participants

5.2.4 Marital Status

Out of the fourteen participants, four (4) were married, nine (9) were single, and one (1) was a widow. In a study conducted by Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2019:23), it was found that single parents often rely on support from extended family and community. It was further reported that there are difficulties in raising foster children in a single-parent household, especially having to juggle between employment and other obligations, whereas married participants had a more solid financial and emotional support from their husbands. It was also found that the lack of spouses for single parents means that there will be no one to share caregiving duties with, and married parents may not suffer the financial and emotional stresses. Mancinelli, Dell'Arciprete, and Salcuni (2021:2) indicated that foster children's behaviour and well-being may be better understood. The pie chart below presents the marital status of the participants:

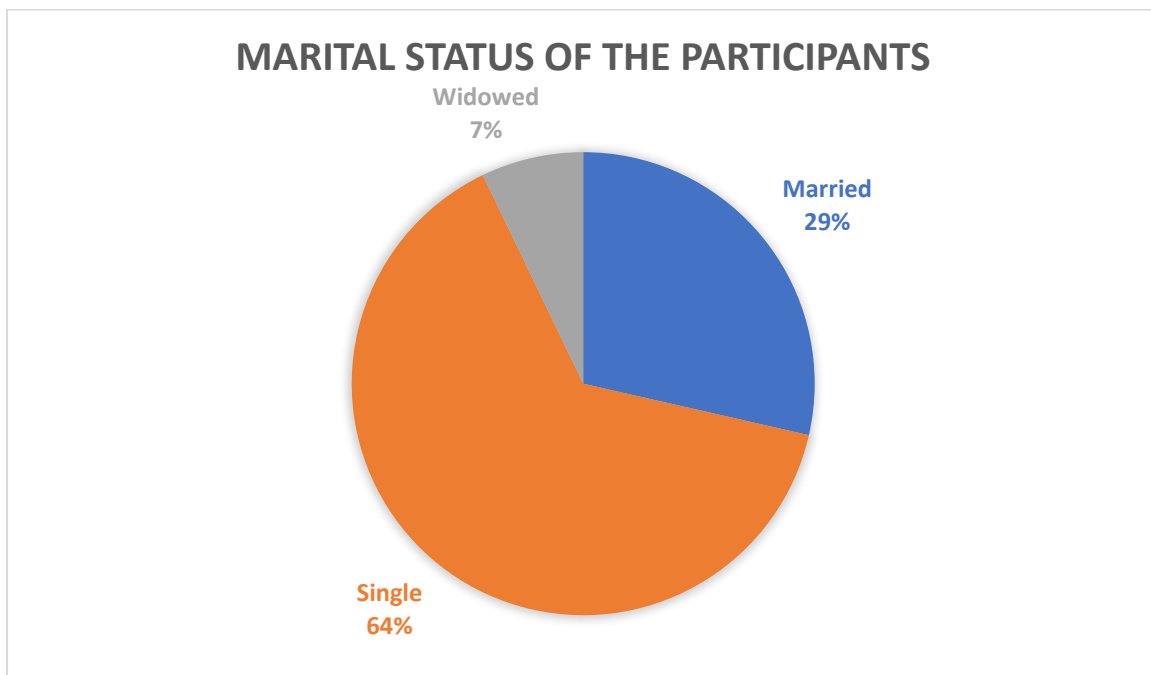


Figure 5.3: Marital status of the participants

5.2.5 Year of becoming a foster parent

Of the fourteen participants, ten (10) have been fostering for more than ten years, and four (4) have been fostering for less than two years. The study indicates that the

majority of the foster parents have been fostering for more than ten years. The benefits of interviewing foster parents with extensive experience enrich the study by providing a historical and complete view of related foster care, contributing to a more thorough understanding of what fosters success and what challenges persist. Whitehead, Barraclough, and Tarren-Sweeney (2023:139) indicated that the benefit of interviewing foster parents is to capture the experiences and challenges they are facing, as well as the need for support. The year of becoming a foster parent is illustrated in the bar graph below:

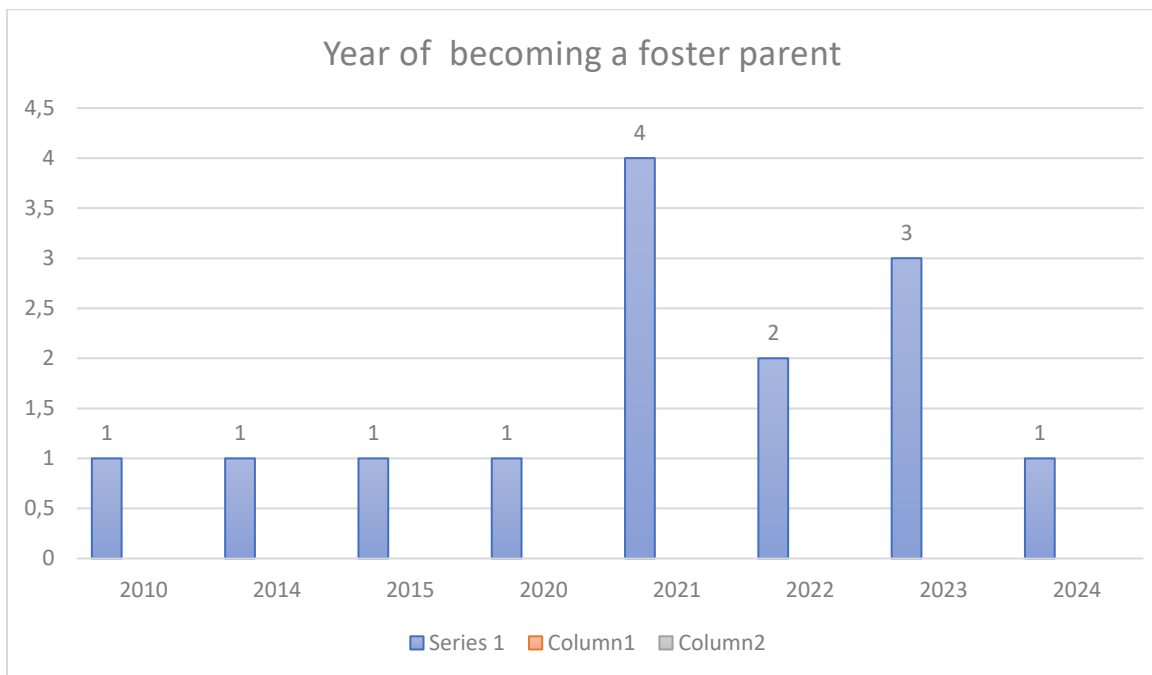


Figure 5.4: Year of becoming a foster parent

5.2.6 Number of foster children

Out of the fourteen (14) participants, seven of the participants fostered one foster child, six participants fostered two foster children, and one participant fostered three foster children. The findings revealed that the majority of the foster parents were caring for one foster child. With only one foster child to care for, it is assumed that a foster parent can dedicate more individualised attention and support to that foster child. This focused attention can enhance emotional bonding, create a stable attachment, and help the foster child to feel more secure and valued within the family. In related foster care placements, this bond is especially meaningful as it strengthens familial connections and a sense of belonging (Mancinelli, Dell’Arciprete & Salcuni, 2021:1-2).

5.2.7 Relationship to the foster child/children

The research focused on the related foster care placement in the Sedibeng District Municipality. Of the fourteen (14) foster parents caring for foster child/children within a related foster care placement, six (6) were maternal grandmothers, four (4) were biological sisters or siblings, and three (3) were maternal aunts. The findings show that the majority were grandparents. Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2019:23) emphasised that the intimate bond and relationship between the foster parents and the foster children made it simple and easier for the placement because the children already knew their caregivers. Due to their closeness, the foster children feel welcomed at home. Furthermore, Mancinelli, Dell’Arciprete, and Salcuni (2021:2) concurred that related foster care placement allows the foster child’s blood ties, which provides the child with a more stable family context.

5.3 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

The following section presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from data collection. The findings are illustrated with direct quotes from the participants and are further analysed in relation to existing literature.

Table 5.3 below provides a summary of the identified themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data.

Table 5.3: Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Experiences and challenges of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement	Sub-theme 1.1: Managing adolescents and their conduct Sub-theme 1.2: Managing expectations for foster children Sub-theme 1.3: Nurturing sibling relationships Sub-theme 1.4: Effects of mental difficulties and prior trauma Sub-theme 1.5: Administrative difficulties and institutional delays

	Sub-theme 1.6: Financial strain as a result of limited resources
Theme 2: Expectations from foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement	Sub-theme 2.1: Safeguarding foster children`s well-being and giving them the care they need Sub-theme 2.2: Keeping an eye on foster children`s attendance at school and ensuring good grades
Theme 3: Social Support mechanisms available for foster parents	Sub-theme 3.1: Family support Sub-theme 3.2: Community support Sub-theme 3.3: Support from a social worker Sub-theme 3.4: Institutional gaps in support
Theme 4: Disciplining foster children versus biological children	Sub-theme 4.1: Managing foster children`s behaviour and establishing moral values Sub-theme 4.2: Managing biological children`s behaviour and establishing moral values
Theme 5: Foster parents` management of their emotional well-being	Sub-theme 5.1: Managing one`s own emotions Sub-theme 5.2: Techniques for handling emotions and anger
Theme 6: Financial implications of providing care for the foster children	Sub-theme 6.1: Ensuring that foster children`s needs are met Sub-theme 6.2: Educational expenses Sub-theme 6.3: Provision of health care to the foster child
Theme 7: Strategies to address the challenges faced by the foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement	Sub-theme 7.1: Improved therapy services for both foster parents and foster children

	<p>Sub-theme 7.2: More resources and financial support for foster care family</p> <p>Sub-theme 7.3: Enhancement of the foster care system</p> <p>Sub-theme 7.4: Shortened waiting period</p> <p>Sub-theme 7.5: Smooth running of the foster care system</p>
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THEME 1: Experiences and challenges of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement

Foster parents face various experiences and challenges in raising foster children within a related foster care placement. The experiences and challenges that foster parents face include the following: managing adolescents and their conduct, managing expectations for foster children, nurturing sibling relationships, effects of mental difficulties and prior trauma, administrative difficulties, institutional delays, and financial strain as a result of limited resources. Ntshongana and Tonga (2018:14) indicated that primary caregivers are mostly females and that the foster care system revealed many struggles with regard to achieving good and positive results. Some foster parents do not get the support they need from the foster care system. In addition, Kaasboll, Lassemo, Paulsen, Melby, and Oosborg (2019:33) emphasised that placement in related foster care is needed to ensure that foster children remain close to their familiar surroundings, and that it plays an important role in helping the foster children to recover from the trauma and neglect they may have witnessed. The following sub-themes on the experiences and challenges of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement emerged:

Sub-theme 1.1: Managing adolescents and their conduct

The participants' experiences with teenagers show the difficulty of combining punishment, emotional support, and social effects on foster children. Many foster parents reported difficulties with teenagers' behaviour, including peer pressure, rebellion, and emotional detachment. Participants further shared that adolescent foster children desired independence and rejected home boundaries, causing conflict

and discipline. Many foster parents reported that children resisted their guidance, especially on curfews, domestic duties, and academics. Some of the foster parents or participants had to adjust their discipline to prevent conflict with their adolescent foster children. Participants struggled to keep control, noting the children's trauma and emotional baggage. Some adolescents were well-behaved, but their adolescent stage was marked by emotional outbursts, secrecy, and delinquency, such as drug misuse or truancy. Some of the participants' views regarding managing adolescents and their conduct are captured in the direct quotes below:

Raising a teenager is tough. They just want to be independent, and they question everything. I tell them that they must be home by 6 pm, but they come back much later and do not explain. It feels like I am talking to a wall sometimes. (Participant 1)

He is a good child, but the teenage years have brought changes. He has been hanging out with the wrong crowd and has started smoking. It is difficult to discipline him since he just shuts down or lies. (Participant 2)

My daughter, whom I fostered, just does not open up to me. She is quiet and keeps her feelings bottled up, but I know she is hurting since she always brings up her late mom when we argue. (Participant 4)

Teenagers need guidance, but they also don't want it. My foster son does well in school, but recently bunked a class, and when I asked why, he just shrugged and said it wasn't a big deal. (Participant 7)

The participants' responses show a familiar trend of teenagers' emotions and social behaviour being hard to control. Foster parents are worried about the children's rebellious behaviour, which they shared was caused by the teenagers' need to be independent while still dealing with mental pain from the past. The foster parents shared that the teenagers sometimes followed the rules, but most of the time they pushed the limits, which made the adults who were caring for them angry. There were also frequent emotional breakdowns, like quick anger or withdrawal, which were hard for the parents to deal with. According to these findings, it is clear that being a teenager makes things even more complicated in foster care. Teenage foster children often like defying authority and wanting to be left alone, but their actions are also affected by the hurt feelings they have from past events. People who act in these ways often show

resistance to authority, more private behaviour, and a lack of interest in doing things around the house. The foster parents have a hard time finding the right mix between being strict and knowing the children's emotional needs. They do not always know how much to follow the rules without pushing the children away.

According to research on foster care and teen growth, teenagers who have been in foster care have behavioural problems since their backgrounds are often traumatic and unstable (Leve, Harold, Chamberlain, Lansverk, Fisher & Vostanis, 2019:761). This is supported by Farmer (2020:67) when the author shared that teens in foster care have more behavioural problems, like rebellion and risk-taking, compared to their peers who are not in foster care. Thompson and Greeson (2017:379) also added that being separated from biological parents can make regular teen problems like figuring out who they are and rebelling against their parents even worse. The studies from these authors are in line with the findings from this sub-theme, where the study participants described how difficult it is to manage regular teenage behaviour and mental health issues from their pasts.

Sub-theme 1.2: Managing expectations for foster children

Foster parents or participants were of the view that they often struggled to meet foster children's expectations. The foster children's expectations, formed by society and a desire to belong, caused home difficulties. Material demands like clothes and allowances, also emotional needs like freedom and independence, were expected. Many foster parents shared that their foster children wanted extra privileges because of their foster care status. One of the biggest concerns was the children's expectation of financial aid, especially the foster care grant. Some foster children see the foster care grant as their right and often demand that their caregivers provide them with more material things or allowances than what the family budget permits. This seems to be stressing foster parents, who are already juggling inadequate means to support the whole family. The sentiments shared by the participants are captured in the quotes below:

They always ask for things – new clothes and gadgets. They think that, since I receive the foster care grant, I must use all of it on them. But that money barely covers food and school fees. (Participant 6)

They hold it against me if I cannot give them something. They do not realise that the money is not just theirs. I have to stretch it to cover all our needs. (Participant 2)

It feels like no matter what I do, it is not enough. They expect me to replace their parents, but I cannot. I can only do so much. (Participant 3)

The findings show that controlling expectations is a problem that comes up a lot in parenting. Foster children often thought of the foster care grant as something they are entitled to, and they do not understand that the family is struggling with the little money they have. In addition, foster children put a lot of emotional pressure on the people who take care of them, such as making up for the lack of parental figures. This made foster parents caring for them feel like they were not doing enough to meet these standards.

Looking at these findings, it is clear that the foster children's hopes are shaped by both the bad things that happened to them in the past and their need to feel safe in their new places. The foster children have emotional expectations that come from not getting enough motherly love and safety. The foster parents face difficult financial expectations from foster children simply because some are unemployed, and some earn a little, and they depend on the foster care grant, which is not enough to meet all the foster children's needs. The parents felt like they had to meet unreasonable standards while also taking care of the family's tight budget. Randle, Miller, Dolnicar, and Ciarrochi (2019:260) shared that foster children often have higher mental and financial needs than other children because they have experienced loss in the past. These demands are even stronger now that their parents have died and left a big mental hole. Pecora, Jensen, Romanelli, Jackson, and Ortiz (2020:11) highlighted that foster children expect their foster parents to take care of both their physical and mental needs. The study found that there are a lot of problems experienced by foster parents as they try to provide for the foster children and stay within their means.

Sub-theme 1.3: Nurturing sibling relationships

Participants were of the view that sibling connections are important in foster care, especially for foster parents with numerous foster children. Some foster parents noted that sibling bonds offered emotional support for foster children, while others struggled to handle sibling rivalry and conflict. Siblings comforted each other, especially older

children, as they dealt with trauma and grief. Participants further shared that foster children who had lost familial links felt a sense of continuity and belonging via sibling relationships. In addition, foster children often relied on their siblings for emotional assistance to adjust to their new surroundings and loss of parents. Sometimes sibling connections cause tension, especially when children and youths compete for foster parents' attention or resources. Some foster parents had trouble resolving these disagreements, particularly when they included unresolved trauma or emotional concerns from the foster children's background. The participants shared their views as follows:

They are each other's only connection to the past, so I try to keep them together. But it's not always easy since they fight a lot, and sometimes I feel like I am choosing sides. (Participant 6)

They are very close, and I am grateful for that. They help each other out with school and chores, and I think it is because they know they have to rely on each other now. (Participant 2)

It is hard; sometimes one of them feels left out. They are both dealing with their emotions, and they do not always have the capacity to help each other through it. (Participant 8)

The sibling bond is strong, but at the same time, it is fragile. One moment they are best friends, and the next they are fighting. I think they are still processing their trauma together, and it comes out in how they interact. (Participant 4)

These findings show how complicated sibling relationships can be in foster care. Of course, sibling relationships are very important for foster children since it gives them mental support and a sense of stability. This helps them deal with losing their parents and moving into foster care. On the other hand, child jealousy and unresolved mental problems can cause stress and fights in the home, which can be difficult for foster parents to handle. A study conducted by Herrick and Piccus (2019:789) found that sibling relationships can be both good and bad for children in foster care. Furthermore, a study conducted by Shlonsky, Webster, and Needell (2021:106) stressed how important it is to keep family ties strong in foster care. These relationships can help children who have had a lot of changes in their lives feel emotionally stable and give them a sense of consistency. The findings from these studies align with the findings

from this sub-theme, concluding that ties between siblings are an important but difficult part of foster care. Foster parents are very important in keeping these relationships strong, but they also need to be able to get help with family fights and make sure that the bond between siblings remains a source of support instead of stress.

Sub-theme 1.4: Effects of mental difficulties and prior trauma

Some of the participants were of the view that some of the foster children are not open to them (foster parents) and often prefer to keep quiet and are not willing to share their emotions. In addition, some of the foster children lack trust in everyone, including the foster parent. The views of the participants on the effects of mental difficulties and prior trauma are reflected in the direct quotes below:

Sometimes she just shuts down. I try to talk to her, but she pushes me away. I know she is still hurting from losing her mom, but she does not want to talk about it. (Participant 5)

The anger comes out of nowhere; he will be fine one minute, and then he is furious because of what he has been through, but it is hard to deal with. (Participant 9)

He does not trust anyone, not even me. It is like he is always waiting for the next bad thing to happen. I try to show him that he is safe here, but it is like he cannot believe it. (Participant 3)

She still talks about her mom sometimes, and it is heartbreaking. She asks why her mom had to go, and I do not have the answers. (Participant 7)

The findings demonstrate how pain from the past makes it very hard for foster children to trust and form safe bonds with their caregivers. As the foster children try to deal with their grief, anger, and feelings of being abandoned, they often shut down emotionally and become angry. Foster parents often felt angry and useless since they could not fully meet the emotional needs of their foster children, even though they tried to provide a helpful setting. According to these findings, foster children's thoughts and actions are shaped by past pain. It can be hard for a child who has been through trauma to make safe connections with adults who care for them. As a result, this could make it hard for the child to handle their feelings and make friends in a healthy way. According to Dozier, Zeanah, Wallin, and Shauffer (2019:1), foster children who have been

through a lot of stress are more likely to have emotional and behavioural issues, like not being able to trust others, keep their feelings in check, and form bonds. Cummings, Davies, and Campbell (2020:90) also emphasised that stress can change a person's mind for a long time. The authors further emphasised that children who are in foster care often carry the mental scars of what happened to them into adulthood.

Sub-theme 1.5: Administrative difficulties and institutional delays

Many participants reported that institutional delays and administrative issues are a major concern, and many of them experienced severe foster care grant delays and social services administrative issues. In addition, participants reported the following challenges: delays in the approval of foster care grants, some of the schools not willing to admit foster children with missing documents, and the slow administration of foster care cases by social workers. Furthermore, inefficiencies in the system exerted a cost to foster parents and prevented foster children from receiving crucial services like education and healthcare. Some of the participants complained about the social service's lack of communication and the necessity to follow up on unresolved concerns. The participants lamented as follows:

The social workers take forever to process the grant. I have been waiting for months, and in the meantime, I have to figure out how to cover the costs of caring for the foster child on my own. (Participant 6)

The school would not admit the child since we did not have the proper documents. It was such a hassle trying to get everything from the social worker. (Participant 5)

I feel like I am constantly going back and forth with the social workers. It takes too long to get anything done, and they do not keep us informed about what is going on. (Participant 3)

The biggest challenge is the delays in the system. Whether it is the grant or school registration, it just takes too long and puts us in a difficult position. (Participant 1)

I had to wait almost a year for the grant to be approved. During that time, I did not know how I would manage financially. (Participant 7)

The findings highlight the impact of systemic delays and inefficiencies in government processes on foster parents. A study conducted by Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2019:23) found comparable documentation issues for foster parents, and that the foster care system postpones funding and other basic tasks, which makes the foster parents upset and unable to pay or settle their debts. Akin, Brook, Lloyd and McDonald (2020:267) concurred that inefficient government processes, such as waiting too long to start school or acquire medical treatment, make it hard for foster children to find stable and caring homes. While Hebert, Fantuzzo, and Aguirre (2021:58) emphasised the need for foster parents and social workers to communicate effectively and consistently to reduce delays and ensure that foster children receive services on time, which will also minimise the frustrations and stress felt by foster parents.

Sub-theme 1.6: Financial strain as a result of limited resources

Most of the participants shared that the foster care grant, although beneficial, is sometimes inadequate to pay all the costs of parenting foster children, particularly as they grow up and their demands rise. In addition, foster parents shared that they often stretch their meager finances to cover food, clothes, education, and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, participants shared that they had to augment the grant with personal money, which increased their financial load. Delays in grant processing added to the financial hardship as participants had to cover expenditures while waiting for funds. This resulted in many foster parents becoming financially insecure. The concerns of the foster parents regarding financial constraints as a result of limited resources are captured in the direct quotes below:

The foster care grant helps, but it is insufficient to cover everything. I still have to pay for school fees, food, and clothes. Sometimes I just do not know how I will manage. (Participant 1)

I am grateful for the foster care grant, but with the rising cost of living, it does not stretch far enough. I have to top it up with my own money, which is hard since I am not working. (Participant 9)

There are extra costs, like school trips or when the children get sick. The foster care grant does not cover those things, and it is hard to find the money. (Participant 4)

I have had issues with renewing the foster care grant. The process takes so long, and during that time, I still had to care for the children without any financial help. (Participant 11)

The grant is not enough, especially as the children get older. They eat more, they need more clothes, and school fees are higher. (Participant 8)

The findings demonstrate that foster parents are under a lot of financial stress in many different ways. While the foster care grant is a good starting point for financial help, it does not cover all the costs of caring for a foster child, especially when the child is in his/her teenage years or is attending school. In addition, the findings show that the current system of financial support is not able to meet the changing needs of foster children as they get older, especially when they become teenagers.

The difficulties with money that this study found are similar to those found in earlier studies about foster care. A study conducted by Brown and Marino (2019:103) discovered that foster parents often have trouble making ends meet since the state does not give them enough money. These findings align with the participants' experiences, as they expressed concerns that the foster care grant was insufficient to cover all the expenses associated with raising a foster child. Another study by Pecora, Jensen, Romanelli, Jackson, and Ortiz (2020:11) found that delays in grant handling are common and put a lot of financial stress on foster families. Geiger, Hayes, and Noon (2020:376) suggested that increasing the foster care grant would help with the parents' finances. The findings of this study back up the idea that more financial aid and more support services are needed to help foster parents meet the financial needs of the foster children.

THEME 2: Expectations from foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement

Findings demonstrate the importance of safeguarding foster children's well-being and providing them with the care they need to ensure their overall development, safety, and stability. It is important to protect children from harm, support them emotionally and psychologically, ensure a stable environment, that children have access to education and health care, prepare them for the future, and to ensure that every child's fundamental rights are respected and fulfilled. Findings also point out that it is important to monitor the foster child's school attendance and ensure that the child

attains good grades. Below are the sub-themes that emerged on the expectations from foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement.

Sub-Theme 2.1: Safeguarding foster children's well-being and giving them the care they need

The findings revealed the responsibilities foster parents have towards ensuring the well-being of their foster children. Many participants articulated a commitment to creating a nurturing and stable environment despite financial and emotional challenges. They expressed a need to address the physical, emotional, and educational needs of the foster children under their care, emphasising the importance of providing food, clothing, and emotional support. The participants' voices regarding the importance of safeguarding foster children's well-being and providing the care they need are captured in the responses below:

They must not suffer from hunger. They must get everything they want, such as clothes, they need to dress up, and when they go to school, they must use warm water to bathe. (Participant 11)

I try by all means for them to have enough food for the month. The next month I lay-by something for them. (Participant 12)

When they leave for school, they must look good. They must show that they are my children. (Participant 12)

When they go to school, they must eat. I want them to look like other children. (Participant 14)

The results show a strong sense of duty and kindness. The foster care grant is seen as helpful, though some participants agreed in the previous theme (theme 1) that the amount given was not sufficient to meet the needs of older children, especially those in high school or those furthering their studies at an institution of higher learning. Emotional support is also considered crucial, with many foster parents emphasising the importance of open communication to ensure that children feel included and not judged in comparison to their peers. A study conducted by Lawrence, Carlson, and Egeland (2020:395) found that foster care places do not always provide enough money, and therefore, foster parents must use their own money to make up the difference. This aligns with the participant's complaints about the limited number of

social grants available to them. Biehal, Ellison, Baker, and Sinclair (2019:176) emphasised that emotional security is important for reducing the long-term psychological effects of foster care. This fits with the focus on emotional well-being. Family and community support were also reported as important to the participants who took part in this study. However, research shows that systemic institutional solutions, like regular counselling services, are often missing (Leve, Harold, Chamberlain, Landsverk, Fisher & Vostanis, 2021:582). This discrepancy indicates that foster parents depend more on unofficial support systems than on the official support systems available to them.

Sub-Theme 2.2: Keeping an eye on foster children's attendance at school and ensuring good grades

The findings showed that education is a key to success. The importance of education spans across individual, societal, and global levels. It serves as a cornerstone for personal growth, societal development, and economic progress. Foster parents regularly monitored school attendance for foster children, helped with homework, and encouraged academic success. It is also important to note that these attempts are hampered by systemic obstacles such as insufficient financial resources, lack of parental involvement in school operations, and social issues like peer pressure and stigma faced by foster children. Foster parents suggested withholding privileges or meeting with instructors to address performance difficulties to ensure educational compliance. The voices of the participants concerning keeping an eye on foster children's attendance at school and ensuring good grades are reflected in the quotes below:

I encourage him to take his books and study seriously. I told him that Grade 11 is difficult; it requires a learner to study harder. (Participant 12)

I expect them to finish school and not stay at home. Education is key to success. They must work hard and build a better future for themselves. (Participant 11)

I monitor their grades since they know education is key to everything. (Participant 9)

The foster care system must make sure that children stay in school. Without education, their future is uncertain. (Participant 1)

A closer look at these results shows how hard it is for foster parents to fight for their foster children's schooling while also dealing with their emotional and behavioural problems. Participants spoke about foster children skipping school, not wanting to do their work, and how bad influences from friends affected them. These problems were made worse by a lack of money, which made it hard to get tools like tutoring or help outside of school. Even with these problems, foster parents were strong, and they shared that schooling was a big part of how they cared for children. These findings are in line with studies that stressed how important education is for breaking the cycle of poverty and instability among foster children. According to Vinnerljung and Hjern (2020:85), foster children often perform poorly in school since they have been through a lot of mental trauma and have to move around a lot. These findings back up the participant's claims that it is hard to keep up with schoolwork and grades. However, some of the research studies criticise the structural lack of academic support programs designed for foster children, and participants agreed with this and called for foster care systems and schools to work together more effectively (Gypen, Vanderfaellie, De Maeyer, Belenger & Van Holen, 2017:83).

THEME 3: Social support mechanisms available for foster parents

Sub-theme 3.1: Family support

The findings show that family support affects foster parents' experiences in related foster care placement. Several participants shared that their main social support comes from siblings, aunts, and uncles who provide emotional support, financial support, and caring assistance. Participants also shared how family members helped them to pay for foster children's education, food, and clothes since the foster care grant is inadequate. Participants also indicated that they relied on family members for emotional support when foster children misbehaved or when they felt overwhelmed by foster parenting. One of the foster parents stressed the usefulness of family WhatsApp groups, where foster children's difficulties were addressed collectively, and the family worked together to solve problems. This collective caregiving strategy gave foster parents peace of mind since they had a network of relatives to call on. The views of the participants regarding family support provided by family members are reflected in the direct quotes below:

I feel supported by my family. When I have challenges with the boys, I inform the family in our WhatsApp group, and we address the issue together. (Participant 2)

My brother is always there for me, helping with both financial and parenting support. It is not just me raising this child; It is a family effort. (Participant 13)

There are times when I do not know what to do, and my family steps in. They send money or sometimes come and help with the children. (Participant 7)

The family support system is very strong. I am able to call my siblings whenever there is a challenge, and they step in to help, whether financially or emotionally. (Participant 5)

The family is all I have. They send clothes and money for the children whenever they can. Without them, it would be much harder. (Participant 12)

The findings show that family support networks are very important for foster parents who have children in similar situations. The group method, which is often facilitated by family and social networks, lets everyone share responsibility, which makes it easier on foster parents' mental and financial situations. This shows how important it is for extended families to be involved in parenting, especially when the children in need are already known to the family. Participants shared how thankful they are for the family support, which not only helped them financially but also made them feel better when things were tough. Family support is important in foster care, as outlined by Geiger, Hayes, and Noon (2020:376) when they shared that foster parents who get mental and financial support from extended family members are more likely to have good experiences as foster parents. This supports the results of this study, which found that family support is a key part of making foster care easier. In the same way, Morris and Medina's (2022:157) study found that having extended family help with childcare can greatly lower stress for foster parents by allowing for a more spread-out form of caring. However, Brown and Marino (2019:103) stated that family participation can sometimes lead to problems, especially when family members have different ideas about how to raise the foster children. Even though none of the participants in this study mentioned this challenge, it is still something that needs to be thought about in order to fully grasp how complicated family support in foster care is. From these findings, it is clear that

foster parents need a strong network of family support, especially when they are in the same situation or experiencing the same challenge. Foster parents are better able to give their foster children a safe and caring home when they can share their responsibilities and get both mental and financial support.

Sub-theme 3.2: Community support

Some of the participants mentioned neighbours or community members as part of the social support since they offer emotional support. Other participants shared that they felt lonely and removed from their communities, missing the social support that they needed. The voices of the participants are reflected in the responses below:

The community here is supportive, and my neighbours help when I am overwhelmed. They watch the children sometimes or just listen when I need to talk. (Participant 1)

I get support from my neighbour, my neighbour is the one person that normally sees us every day, every now and then she comes and checks up on us. (Participant 9)

I get very good support from the community; they help me to look after them, and I can maintain them. (Participant 12)

The results revealed that participants who had access to community help felt relieved to have someone they could depend on. This suggests that building better community ties could be a good way to make foster parenting easier, even though the community support is not given as much attention, it shows that neighbourhood networks can work with official support systems. Research also shows that community support is important for making caring plans work well (Harding, Murray, Shakespeare-Finch & Frey, 2020:107). According to Farmer (2020:45), foster parents with strong community ties are more likely to report good results. This is because they can count on friends and local networks for both physical and mental help.

Sub-theme 3.3: Support from the social worker

The findings revealed varied experiences with the support provided by social workers, reflecting both positive interactions and notable gaps in service delivery. Several participants indicated that while social workers are a vital point of contact for

administrative tasks like grants and school-related documentation, the frequency and depth of engagement were inconsistent. For instance, Participant 1 highlighted a lack of follow-up, particularly in addressing delays in processing foster care grants, which exacerbated financial strain. Similarly, Participant 2 expressed frustration with the insufficient communication between social workers and educational institutions, leading to missed opportunities for the foster children. However, other participants reported positive outcomes from their interactions with social workers. Participant 4 emphasised the value of counselling sessions provided during the early stages of the foster care process, which helped build foundational skills for managing the complexities of fostering. Yet, the overarching sentiment among participants was that while support mechanisms exist, their accessibility and consistency require significant improvement. The participants' responses are captured as follows:

The social workers, together with SASSA, need proof of registration from the school and the acceptance letters. So, it is something that I do not have due to the challenges of them not having secured spaces or having received correspondence from the institutions. (Participant 1)

I feel like they should go. Normally, when they have done something, we have a family WhatsApp group. I tell the social workers, but no one really follows up unless I push hard. (Participant 2)

You also told us that if we are facing any challenges in this journey, we need to talk to the social workers. We are welcome anytime and any day we can bring the child. (Participant 4)

I think the main issue is the inconsistency. They told me I could reach out anytime, but when I do, I rarely get a response on time. (Participant 7)

Counselling from the social workers would help both the child and me, maybe once in three months or even twice a year. It's something that can address our challenges better. (Participant 13)

The excerpts highlight a dual perspective: on one hand, social workers are recognised as a critical lifeline for navigating the foster care system, yet on the other hand, systemic inefficiencies undermine their effectiveness. Foster parents confront systemic impediments like delays in processing crucial documents and a lack of

consistent participation. Participant 1's comment shows how administrative inefficiencies affect foster parents' capacity to access crucial supplies for children. Participant 2's response emphasises social workers' inaction, which isolates and neglects foster parents. However, Participant 4's positive experiences imply that social workers can provide substantial support, especially through early interventions like counselling. Participant 7 notes that inconsistent follow-up and response delays overshadow these pleasant experiences. Participant 13's need for periodic counselling suggests that structured, continuing support could help foster parents with many of their issues.

The findings reinforce research suggesting that social worker support is essential to foster care systems. Foster parents need consistent communication and planned interventions from social workers to feel supported and competent to handle the varied needs of foster children (Berrick, Peckover & Skivenes, 2021:89). Participant 4's foster care journey was improved by counselling. However, recent research has identified systemic issues that explain the findings' limitations. According to Lee, McDonald, and Nyland (2022:361), social workers' inadequate resources and heavy caseloads typically lead to uneven treatment delivery, as Participant 7 and Participant 2 experienced. Mofokeng and Zitha (2020:420) also noted that the absence of integration between social workers and other stakeholders, such as educational institutions, worsens foster parents' problems, a point voiced by Participant 1.

Sub-theme 3.4: Institutional gaps in society

Participants noted major school and health system support gaps. The findings indicate that schools were unprepared to help foster children with emotional and behavioural issues. There is a difficulty getting schools to understand foster children's needs, with some foster parents believing instructors were insensitive to pain and loss. School delays in providing counselling or academic help were also reported. Foster children have trouble getting medical treatment from healthcare systems. Some of the participants shared that there is a lengthy waiting period, and regulatory hurdles made it hard for children with pre-existing diseases or mental health problems to get health treatments. These institutional deficiencies left foster parents feeling unsupported in providing complete care for their foster children. The following responses capture the essence of participants' views:

The school does not seem to understand that foster children have different needs. They expect them to just behave like any other child, but they do not realise what these children have been through. (Participant 8)

It is hard to get the school to provide extra support. My foster child struggles with her studies, but they do not have the resources to help her. (Participant 4)

The health system is a mess. I have been trying to get my foster child into therapy, but the waiting list is so long. It is frustrating. (Participant 13)

There is a lack of coordination between the schools and the social workers. They do not talk to each other, and I have to be the one to chase everything up. (Participant 5)

I feel like the health system does not take foster children's needs seriously. It is so difficult to get them the care they need, especially for mental health. (Participant 10)

The results show that formal support from healthcare and school systems is important in the foster care experience. It has been found that schools, in particular, did not provide the necessary mental and intellectual support to foster children, many of whom come from challenging backgrounds. This governmental lack of understanding makes things harder for foster parents who must figure out the complicated school system on their own. Likewise, the difficulties people face in accessing medical care, particularly mental health services, were mentioned repeatedly. It was also pointed out that different groups, like schools, healthcare providers, and social workers, do not always work together.

There is a lot of research on the gaps in institutional support that this study found. Foster children have a hard time in school, according to Leve, Harold, Chamberlain, Landsverk, Fisher, and Vostanis (2019:761). The authors shared that schools do not always have the right tools and skills to meet the needs of these children. In the same way, Oosterman, Schuengel, Bullens, and Doreleijers (2018:697) shared about the problems foster parents face in getting their foster children medical care, especially mental health care. Other problems include receiving medical and psychological help late, excessive wait times, and administrative difficulties in getting therapy or specialised care. The participant's complaints about long waiting times and

organisational red tape are in line with what researchers have found about the health needs of foster children.

THEME 4: Disciplining foster children versus biological children

Disciplining foster children versus biological children brings unique challenges due to differences in relationships, backgrounds, and emotional contexts. Some of the participants shared that they have trouble handling foster children's rebellion and disrespect. The responses of the participants with regard to disciplining foster children vs biological children focused on the following sub-themes: managing foster children's behaviour and establishing moral values, as well as managing biological children's behaviour and establishing moral values.

Sub-theme 4.1: Managing foster children's behaviour and establishing moral values

Foster parents' experiences with teenage children focused on discipline and behaviour control. Participants expressed difficulty handling foster children's rebellion, disrespect for authority, and resistance to punishment. When children had unresolved pain from losing their biological parents, they typically acted rebelliously or self-destructively. Foster parents had to strike a balance between strictness and understanding since children often resisted discipline. The children often compared the foster parents' punishment to their biological parents', making it tougher for them to exercise control. The views of participants regarding managing foster children's behaviour and establishing moral values are reflected in the statements below:

These children think that since they have lost their parents, they deserve special treatment. When I discipline them, they say their biological parents would not treat them this way. (Participant 3)

I try to discipline them, but it is hard. They are teenagers, and they always think they know better. They do not listen to me. (Participant 2)

One of the boys smokes drugs, and the other one is always in trouble at school. I feel like I cannot control them. (Participant 5)

They do not respect the rules I set. When I ask them to do chores, they ignore me or do them halfway. It is like they are testing me. (Participant 7)

I cannot discipline them the same way I did with my own children. They have been through a lot, so I try to be understanding. But it is hard when they do not listen. (Participant 4)

The findings reveal that disciplining foster children in foster care is complex, as foster parents must balance addressing the children's social and emotional needs with enforcing rules. Many foster children, particularly those who have experienced trauma, show resistance through defiance, violence, or withdrawal. They may also compare foster parents' discipline to that of their biological parents, making it harder for foster parents to establish authority. This emotional challenge highlights the struggles foster parents face in managing behaviour while helping children cope with unresolved pain and loss. There are many studies on foster care punishment and behaviour issues. Leve, Harold, Chamberlain, Landsverk, Fisher, and Vostanis (2019:761) study found that many foster youths experience behaviour disorders, especially those who were stressed or uncertain. This study indicated that foster children, especially teens, were difficult to control. According to Dozier, Zeanah, Wallin, and Shauffer (2019:1), attachment issues and a history of neglect or abuse can lead to rebellion or opposition to authority in foster children.

Sub-theme 4.2: Managing biological children's behaviour and establishing moral values

The findings revealed a multifaceted approach adopted by foster parents in managing the behaviour of their biological children while instilling essential moral values. Participants kept stressing how important it was to treat foster children and biological children equally to keep the peace in the home. However, some foster parents shared that biological children sometimes thought foster children were treated better than them, usually because they got more mental or financial support. This way of thinking caused problems as foster parents tried to meet the special needs of foster children without making their own children feel bad. One common theme was how important it was to teach morals like respect, responsibility, and following house rules. The participant's voices are reflected in the direct quotes below:

My biological son says I love the foster children more than him. I give them money every month, but I buy him clothes only twice a year, in winter and summer. (Participant 2)

I discipline them the same way, but the foster child feels special treatment is unfair to them since they have lost their parents. (Participant 1)

I do not compare them; they are all my children. But my biological children say I spoil the foster children to fill the gap in their hearts. (Participant 5)

They know I am strict, and I do not tolerate disrespect. Respect is mandatory, whether you are my biological child or a foster child. (Participant 9)

I emphasise moral values by teaching all of them that respect for elders and honesty are non-negotiable. (Participant 13)

The findings highlight the complexity of parenting biological and foster children. Participants reflected on their constant struggle to balance equity and empathy in parenting, and some of the participants (foster parents) felt confident in their abilities to preserve fairness, but others admitted to struggling owing to foster children's emotional needs. Many participants noticed that biological children often showed resentment, especially when they thought foster children were getting preferential treatment. Furthermore, participants stressed the need to set clear boundaries for all children, saying rules and expectations were non-negotiable. Others reported that they adjusted their discipline and moral guiding methods to meet individual needs.

Schofield and Beek (2020:549) support the above findings when they suggested that successful integration involves a purposeful balance of emotional and monetary resources to avoid favouritism. This attitude shows in participants' efforts to parent fairly. These approaches have limits, as biological children may view foster children's extra attention or resources as favouritism. Janssens, Van Rooij, and Vrijhof (2019:1668) found that foster siblings commonly fight over care perceptions rather than treatment differences. Despite the literature's support for diverse parenting strategies to meet individual needs, several participants were reluctant to change their discipline methods, and this hesitation may be intended to prevent alienating their biological children or escalating family problems (Dozier, Bernard & Lindhiem, 2022:129). However, teaching moral principles as a unifying concept supports research showing that shared values strengthen families (Hughes, Kochanska & McCormick, 2021:360). In this study, participants committed to fostering an inclusive environment that supports all children's growth by prioritising respect, honesty, and accountability.

THEME 5: Foster parents' management of their emotional well-being

The findings demonstrate that foster parents face significant emotional and practical challenges, including managing foster children's behavioural issues, financial strain, and a lack of social support. Many participants feel overwhelmed by the emotional demands of caring for traumatised children while managing their own emotions. Despite these struggles, they strive to remain calm and supportive. Participants (foster parents) expressed a need for emotional support through therapy or peer groups, though such resources are often difficult to access.

Findings further demonstrate that foster parents use various strategies to manage emotions and anger when facing challenges in raising foster children. Common feelings of frustration arise from behavioural issues like defiance or withdrawal. Techniques include open communication, self-regulation methods such as prayer or silence, and seeking support from family. Many prioritise calm discussions over impulsive reactions, while some use silent treatment to express displeasure. Emotional management depends on individual coping mechanisms and the availability of support networks. The following sub-themes on foster parents' management of their emotional well-being emerged.

Sub-theme 5.1: Managing one's own emotions

The results showed that many participants were worn out from managing the behavioural issues of foster children, as well as personal difficulties like a lack of social support and financial hardship. Many participants shared that they were overwhelmed by the emotional demands of parenting traumatised children and struggled to manage their own emotions, such as impatience or despair. Despite these problems, most participants preferred being calm and supportive for the children, even when it was emotionally draining. Foster parents also wanted emotional help from therapy or peer support groups, but many said these were hard to find. Some of the participants' views in this regard are reflected in the responses below:

Raising foster children can be emotionally draining. You want to help them, but sometimes it feels like too much. I just try to stay calm and not let my emotions show. (Participant 7)

I do not like to bottle things up. When I am upset, I talk to the children about it, but sometimes it is difficult to manage my own emotions when they do not listen or act out. (Participant 1)

It is emotionally exhausting, especially when the children bring up their biological parents. It makes me feel like I am not enough, even though I am doing my best. (Participant 9)

I try to keep calm and talk things out, but sometimes I just feel so overwhelmed. There is no one to talk to about these things. (Participant 12)

My emotional well-being is affected. It is hard to always be strong when you are dealing with your own issues and trying to help these children heal from their trauma. (Participant 4)

The findings show that keeping your emotions in check while raising foster children is a problem that comes up time and time again. Participants shared that they have a hard time mentally because the children they care for have a lot of different needs. Many of them have been through loss, suffering, and not knowing what will happen next. Findings further indicate that foster parents are lonely and stressed since they do not have enough people to lean on when they need help in dealing with the mental toll that caring for others takes. This stress on the mind shows up in many ways, such as anger, sadness, and doubt in oneself, especially when foster children talk about their biological parents or say they do not like living with foster parents. Findings also showed that foster parents need more types of mental health services to help them deal with the stress of taking care of other people. Foster parents may not be able to give foster children the care they need if they do not get the right mental health help.

Several studies have been conducted on the mental problems foster parents face. Cooper, McWey, and Riebschleger (2020:453) highlighted that foster parents often feel a lot of mental stress since the children in their care have a lot of different needs, and social services do not help them. Cooper, McWey, and Riebschleger (2020:453) added that the mental health of foster parents is very important to the success of foster care placements. Emotionally stable guardians are better able to give children a safe and caring home. According to Smyke, Zeanah, and Fox (2019:792), foster parents who get enough emotional support from therapy or peer support groups are better able to handle the mental tasks of caring for foster children. The authors further stated that

the foster parents felt less emotionally worn out and were more likely to keep parenting for a long time.

Sub-theme 5.2: Techniques for handling emotions and anger

The findings reveal diverse techniques employed by foster parents to manage their emotions and anger while navigating the challenges of raising foster children. Most participants acknowledged that caregiving roles often elicited feelings of frustration, particularly when children exhibited behavioural issues such as defiance, neglect of responsibilities, or emotional withdrawal. Participants adopted strategies ranging from maintaining open communication with the children to employing self-regulation techniques such as prayer, silence, or confiding in family members. Emotional strain was often compounded by the dual responsibility of meeting the needs of foster children while addressing their own emotional health. For instance, several participants noted that they chose to discuss issues calmly rather than reacting impulsively, while others reported using methods like silent treatment to express their displeasure. Emotional management appeared closely tied to each foster parent's individual coping mechanisms and the extent of support available to them from family or social networks. The following quotes capture the essence of participants' views on the techniques for handling emotions and anger:

When I get angry, I talk a lot. After that, I keep quiet. When I see that the child has done something big that has hurt my feelings, I keep very quiet. I do not talk; I keep very quiet and just drink tea. That is when the children see that I am very angry. (Participant 8)

I do not bottle things inside. If there is an issue, I speak to them immediately. But it is up to them how they take it. I do not nurse the feelings since children can be very manipulative. (Participant 1)

When I get angry, I cry and lock myself in my room. I think about their late mother, then I calm down and talk to them. (Participant 10)

Sometimes I do not know what to do, especially when he cries after being reprimanded. I choose to keep quiet and let things calm down. (Participant 5)

If I concentrate on what she did wrong, I get emotional and feel like hitting her. So instead, I talk to her to understand why she did it. That is how I manage my emotions. (Participant 4)

The study highlights the challenges foster parents face in managing emotions and anger. Some parents addressed issues directly with their children to prevent tension, while others used isolation to process their feelings. These strategies helped maintain peace but sometimes led to misunderstandings, like children feeling rejected. The study also shows that personal resilience and external support, such as financial or emotional help from family, influenced how foster parents handled stress. Those with more support tended to cope better, while those without it struggled more. The interaction between internal coping strategies and external support was crucial to maintaining emotional health and creating a nurturing environment.

The results are in line with other studies that focused on the mental problems faced by foster parents and how important it is for them to find healthy ways to deal with these problems. Cooley and Petren (2020:1689) shared that the foster parents' ability to control their emotions has a big effect on the level of care they give and the overall health of the children they foster. In addition, Brown and Bednar (2021:801) emphasised how important it is to encourage a dialogue-centered approach to resolving conflicts in caregiving situations. The fact that participants depend on communication, whether it is instant or delayed, shows that they are trying to find a balance between expressing their feelings and keeping the household stable. However, the fact that some participants relied on quiet treatment goes against what is suggested in the literature. Passive coping strategies are not recommended since they can make it harder for carers and children to connect emotionally and build trust (Palacios, Roman & Moreno, 2019:89).

Theme 6: Financial implications of providing care for foster children

The study demonstrates that foster parents highlighted significant financial challenges in meeting the needs of foster children. Several foster parents expressed their sense of responsibility for providing essential resources such as food, clothing, and shelter. Foster care grants were a crucial source of support, as noted by one of the participants, who carefully budgeted to cover necessities. However, these grants were often insufficient, compelling foster parents to supplement with their limited personal

income. Another participant, for instance, reported borrowing money to address financial shortfalls, while the other participant faced difficulty managing unexpected expenses, particularly those related to education. The increasing cost of living and the inadequacy of foster care funding emerged as recurring themes across participants' experiences. These findings underscore the financial strain foster parents endure and the need for improved financial support mechanisms. Education-related expenses were a significant concern for participants, with many struggling to afford school uniforms, books, transportation, and extracurricular activities. These outcomes highlight the financial burden of education on foster parents and the critical need for additional financial assistance. The following sub-themes on the financial implications of providing care for foster children emerged:

Sub-theme 6.1: Ensuring that foster children's needs are met

Participants identified major financial obstacles in satisfying foster children's needs. Numerous foster parents felt responsible for meeting children's fundamental necessities, including food, clothing, and shelter. Participants such as Participant 1 budgeted carefully and relied on foster care grants for basics. However, handouts alone were insufficient, forcing foster parents to augment with their meagre personal income before grant payouts. For example, Participant 9 had to borrow money to fill gaps. Participant 14 struggled with unexpected expenses, especially school-related ones. The rising expense of living and inadequate foster care funding were constant themes. The responses of the participants are reflected in the verbatim statements below:

The money that these children get is not much. Normally, when I split the money, I buy food that costs R1000 and give them each R500 per month.”
(Participant2)

“I buy food, 25 kg of mealie meal, and other groceries to last the month. Sometimes it is not enough. (Participant 11)

When I buy clothes, I must use store accounts since I cannot afford to pay cash for everything. (Participant 7)

Things are expensive. Sometimes I wish the grant could be increased to cover more of their needs. (Participant 10)

These findings show how hard it is for foster parents to make ends meet, especially as their foster children get older and their needs change. The rising prices of goods like food, clothes, and school supplies make things even harder for foster parents who are already struggling with money. When looking more closely, the financial stress that participants noted shows that the foster care system has holes in it. Social grants are a safety net, but they do not take into account the rising cost of living. Neither do they take into account the special problems foster children face, like trauma or not being able to learn as much as they should, for which foster parents need extra help. There were a lot of foster parents who shared that they needed extra help, like money to pay for school or counselling, and this shows the need for a bigger support system that includes more than just financial help. Some of the studies support the idea that foster parents around the world have a hard time with money. Brown, Smith, and Taylor (2022:801) stated that foster parents often do not realise how much money they have to spend on their children, especially in low-income areas. Roesch-Marsh and Gillies (2021:230) also emphasised that while financial help is important, it needs to be paired with community and psychological support to make sure that foster children get the best care possible.

Sub-theme 6.2: Educational expenses

Expenses associated with education were a major concern, with many participants facing challenges in affording school uniforms, textbooks, transportation, and extracurricular activities. Due to wear and tear, Participant 8 had to buy new outfits often. Participant 10 had trouble handling matriculation expenditures, which included exam and school trip fees. Participant 14 also stressed the necessity for targeted financial support for higher-grade students where costs rise. The participants lamented as follows:

School expenses are high. I struggle to pay for their transportation and uniforms, especially for the child in matric. (Participant 10)

The school wants fees for events and trips, but sometimes I cannot manage. It is frustrating since I want the child to participate like others. (Participant 14)

I pay for their school supplies, and sometimes they still need extra books or a calculator, which is costly. (Participant 7)

It is hard to balance everything when school fees and uniforms eat into the grant money. (Participant 6)

The findings revealed that the foster care grant does help with basic needs, but it does not always cover the costs of going to school. Foster children need to get an education to break the cycle of poverty, but often they are unable to since they cannot afford educational expenses. More research shows that the costs of education are greatly felt by foster families, since the children in these homes often need extra help in school, and because of the money problems participants may have to make tough decisions, like giving up other important things to focus on school (Maguire, May, McCormack & Foster, 2024:667). Participants were upset that the government did not help foster children with school costs, especially for extracurricular activities. According to Lloyd (2023:102), there is a need for specific educational help for foster care families. Lloyd (2023:102) suggested that government programs should include subsidies for school-related costs to promote equitable educational access for foster children. The findings support and suggest that policy adjustments are necessary to bridge the gap between financial aid and educational expenses.

Sub-theme 6.3: Provision of health care to the foster child

The findings indicate that health care costs also pose significant challenges for foster parents, since many foster children under their care require medical attention. This contains routine check-ups, vaccinations, and treatment for various illnesses. Participant 7 mentioned the difficulty of affording over-the-counter medications, while Participant 5 noted the high costs of specialist visits for chronic conditions. Although some participants had access to public health care facilities, others reported delays or additional costs for private care. The views of the participants are reflected in the direct quotes below:

When they get sick, I sometimes have to pay for private doctors since the clinics take too long. (Participant 5)

The child needed glasses, but I could not afford the tests, so we had to wait for months while I was saving money for the glasses. (Participant 9)

Their health is my priority, but it is not always easy to pay for everything, even with the grant. (Participant 12)

I wish there were more assistance with medical costs, especially for things like dental care. (Participant 13)

These results demonstrate the cost of providing health care to their children. Foster parents aim to protect their children, but limited resources and bureaucratic inefficiencies make it difficult. Analysis shows that limiting access to free or affordable health services increases health care expenses. Private care is often necessary for foster parents, straining their finances. This highlights the need for more accessible foster family health care programs. García-Moya, Ruiz, and Delgado (2020:240) indicated that foster children face financial and institutional challenges that lead to unmet health needs. Kelly and Rhodes (2021:326) proposed that subsidised medical care for foster care families can greatly reduce this burden. Similar needs were found in Sedibeng District, suggesting that authorities should prioritise inexpensive health care.

Theme 7: Strategies to address the challenges faced by the foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement

The participants suggested several strategies to address the challenges faced by the foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement. These strategies are incorporated in the following sub-themes:

Sub-theme 7.1: Improved therapy services for both foster parents and foster children

Several foster parents shared that they needed more counselling to assist them in dealing with the social and mental challenges of caring for foster children and to help the foster children as well. According to some of the participants, it was hard to deal with parenting children who had been through traumatic events, and others said it was important to get professional help to deal with the difficult emotional situations at home. According to the findings, some foster parents strive to assist the children emotionally. However, they feel unprepared to face deeper psychological concerns like abandonment, bereavement, or behavioural challenges.

Participants also stressed the need for therapy and counselling for foster children and caregivers. Many foster parents were unprepared for the emotional toll of fostering, especially when they had to balance their emotional well-being with caring for foster

children. Some highlighted that frequent counselling sessions would allow them to share their issues and obtain competent advice, thus enhancing their childcare. The suggestions raised by the participants are reflected in the following verbatim statements:

I think both the foster children and foster parents need counselling, especially during the difficult times when emotions run high. Sometimes it is hard to manage everything on my own. (Participant 1).

Counselling should be provided, not just for the children, but for us as well. We carry the burden of their trauma, and sometimes it is too much. (Participant 9).

I have been raising these children for years, but there are moments when I do not know how to handle their emotional outbursts. Counselling would definitely help. (Participant 5).

The system needs to offer more counselling, especially for young foster parents like me who are still learning how to deal with all these responsibilities. (Participant 13).

There should be mandatory counselling sessions for all foster parents. It helps to talk things out, especially when the children are difficult to handle. (Participant 2).

The findings highlight a gap in social support within the foster care system, leaving foster parents feeling unprepared to deal with the emotional and behavioural challenges of foster children. The lack of access to professional therapy contributes to stress, emotional exhaustion, and potential burnout. The study suggests that counseling services would benefit both foster children and parents by providing emotional support and coping strategies. Regular therapy sessions could help foster parents manage their own feelings while improving their ability to care for the children, ultimately creating a healthier family environment.

Smyke, Zeanah, and Fox (2019:792) highlighted that stress can induce mental and behavioural issues in foster children, which can worsen without competent care, and they need counselling to deal with their emotions and gain problem-solving skills. This supports what the participants expressed about the need for therapy and counselling to help children cope with stress. Foster parents should seek treatment since the

mental stress of caring for others can lead to burnout. Also, regular therapy meetings can assist foster parents in coping with mental health concerns, benefiting both the parents and the children (McWey & Riebschleger, 2020:453).

Sub-theme 7.2: More resources and financial support for foster care family

Findings revealed that foster parents are suffering from financial stress. Participants shared that the funds for foster care were not enough for the foster children in their care, especially as the children get older and need more money for basic needs like school, clothes, and food. Participants shared that they lack money because of unemployment and low-paying jobs. This made a lot of foster parents feel like they could not give the foster children the care and help they needed. The participants' proposals are reflected in the direct quotes below:

The foster care grant is not enough, especially when the children grow older and need more things. I am barely able to keep up with the costs. (Participant 3)

There should be more financial support for foster parents. It is hard to provide everything they need with the little money we get. (Participant 12)

I have had to wait months for the grant to be approved. In the meantime, I am using my own money to take care of the children, which is not sustainable. (Participant 7)

We need more financial resources, especially for things like school fees and uniforms. The current system does not provide enough. (Participant 6)

If they could increase the foster care grant or provide more resources like food parcels, it would make a huge difference for foster parents. (Participant 14)

The findings show that foster parents face financial difficulties, making it hard to meet their foster children's basic needs. The financial support provided is insufficient, especially as costs rise with age. Delays and a complicated aid process add to their frustrations, highlighting the need for a more efficient system. Some parents struggle to afford essentials like school fees, clothing, and recreation, which are important for children's development. These financial worries create stress and anxiety, negatively affecting both foster parents and children's well-being.

According to Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2019:23), foster parents struggle with money, and most of the time struggle to pay their bills due to insufficient funds. This is especially true for children with complex educational or healthcare needs. In addition, Akin, Brook, Lloyd, and McDonald (2020:627) found that foster parents who received food stamps or school scholarships were better able to meet their children's needs and felt less anxious about money. This is in line with what the study participants recommended; they suggested that foster care families receive food hampers and school scholarships to help them financially. However, Berrick and Boyd (2019:89) argued that increasing financial aid is a wonderful concept, but difficult; it requires a lot of money and time, which foster care agencies are already short on. The authors suggested that foster care systems should look into other ways to help, like forming relationships with community groups so that they can give foster care families more resources without putting too much stress on the system's budget.

Sub-theme 7.3: Enhancement of the foster care system

The findings reveal that there are multifaceted challenges faced by foster parents and the need for significant enhancements to the foster care system. Participants consistently highlighted inefficiencies in the system, such as delayed processing of foster care grants, a lack of sufficient communication from social workers, and inadequate training for caregivers. The absence of structured emotional and psychological support for both foster parents and foster children emerged as a critical gap. Many foster parents were frustrated by the Department of Social Development's lack of follow-up visits, assistance, and training to handle foster children's behavioural issues. Participants also found a divide between stakeholders, including educational institutions and SASSA, which worsens foster families' problems. The participants' proposals are reflected in the verbatim words below:

The social workers need to visit us more frequently. We need them to guide us, as sometimes we feel abandoned after the grant is processed. (Participant 6)

If only the system could reduce the waiting time for processing social grants and provide training for us on how to handle the children better. (Participant 2)

I sometimes feel overwhelmed since there is no one to help with emotional support for the children or me. A counsellor would be helpful. (Participant 13).

The foster care grant is helpful, but the process to renew it is frustrating and lengthy. It takes too much time. (Participant 9)

The findings show that the system is not working well for foster parents. For example, Participant 6 pointed out that the repeated calls for social workers to come more often show that there is not enough ongoing involvement and supervision. Foster parents often feel alone and unprepared to handle complicated family dynamics since they do not get enough help. Participant 13's request for counselling shows how hard it is emotionally on foster parents who not only have to pay the bills but also deal with the mental health needs of foster children. Also, as Participant 9 pointed out, the errors in the grant renewal processes make it hard for families to pay their bills when they need the money. These problems with the system make foster parents feel like they are being ignored, and this makes them angry.

These results are very similar to those of foster care studies from the global community. Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, and Raap (2020:247) shared about similar systemic problems, where the authors mentioned that while grants give foster parents much-needed help, the lack of training and emotional support for foster parents often makes the system less successful. In the same way, Louw, Parker, and Mngomezulu (2022:102) shared that bureaucratic mistakes in grant distribution hurt caregivers in low-income areas more than others. This is something that the participants who took part in this study also noticed. The results back up these views, making it clear that the foster care system needs major changes to be more efficient and open to everyone.

Sub-theme 7.4: Shortened waiting period

Findings show that the delayed or prolonged foster care grant approval and renewal waiting times have a major impact. Participants struggled financially to care for foster children without state aid during these delays. The majority of participants complained about the social worker's repetitive documentation and inadequate communication. These delays increase financial and emotional burden for foster parents, who are unsure how to care for their children. The suggestions from the participants are captured in the direct quotes below:

It took almost a year for the foster care grant to be approved. During that time, I had to take loans to provide for the children. (Participant 7)

They always ask for the same documents repeatedly, which delays the process unnecessarily. (Participant 10)

I wish the waiting period could be shortened since the children's needs do not wait for the paperwork to be completed. (Participant 5)

Social workers should communicate better. Sometimes we wait months without any updates. (Participant 14)

These findings give us important information about the problems with the way the foster care system is run. Participant 7 had to take out loans to pay for their children's costs shows how important it is to speed up the grant processes. In the same way, Participant 10's anger over having to keep writing the same things repeatedly shows flaws that could be fixed by using digital technology more effectively. Participant 14 pointed out that these problems are made worse by the fact that social workers do not talk to them, making them feel ignored and undervalued. Such behaviour makes it very hard for the foster care system to work properly.

According to Joubert and Seekoe (2021:419), the one big reason why foster parents are unhappy is that grants are not processed quickly or efficiently, which is especially true in settings with few resources. Not only that, but Louw, Parker, and Mngomezulu (2022:102) stated that digitising grant applications could cut down on waiting times and make the system work better overall. The results back up these points of view and show how important it is to change the whole foster care system to fix gaps and make it more responsive overall.

Sub-theme 7.5: Smooth running of the foster care system

Participants suggested interdepartmental cooperation, digitisation, and emotional support for foster parents and children to improve the foster care system. Many carers stressed the need for better collaboration between DSD, SASSA, and educational institutions to resolve funding delays and school resource availability. Participants also advised using digital technologies to streamline operations and boost productivity. Counselling and mentorship programs also help foster families feel more supported. Participants' recommendations are quoted as follows:

The system would work better if the social workers, SASSA, and schools coordinated their efforts instead of working in silos. (Participant 8)

They need to digitise everything. If we could apply for social grants online and track the progress, it would save us so much time and travelling costs. (Participant 4)

Regular visits by social workers would help. We feel forgotten after the initial placement. (Participant 11)

Mentorship programs for the children would be great, especially for teenagers who are struggling with identity issues. (Participant 1)

The findings show that there is a strong need for modernisation and structural integration. The fact that Participant 8 suggested that key stakeholders should work together better shows how disjointed the present foster care system is and how foster parents are often left to deal with problems without the right help. Participant 4 pointed out that the call for digitisation fits with larger trends in public administration that push for technology-based ways to make services better. Participant 1's focus on mentorship programs also shows how important it is to meet the social and developmental needs of foster children, especially during important stages like adolescence. McPherson, Bales, and Dunlop (2023:172) support the results and back it up by saying the call for digital tools to be used in social aid systems can make them more open and effective. Siegel and Andersen (2022:211) stressed the importance of counselling and mentoring programs in order to help foster children do better and to lower the stress of foster parents.

5.4 Discussion of findings and integration of literature

This section discusses the findings based on data gathered from foster parents, integrating the results with relevant literature and theoretical framework(s).

- **Experiences and challenges of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement**

Foster parents caring for foster children within a related foster care placement face challenges in managing adolescent behaviour. According to Bernedo, Oliver, Urbano-Contreras, and Conzalez-Pasarín (2022:55), foster parents navigate adolescent

rebellion, emotional detachment, and enforcing family rules. The authors further stated that teenagers seeking independence may create conflicts over curfews, household chores, and school responsibilities. In addition, Maguire et al. (2024:641) emphasised that trauma can lead adolescent foster children to resist authority, impacting their behaviour and relationships. Stewart, Celebre, Hirdes, and Poss (2023:750-751) stated that understanding early trauma's psychological impacts is key to managing adolescent trauma-informed care, which is shown by the participants in this study. Despite these challenges, many foster parents adjusted their disciplinary approaches to minimise conflict and strengthen trust with teenagers. Flexible discipline and emotional support improve relationships and help reduce behavioural issues in relative foster care placement, particularly with adolescents (Dorval, Lamothe, Heie & Poirier, 2020:2). The foster parents in this study adopted adaptive parenting strategies to ensure the protection and welfare of these children.

The findings revealed that foster parents struggle to meet both the financial and emotional needs of foster children, who expect clothes, devices, and allowances from the foster care grant. This financial strain leads to stress as foster parents struggle to fulfil obligations and children's expectations (Burke, Bouey, Madsen, Costello, Schmidt, Barkaskas, White, Alder & Murium, 2023:649). Furthermore, a study conducted by Dorval et al. (2020:3) found that foster parents are expected to extend their limited resources to care for foster children, and this results in further strain on their finances. Despite their financial limitations, they strive to offer stability and parental support.

Another concern raised by participants is that the foster children are uncertain about the purpose and limitations of the foster care grant. They often associate financial support with emotional care and feel resentment towards foster parents when their needs are not met. Orsbone, Hindt, Lutz, and Hodgkinson (2021:108) highlighted that financial difficulties in foster homes can cause resentment and miscommunication between children and foster parents. Gomez, Guo, and Lau (2024:7) added that systematic financial education in foster care programs could help children develop reasonable financial expectations, minimising these conflicts because financial misconceptions induce emotional alienation and damage the foster parent-foster child relationship.

The findings highlight that sibling bonds provide continuity and emotional security for children in foster care, particularly in relative placement. This study found that while sibling relationships offer comfort and stability, foster parents face challenges in managing them. Participants noted that siblings supported each other in adjusting to a new home, but their interactions are affected by rivalry, competition for attention, and unresolved trauma (Burke et al., 2023:650). Gomez et al. (2024:8) added that sibling relationships create a sense of belonging but can also strain foster parents, especially when conflicts arise over money and attention. While these relationships can enhance emotional resilience and adaptability, they may also intensify existing disputes and behavioural issues.

The findings also highlight the complexity of sibling dependency, as foster children rely too heavily on their siblings, making it difficult for them to build independent relationships with foster parents or other household members. According to Osborne et al. (2021:109), foster care siblings can provide stability, but excessive dependency can hinder emotional growth and adaptation. Hassall, Van Rensburg, Trew, Hawes, and Pasalich (2021:814) stated that foster care sibling connections provide consistency and identification, which is crucial for psychological well-being. This study highlights the fact that while sibling bonds are valuable, they need to be managed effectively to support children's adjustment to their new home.

According to this study, trauma affects the mental and emotional well-being of foster children within a related foster care placement. Children's emotional detachment, distrust, and mood swings made it challenging for foster parents to build meaningful bonds. According to Stewart, Celebre, Hirdes, and Poss (2023:754), foster children's past experiences often lead to mental distress, making it challenging for foster parents to provide stability. Early hardships increase the risk of mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, which may manifest as behavioural outbursts or emotional withdrawal (Hirdes, Van Everdingen, Ferris, Franco-Martin, Fries, Heikkila, Hoffman, James, Martin, Perlman & Rabinowitz, 2020:9). In addition, Lau, Stewart, Sakiofoke and Hirdes (2021:295) confirmed that trauma-informed therapies are essential for addressing foster children's emotional needs, as their struggles with trust and self-regulation hinder their ability to form meaningful relationships with their foster parents.

- **Expectations from foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement**

The results revealed that foster parents caring for children within a related foster care placement protect and support their foster children despite facing financial and emotional challenges. In a nurturing environment, participants prioritised essentials such as food, clothing, and shelter. In support of the above findings, Burke et al. (2023:653) reported that kinship carers indeed provide stability and emotional security for foster children as parents. On the contrary, Gomez et al. (2024:296) reported that kinship caregivers prioritise academic support and psychological well-being to foster a sense of belonging in children who have faced family challenges. Participants highlighted the challenge of helping foster children feel like their peers, investing in clothing, school supplies, and nutrition to ensure they foster their dignity and inclusion. Dorval et al. (2020:106) support this statement by highlighting that foster parents focus on social integration by making foster children feel loved and cared for. Additionally, Osborne et al. (2021:112) highlighted that frequent emotional support helps related foster children recover from early childhood trauma.

Another key finding was that foster parents place great value on education for future success, ensuring that foster children attend school and achieve good grades. Key findings also revealed financial constraints, limited parental involvement in school activities, and stigma associated with foster children. Foster children in relative care often encounter financial barriers to educational and social influences that hinder academic achievement (Gomez et al. 2024:297). Furthermore, Burke et al. (2023:654) emphasised that related foster care provides a safe learning environment, but without financial and institutional support, schooling seems challenging. This indicates that foster parents value their children's education but encounter social barriers. Due to peer pressure and behavioural concerns, foster parents in this study struggled to enforce school attendance and discipline. Despite the challenges, foster parents continued to keep their children in school, often withholding privileges or involving teachers to enhance academic performance. Dorval et al. (2020:7) confirmed that foster parents have higher academic expectations for their foster children compared to children in non-related foster care placements.

- **Social support mechanisms available for foster parents**

Family support plays a significant role in shaping foster parents' experiences in related foster care placement (Doval, 2020:8). In this study, participants reported receiving financial, emotional, and co-parenting assistance from siblings, aunts, and uncles, which helped them manage emotional and financial challenges. Thus, creating a stable and strong family. Consistent with the above findings, Osborne (2021:114) also noted that many foster parents rely on extended family members to provide adequate care for foster children, which alleviates financial strain. However, this support may not be sustainable, as it can also place strain on the extended families.

Community support, along with the assistance of the social workers, plays a vital role in the lives of foster parents. Participants noted that their neighbours often assist when needed in caring for the foster children, and they complimented social workers for their support with legal placements and foster care grants. However, some expressed dissatisfaction with administration delays and the lack of frequent involvement from social workers. According to Harding et al. (2020:107), community networks can provide foster parents with emotional support and occasional childcare assistance. Similarly, Maguire et al. (2024:659) highlighted that strong community support helps reduce foster parents' isolation and stress, as they receive both emotional and practical assistance from neighbours, community organisations, and religious groups.

- **Disciplining foster children versus biological children**

In this study, foster parents expressed that disciplining foster children, particularly disobedient teenagers, was more challenging than disciplining their biological children. They mentioned that foster children often resisted authority and compared their discipline to that of their biological parents. Harding et al. (2020:109) shared that foster children have difficulty with authoritative individuals due to past trauma and instability. Foster parents viewed discipline as a delicate balance between authority and disobedience, as excessive harshness could lead to behavioural resistance (Vanderfaeillie, West & Van Holen, 2020:107). This study found that many foster parents experienced emotional exhaustion due to disciplinary challenges, particularly when children engaged in self-destructive behaviours or risky activities such as

substance abuse or absenteeism. Participants set moral guidelines while considering a child's experiences, as many foster parents found that strict restrictions and approvals were ineffective due to the children's emotional trauma. Maguire et al. (2024:662) found that unresolved trauma in foster children could lead to rebellious behaviour, often necessitating therapeutic intervention.

Foster parenting is both demanding and complex as it involves managing the behaviour of biological children and instilling moral values to uphold family harmony. Participants emphasised the importance of treating both biological and foster children equally. However, biological children perceived that foster children received greater financial and emotional support, leading to conflicts. Burke et al. (2023:660) noticed that related foster care placements often lead to conflicts between biological and foster children, as foster parents must prioritise the needs of foster children. Gomez et al. (2024:301) found that family resilience helps minimise jealousy and strengthen cohesion within biological and foster families.

The study found that many participants aimed to uphold fairness while recognising the unique challenges faced by foster children. The findings also highlight the importance of moral education in fostering respect and responsibility among children. Participants emphasised that teaching honesty, respect, and discipline was crucial for maintaining household stability. Vanderfaeillie, West, and Van Hoen (2020:108) emphasised that foster parents prefer structure and clear expectations to prevent child behaviour disputes. Harding et al. (2020:109) cautioned that parenting styles and established habits can hinder moral development in families, including foster families. This study revealed that many participants found it challenging to maintain consistent discipline, particularly when biological children anticipated leniency from the foster parent.

- **Foster parents' management of their emotional well-being**

Foster children often leave many foster parents feeling frustrated, fatigued, and emotionally drained. Some foster parents struggle to balance their emotional well-being alongside the psychological and behavioural needs of foster children. Many also felt self-conscious, particularly when foster children compared them to their biological parents. Harding et al. (2020:110) noted that foster parents frequently experience emotional distress due to the demanding nature of fostering, especially when children

exhibit attachment disorders or problematic behaviours. Bernedo, Oliver, Urbano-Contreras, and Conzalez-Pasarin (2022:59) found that foster parents experience stress due to a lack of formal support. The present study confirms these findings, as many foster parents reported facing their challenges without formal emotional assistance. Participants highlighted the difficulty of maintaining emotional resilience when foster children carry persistent emotional distress. While some suppressed their emotions to avoid burdening the children, others found it beneficial to express their feelings.

Vanderfaeillie et al. (2020:109) found that some foster parents maintain stability through emotional detachment, while others believe open communication strengthens the caregiver-child bond. Many foster parents managed their emotions by choosing silence, isolation, sipping tea, or crying alone before engaging with foster children. Bernedo, Oliver, Urbano-Contreras, and Gonzalez-Pasarin (2022:60) noted that foster parents often suppress emotions and isolate themselves to stay calm and avoid reactive behaviours. However, Osborne et al. (2021:121) emphasised that healthy emotional expression and structured discussions create a more stable and supportive foster environment, reducing the risk of emotional suppression that may lead to anger or exhaustion.

- **Financial implications of providing care for the foster children**

Participants noted that the foster care grant provides assistance but fails to cover all child-rearing expenses due to their financial challenges. Burke et al. (2023:662) found that both related and non-related foster parents use personal cash to fill financial gaps. Reports indicate that foster parents frequently make difficult financial choices, such as purchasing food on credit or borrowing money before foster grant payouts, leading many to accumulate debt due to caregiving expenses (Harding et al., 2020:111). Financial instability in foster households also impacts children's school participation, as some foster parents prioritise survival over educational enrichment. Gomez et al. (2024:10) noted that despite careful budgeting, unexpected expenses frequently disrupt household finances.

Participants emphasised the considerable financial challenges in meeting the needs of foster children. Many foster parents shared their strong sense of responsibility for

providing essential resources like food, clothing, and shelter. Foster care grants played a vital role in supporting them, with one participant mentioning how they carefully budgeted to cover necessities. Maguire et al. (2024:667) also found that foster parents struggle to afford school fees, clothing, transportation, and extracurricular activities, as they often prioritise necessities over education due to insufficient foster care grants. Osborne et al. (2024:122) argued that foster children's financial limitations hinder their full participation in school, leading to social isolation and lower academic performance. Fallon, Lefebvre, Trocmé, Richard, Heilie, Montgomery, and Soop (2021:83) further highlighted that the lack of access to supplemental educational programs widens the learning gap between foster children and their peers, exacerbating socioeconomic disadvantages.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the concerns and challenges of foster parents in Sedibeng District Municipality. Social grant clearance delays, low social worker engagement, and lack of formal psychological treatment are important issues. These findings support prior research that showed that budgetary uncertainty, administrative delays, and poor interdepartmental cooperation hamper foster care delivery (Dorval, Lamothe, Heie & Poirier, 2020:11). The study also suggests comprehensive foster care policy changes, recommends digital application processing and case tracking tools to eliminate administrative delays and promote service transparency. Stewart, Celebre, Hirde, and Poss (2023:762) highlighted that foster parents and children need mental health therapy for placement stability and long-term well-being. The authors further stated that educational institutions and financial aid providers are also crucial and that educational, psychological, and financial support enhances children's wellbeing in foster care (Gomez, Guo & Lau, 2024:16). In this chapter, the presentation and discussion of the findings have highlighted key challenges faced by foster parents, particularly in the areas of financial strain and emotional well-being, including the impact of these factors on the care and development of foster children. The findings underscore the significant financial burden foster parents face as they struggle to cover essential child-rearing costs, with foster care grants often falling short. This financial instability not only affects the day-to-day caregiving but also influences the educational participation and social integration of foster children. Additionally, the

emotional toll of fostering was evident, with many participants reporting feelings of emotional exhaustion and the difficulty of balancing their own well-being with the needs of foster children.

Furthermore, the study reinforced the importance of emotional resilience and support systems for foster parents as they navigate the complexities of their roles. Foster parents often resort to isolating themselves or suppressing their emotions as coping mechanisms, which can have long-term implications for both their mental health and the quality of care provided. The integration of existing literature throughout this chapter has confirmed that these issues are not unique to this study but reflect broader challenges within foster care systems globally.

Overall, the findings emphasise the need for more comprehensive support systems for foster parents, including financial assistance, emotional support, and resources to help foster children thrive in their educational environments. The next chapter will present conclusions and explore potential strategies and recommendations for addressing these issues. Thus, improving the overall foster care experience for both parents and children.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

Chapter six presents the conclusion of the study, exploring the experiences of foster parents caring for foster children within a related foster care placement. It summarises the main findings of this study, reflecting on the central themes that emerged from the research. The chapter also deliberates on the implications of the study for practice, policy, and future research, highlighting the unique challenges and rewards associated with related foster care placements. By drawing together the insights gained, this chapter offers a complete understanding of the experiences of related foster carers and suggests pathways for supporting them more effectively.

6.2 Research summary

6.2.1 Goal of the study

The goal of this study was to explore the experiences of foster parents caring for foster children within a related foster care placement. To achieve the study's stated goal, it was critical to establish the following specific objectives.

6.2.2 Summary based on the objectives of the study

A qualitative research approach was used to explore the experiences of foster parents caring for foster children within a related foster care placement. Following a constructivist paradigm, semi-structured interviews were carried out to address the following central research question: What are the experiences of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement in Sedibeng District Municipality? To ensure thorough data collection, an interview guide was carefully developed to align with the overarching research objectives, which were subsequently refined into specific sub-questions. This approach was intended to generate rich, conversational insights from participants on the following key areas:

- To explore the experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement.

- To explore the expectations of the foster care system regarding foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement.
- To describe the social support mechanisms available to foster parents caring for foster children within a related foster care placement.
- To examine how foster parents discipline foster children in comparison to their disciplinary approaches with their biological children.
- To explore how foster parents manage their emotional well-being while caring for foster children within a related foster care placement.
- To investigate the financial implications faced by foster parents when providing care for foster children within a related foster care placement.
- To address the challenges of foster parents while caring for foster children who are related to them.

6.3 Conclusions, key findings, and fulfilment of research objectives

6.3.1 Objective 1: To explore the experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement

Research on related foster care placements highlights both the challenges encountered and the potential for successful outcomes. The psychological impact on foster families and the structural measures needed to improve service delivery have been examined. The emotional impact of raising related foster children is another key topic in the literature. Bernedo, Oliver, Urbano-Contreras, and Conzalez-Pasarin (2022:56) argued that although related foster care placement offers foster children familiarity and stability, foster parents often experience high stress due to inadequate support mechanisms. Similarly, Harding et al. (2020:106) highlighted that foster parents endure increased emotional stress since they must maintain family relationships while treating trauma-related behaviours. Vanderfaeillie et al. (2020:104) noted that foster parents often feel abandoned after the initial placement because of the lack of consistent support from social workers. Similarly, participants in this study expressed a need for more frequent support. The study revealed that foster parents are experiencing difficulties in managing adolescents and their behaviour, addressing expectations for foster children, fostering sibling relationships, dealing with the effects

of mental health issues and past trauma, navigating administrative challenges and institutional delays, and coping with financial strain due to limited resources.

Therefore, it can be determined that foster parents in related foster care placements face a range of challenges. These challenges include managing adolescent behaviour, meeting expectations, fostering sibling relationships, and addressing the emotional impact of trauma and mental health issues in foster children. Additionally, administrative issues, delays, and financial strain due to limited resources further complicate their caregiving. These findings emphasise the need for improved support systems, better resource allocation, and targeted interventions to ease the burden on foster parents and enhance the well-being of both caregivers and foster children. Burke et al. (2023:650) suggested that foster care systems are often fragmented as different government sectors operate independently, resulting in delays in processing funds and providing appropriate assistance. In the same way, Osborne, Hindt, Lutz, Hodkinson, and Leon (2021:23) emphasised that security of related foster care placement is jeopardised when foster parents face financial uncertainty due to lengthy approval processes. This uncertainty increases stress for foster parents, which can have a detrimental effect on their health and safety.

6.3.2 Objective 2: To explore the expectations of the foster care system regarding foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement

The results of this study discovered that foster parents felt a strong sense of responsibility to provide proper care for the well-being of their foster children. Regardless of their financial situation, they were expected to ensure the children's stability and emotional security, fulfilling their parental role. Burke et al. (2023:653) highlighted that children enter foster care for various reasons, and foster parents are expected to welcome them with warmth and provide a loving home. Access to basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter is a key priority for these caregivers. In addition, foster parents highlighted the challenge of ensuring that foster children feel at home and have a sense of belonging, especially due to the trauma they may have experienced. This aligns with the statement by Harding et al. (2020:110) that foster children's emotional well-being diminishes when caregivers lack resources.

Additionally, Osborne et al. (2021:112) also noted that consistent emotional support plays an important role in helping foster children heal from early childhood trauma.

The study also revealed that foster parents are expected to provide foster children with academic and psychological support to ensure that they are independent young adults. The study also found that participants placed a high value on education as a pathway for future success, with particular emphasis on regular school attendance and achieving good grades as top priorities. Contrary to these findings, Gomez et al. (2024:297) highlighted that foster parents may be limited to being fully involved in their foster children's school activities due to financial constraints, and this may lower their academic achievements. Furthermore, Burke et al. (2023:654) agreed that while foster parents provide a safe and supportive learning environment for foster children, the lack of financial and institutional support makes this task challenging. These limitations represent some of the social barriers that foster parents commonly encounter.

6.3.3 Objective 3: To describe the social support mechanisms available for foster parents caring for foster children within a related foster care placement

The outcome of this study indicates that foster parents highlighted the importance of mentorship and counselling programs, especially for their teenage foster children. These programs are seen as crucial in helping adolescents navigate identity issues and supporting foster parents in managing these challenges. Gomez, Guo, and Lau (2024:7) emphasised that mentorship programs boost foster children's emotional resilience, minimising behavioural issues and increasing school participation. Maguire, May, McCormack, and Foster (2024:642) added that systematic counselling helps foster parents and foster children manage their psychological difficulties, improving long-term outcomes. Additionally, foster parents stressed the need for regular visits from the social worker to provide active and sufficient support to reinforce persistent emotional intervention mechanisms in foster care.

This study also revealed that participants receive financial, emotional, and co-parenting support from siblings, aunts, and uncles. This assistance helped them manage emotional and financial challenges, contributing to the creation of a stable and strong family environment. Gomez et al. (2024:8) emphasised the importance of support for foster parents, noting that it helps them recognise when to seek

professional services. This support also helps them in managing emotions such as anger, happiness, anxiety, and confusion. These are feelings that, if unaddressed, could lead to challenges like burnout or secondary trauma. Ultimately, the support they receive contributes to creating a stable and nurturing home environment. In addition, community support emerged as a key finding in the study, in which foster parents emphasised the importance of relying on their neighbours for support as it significantly eases the challenges of foster parenting. According to Farmer (2020:45), foster parents with strong community ties are more likely to report good results. Harding et al. (2020:107) emphasised the importance of community support in ensuring the success of foster care, as it helps foster parents feel relieved knowing they have reliable people to depend on. In conclusion, this study emphasises the vital role of familial and community support in the lives of foster parents. Participants highlighted receiving financial, emotional, and co-parenting help from family members, which eased the emotional and financial challenges of fostering. Community support, especially from neighbours, and assistance from social workers, particularly with legal placements and foster care grants, were also crucial in alleviating burdens. These findings stress the importance of a strong support network to promote the safety of both foster parents and children.

6.3.4 Objective 4: To examine how foster parents discipline foster children in comparison to their disciplinary approaches with their biological children

The study found that disciplining foster children can be more challenging than disciplining biological children, as foster children often resist authority and compare their foster parents' disciplinary methods to those of their biological parents. According to Harding (2020:109), this is a result of trauma and instability that the children may have experienced. Additionally, the study revealed that many foster parents experienced emotional exhaustion due to discipline challenges, particularly when foster children exhibited self-destructive tendencies or problematic behaviour. According to Vanderfaellie, West, and Van Hole (2020:107), although many foster parents have established moral norms, they felt strict restrictions were ineffective because of the emotional trauma experienced by foster children.

Concerning their biological children, foster parents in this study stated that treating both foster and biological children equally was the only way to maintain balance and

unity within the household. Gomez et al. (2024:301) stated that family resilience helps to lessen jealousy between biological and foster children, thus preventing conflict and encouraging fairness. Maguire et al. (2024: 662) noted that despite foster parents' efforts to be fair, biological children often show resentment, particularly when they perceive foster children as having certain advantages. When biological children experience disparities in attention and resources, these feelings can lead to emotional withdrawal or rebellious behaviour. However, foster parents have addressed this challenge by fostering a family unit and encouraging mutual understanding, which helps reduce conflicts and strengthen relationships.

6.3.5 Objective 5: To explore how foster parents manage their emotional well-being while caring for foster children within a related foster care placement

This study discovered that many foster parents were emotionally worn out and felt alone, especially after the placement of foster children, since there is not enough supervision or support from social workers. According to Bernedo et al. (2022:57), participants reported that they are experiencing emotional challenges when caring for foster children who exhibit trauma-related behaviours such as withdrawal or difficulty forming attachments. As a result, these children often require mental health support to address their complex emotional needs. The discoveries of this study also revealed that many foster parents choose to adopt silent treatment and isolation to have time to deal with their emotions before addressing the challenge with foster children. According to the foster parents, they are trying to avoid being harsh to the foster children and to remain calm. Osborne et al (2021:121) suggested that a healthy emotional expression and organised discussion between foster parents and children promotes a more stable and supportive foster family environment. This helps to lessen the risk of emotional suppression that may lead to anger and acting out. Harding (2020:106) emphasised that foster parents often experience heightened emotional strain due to the dual responsibility of nurturing family bonds while simultaneously managing trauma-induced behaviours exhibited by foster children. This persistent emotional burden is further compounded by the frequent absence of adequate institutional or community-based support systems. Consequently, Harding advocates for the provision of targeted counseling services for foster parents, recognising that

structured psychological support is essential to mitigate stress and promote caregiver resilience in high-pressure fostering environments.

6.3.6 Objective 6: To investigate the financial implications faced by foster parents when providing care for foster children within a related foster care placement

The study revealed that foster parents face financial challenges in meeting the needs of their foster children. Although a foster care grant is provided, it is often inadequate to cover all associated expenses. In a study conducted by Burke et al. (2023:662), it was discovered that both related and non-related foster parents often use their own personal money to bridge financial disparities for the well-being of foster children. Harding et al. (2020:111) lamented that foster parents accumulate debt for the sake of caring for their foster children as they must borrow money to buy food, clothes, and cover school fees. This study also revealed that financial instability in the foster care placement comes with stress for foster parents, whereby they have to put survival first and other needs, such as educational needs, secondary. The study by Maquire et al. (2024:667) supported that most foster families prioritise their basic needs over schooling due to inadequate and insufficient foster care grants. Also, some of the foster parents are unemployed, and they depend on the grant for survival.

Another finding highlighted in this study is the challenge of providing adequate health care for foster children. This issue adds to the financial strain faced by foster parents, as they often cannot afford regular checkups, treatments, or specialist visits. As a result, medical care is delayed, further increasing financial pressure on the foster families. Bernedo et al. (2022:59) highlighted those financial constraints faced by many foster families that often lead to delays in accessing medical care, which can worsen the health issues of foster children. Due to financial instability, these families may struggle to afford prescription medications and specialised therapies. Conversely, Fallon et al. (2021:83) observed that inadequate health care negatively impacts foster families, leading to poor healthcare and health disparities among foster children. Financial difficulties combined with inefficiencies in the public health sector often hinder these children from receiving proper medical care. Participants recommended that to improve healthcare services and their costs to foster families, government help or assistance is needed. Participants in this study expressed feeling overwhelmed and

emphasised the need for a government subsidy to ensure comprehensive healthcare coverage for foster children.

6.3.7 Objective 7: To address the challenges of foster parents while caring for foster children who are related to them

Numerous recent research studies highlighted the importance of digital transformation in enhancing foster care services. Digitisation can enhance clarity, reduce paperwork challenges, and accelerate communication between staff and social service agencies. Osborne, Hindt, Lutz, Hodgkinson, and Leon (2021:24) emphasised that digital case management tools streamlined the distribution of funds and improved case monitoring. This meant that carer-givers could find out about foster care programs right away. The Government of Ontario (2022:582) has set up online tools for foster parents to check on the progress of their money requests. These systems have greatly reduced waiting periods and made services easier. Participants in this study strongly advocated for similar digital solutions in South Africa, stressing the need for an online platform to track grant applications, schedule social worker visits, and access support. This suggests that implementing digital technology could help address some of the current inefficiencies in the foster care system. These insights collectively underscore the urgent need for a more coordinated and technology-driven approach to foster care that ensures better support for caregivers and more efficient service delivery.

The findings for this study also highlighted the need for improved collaboration between SASSA, the Department of Social Development, and educational institutions. Participants pointed out that poor coordination among these entities hinders the effective delivery of financial assistance and educational support for foster children. Burke et al. (2023:648) concurred that inter-agency collaboration is essential to nurture children's overall well-being. Furthermore, Gypen, Vanderfaeillie, De Maeyer, Belenger, and Van Holen (2017:83) suggested that effective academic support for foster children requires collaboration between the foster and education systems. Strengthening cooperation across departments could significantly enhance educational outcomes for foster children. The study revealed that uncoordinated systems place significant stress on foster parents, making it more difficult to provide stable and supportive environments. The study emphasises the urgent need for a more responsive, coordinated, and well-resourced foster care system. Addressing

systemic inefficiencies, improving communication and training, and strengthening collaboration among key stakeholders are essential steps towards supporting foster families and ensuring the well-being of foster children.

The participants further suggested that there is a need for more counselling to deal with the challenges they face in raising foster children. They lamented the difficulty of raising foster children who have been through trauma and exhibit challenging behaviours. According to McWey and Riebschleger (2020:453), foster parents should seek help because the stress of caring for foster children can lead to burnout. Hence, regular therapy or counselling is required to assist them in coping with their mental challenges. Improved therapy is also required for foster children, as some situations are deeper and therefore need professional psychological attention. Smyke, Zeanah, and Fox (2019:792) noted that stress can contribute to mental and behavioural problems in foster children, which may worsen without professional intervention. Therapy can equip these children with problem-solving skills to help them manage their emotions effectively.

More resources and financial support are needed, as recommended by the participants. Foster parents reported that they are struggling to meet the foster children's needs. In addition, they face difficulties covering their expenses, which hinders their capacity to adequately care for their foster children. Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2019:23) confirmed that many foster parents face financial challenges, and they also find it challenging to care for foster children, especially as they become older and their needs increase. In addition, Akin, Brook, Lloyd, and McDonald (2020:627) emphasised that while foster grants do assist foster parents in meeting their foster children's needs, the support is insufficient, often leaving them feeling anxious about their financial situation. Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, and Raap (2020:247) also emphasised that while the foster care grant offers valuable financial support to foster parents, providing training and emotional support is equally essential for the overall success of the foster care system.

6.4 Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the research outcome gathered from interviews with participants, who are foster parents providing care within related foster care placements.

6.4.1 Addressing financial strain in foster care

This study identified financial pressure as a significant challenge for foster parents. To address this, participants suggested that South Africa should enhance its foster care grant system by providing foster parents with more comprehensive, needs-based financial support. Burke et al. (2023:653) also emphasised that financial stability plays a crucial role in the success of foster care. A strengthened financial support system would not only ease the burden on foster parents but would also contribute to more stable and effective foster care placements. When foster parents are financially secure, they are able to meet the diverse and often complex needs of foster children. This includes access to healthcare, education, and emotional support. In turn, this promotes a more nurturing and stable environment, which is essential for the healthy development and well-being of foster children. Ultimately, comprehensive financial support enhances the overall success and sustainability of the foster care system in South Africa.

6.4.2 Enhancing social support systems

Foster parents frequently experience isolation and emotional exhaustion due to the demands of caregiving. Strengthening community-based support networks can provide them with valuable peer support and access to trained counsellors. According to Harding et al. (2020:107) and Hassall, Van Rensburg, Trew, Hawes, and Pusalick (2021:816), support groups and mental health interventions contribute to greater stability in foster care placements and help reduce stress among foster parents. It is therefore recommended that social workers set up support groups where foster parents are afforded an opportunity to share their challenges with each other and find ways to deal with them. The results of this study also revealed that foster parents often lack trauma-informed care and child development skills. Therefore, it was suggested that foster parents must receive mandatory parenting training to equip them with the

skills and knowledge needed to effectively manage behavioural challenges and provide a nurturing, stable environment for foster children. Furthermore, training should include trauma management, address behavioural issues, and understanding foster care legislation. Bernedo et al. (2022:59) emphasised that well-prepared foster parents are better equipped to handle difficult behaviours and offer a stable home environment.

6.4.3 Improving foster care policy and administrative practices

The findings reveal that current foster care policies and procedures are ineffective. Delays in accessing foster care grants, legal documentation, and medical services create significant stress for foster parents. To improve service delivery, the Department of Social Development should digitise routine processes to enhance efficiency and responsiveness. Osborne et al. (2021:27) and Dorval et al. (2020:3) noted that reducing administrative burdens increases foster parents' engagement and leads to better outcomes in foster care. Streamlining and digitising administrative processes would not only reduce stress for foster parents but also improve their engagement and capacity to provide stable, high-quality care, ultimately strengthening the overall effectiveness of the foster care system.

6.4.4 Strengthening educational support and engagement for foster children

Foster children face challenges at school due to inconsistent placements, including social and emotional issues. Participants recommended that the government provide scholarships and mentoring programmes to support foster children. The study by Maguire, May, McCormack, and Foster (2024:644) pointed out that placement stability and academic support improve foster children's academic performance. Foster children should be allowed to participate in decisions that affect their lives, with their perspectives taken into account when choosing schools. Living environments and approaches to improving their mental health should be directed through the child-centred approach. Osborne et al. (2021:28) and Stewart et al. (2023:392) highlighted that granting greater responsibility to foster children, especially teenagers, enhances their happiness and fosters greater independence.

6.4.5 Enhancing monitoring and accountability in child welfare services

Participants recommended that foster care placements be regularly monitored to ensure the protection of children, with foster families receiving frequent home visits and ongoing support from social workers. Fallon et al. (2021:78) and Vanderfaeillie et al. (2020:107) stressed the importance of continuous monitoring to enhance foster care and prevent disruptions in placements. According to Harding et al. (2020:104), frequent social worker interaction enhances placement stability and foster parent well-being, as some parents feel abandoned after placements due to social workers not visiting anymore. Foster parents often face discrimination and fail to receive adequate recognition for their valuable work. There should be increased public awareness of foster care to highlight the importance of caring for foster children and the critical role foster parents play.

6.4.6 Recommendations for future research

Further research is needed to gain deeper insights into the experiences of foster parents raising children within related foster care placements. Additional areas for future study on the experiences of foster parents in such placements within the South African context may include the following:

- Investigate differences in experiences between related and non-related foster care placements to identify unique challenges or benefits in kinship care.
- Include the voices and perspectives of children raised in related foster care placements to expand a more holistic understanding of the placement experience.
- Assess the effectiveness of existing policies and programs in supporting related foster care placements and identify areas for improvement.

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Appendix 1: CV of the researcher**PERSONAL DETAILS**

Surname: Mosella
Names: Mpho Sophia
Age: 39
Gender: Female
ID No: 8607100276082
Marital status: Married
Nationality: South African
Residence: 36 DeForest Street, CW5 Vanderbijlpark
Postal address: 36 DeForest Street, CW5 Vanderbijlpark
Contact number: 083 756 4882
E-mail address: Mpho.Mosella@gauteng.gov.za/
mphomosella022@gmail.com

EDUCATION**HIGH SCHOOL**

Name of school: Yakhisizwe Secondary School
Grade: Grade 12
Year: 2003

TERTIARY LEVEL

Name of institution: Flavius Mareka College
Qualification: Diploma in Business Management
Year completed: 2007
Name of institution: North West University (Vaal Campus)
Qualification: Bachelor of Social Work
Year completed: 2013

EMPLOYMENT

Name of employer: Department of Social Development
Year: June 2014 to date

Appendix 2: Researcher acknowledgement

RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Research title: The experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement

Researcher: Mpho Sophia Mosella

I, **Mpho Sophia Mosella**, ID number **8607100276082**, in my personal capacity as a researcher, acknowledge that I am aware of and familiar with the stipulations and contents of the following;

- Unisa Research Policy
- Unisa Ethics Policy
- Unisa IP Policy

and that I shall conform to and abide by these policy requirements

Signature..... **Date**.....

Appendix 3: Permission to conduct research

Enquiries: Ms D Mukhathi
Tel: 011 355 7758
Cell: 079 891 5883
File no: 13/06/2024

Dear Mpho Sophia Mosella

**RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE
GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**


Thank you for your application to conduct research within the Gauteng Department of Social Development.

Your application for the research titled *"The Experiences of Foster Parents Raising Children Within a Related Foster Care Placement"* approved by the University of South Africa has been considered and approved for support by the Department as it was found to be beneficial to the Department's vision and mission. The approval is subject to the Department's terms and conditions as endorsed on the 13th of November 2019. This approval letter is valid from the date of approval until August 17, 2024.

You have permission to interview departmental officials and beneficiaries, conduct observations and access relevant documents where necessary.

May I take this opportunity to wish you well on the journey you are about to embark on. We look forward to a value adding research and a fruitful co-operation.

With thanks


Ms Amanda Hartmann
DDG: Support Services
Date: 2024/06/19

Appendix 4: Participation information sheet

Research title: The experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement

**Researcher:
(Mpho Sophia Mosella)**

Ethics clearance reference number: 17139880_CREC_CHS_2023

Research permission reference number (if applicable): N/A

20 June 2025

Title: The experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Mpho Sophia Mosella, and I am doing research under the supervision of Dr. Sandile Lucas Dhludhlu, a senior lecturer in the Department of Social Work, towards a Master's degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "The experiences of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement".

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to explore the experiences of foster parents caring for foster children within a related foster care placement. The relation may be maternal, paternal or between siblings. The experience shared involves foster parents reflecting on their emotional well-being, as well as their financial needs.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited to participate in this study to help answer the research question: "What are the experiences of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement?". As a foster parent in a related placement, your insights are valuable and relevant to this research. I have selected you as a participant because I offer services to you as a social worker and believe that you have a meaningful story to share about your experience fostering a sibling, grandchild, niece, or nephew.

As a selected participant, you form part of the Department of Social Development Regional office beneficiaries, and the Department has existing files where personal information is kept. During participants' recruitment, they were contacted telephonically, and others were verbally requested when they reported to the office for supervision services. This was all done informally to prepare them to partake before being given the formal invitations to form part of the study.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

As the participant, you will form part of the other 14 participants in this study and you will be interviewed separately. The interviews will take place face-to-face, and a phone will be used to audio record the interviews. The recording is done to have data that can be used further in the study, and the recordings will be kept in a safe place at the researcher's residence. You will also be asked to provide your consent to participate in a verbal interview. The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and depending on the interaction during the interview, the time may be less than or more than the stipulated time. The interview will be conducted either at the researcher's office or at the location of your choice that ensures privacy and a comfortable setting, on a date and time arranged by the researcher.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary, and you are obligated to consent to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. Please note that even after you have signed the consent form, your participation in the study remains entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any point, without providing any reason and without facing any negative consequences. Your decision to withdraw will be respected, and any information you have already shared will not be used in the study unless you permit for it to be included. Your well-being and comfort throughout the research process are of utmost importance.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The benefits of taking part in the study include the results of the study being shared with other foster parents and prospective foster parents. The information will play a

vital role in preparing prospective foster parents on what to expect in raising foster children and even getting insights on how to tackle challenges they may come across.

On the other hand, the participants may be empowered as they will be sharing stories on a new platform where they will feel important and appreciated. This opportunity may be the first one where foster parent get to reflect on their journey, which may help them process their experiences, challenges, and accomplishments. The interview may also be therapeutic due to expressing themselves and validating their efforts of raising these foster children or persons.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

During the interview, participants will share their experiences in raising foster children within a related foster care. Due to the stories being personal, this may arouse emotional and psychological discomfort or social discomfort. Foster parents face different challenges, and the foster children or persons are placed with them for various reasons such as death, neglect, or abandonment. Such has an impact, be it a positive or a negative one, such as:

- Revisiting of painful experiences
- Invasion of privacy
- Feeling judged
- Gratifying moments
- Feeling pressured to answer “perfectly.”

As a result, a social worker from FAMSA or GCRC has been requested to assist with counselling should a participant need assistance during or after an interview to address the discomfort at hand. In terms of needing medical assistance, the participant will be taken to Sebokeng Hospital, which is near to the office for medical assistance. There is no insurance cover in place for participants as no harm or injury is anticipated to take place due to the office environment.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Interviews will be conducted in an office for privacy, and you have the right to insist that your name not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, such as the research supervisor, will know about your involvement in this research or connect the answers provided to you. Your answers will be given a code or an assumed name that will be used as a reference in the data.

Furthermore, your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that this research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and the research supervisor, who are also committed to ensuring the confidentiality of the study, unless you permit for other people to see the records. As the interview may be emotional when answering a personal question, debriefing may be needed; therefore, your identity will also be shared with the identified social worker from FAMSA or GCRC.

Note that your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles, and/or conference proceedings. Your identity will be kept anonymous as well. Please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity, e.g., when focus groups are used as a data collection method.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Two hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a minimum period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at the researcher's residence and at the researcher's office. For future research or academic purposes, electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

In time to destroy the information provided by participants, hard copies will be shredded, and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no money offered for taking part in the study. As mentioned, the study is voluntary. Key holder gifts will be given to the participants as a way of appreciating their participation in the study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Human Sciences [REF# 17139880_CREC_CHS_2023], Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

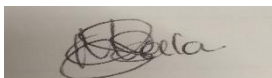
HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Ms. Mpho Sophia Mosella on 067 244 2732 or email her at 17139880@mylife.unisa.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about how the research has been conducted, you may contact the student's supervisor, **Dr. Sandile Dhludhlu**, on **012 429 4285** or email him at dhludsl@unisa.ac.za. You can also contact the research ethics chairperson, **Prof KJ Malesa**, on **012 429 6054** or email him at maleskj@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.



Mpho Sophia Mosella

Appendix 5: Consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

Research title: The experiences of foster parents raising foster children within a related foster care placement.

Researcher: Mpho Sophia Mosella

I.....(participant’s name), volunteer to take part in the research project conducted by Mpho Sophia Mosella, a student from Unisa.

I understand that I am not forced to take part in the study, and I am allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher has explained the purpose and nature of the study to me before taking part, and I am prepared to participate.

I understand that the information gathered will remain confidential, and my name will not be quoted in the study.

Furthermore, I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications, or conference proceedings, and that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree for the interview being audio recorded, and that I can request a copy of the informed consent agreement.

I have read and understood the explanation provided to me. I will answer all the questions to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant’s Name and Surname.....

Participant’s Signature..... **Date**.....

Researcher’s Name and Surname.....

Researcher’s Signature..... **Date**.....

Appendix 6: Data collection tool

Biographical information

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Marital status
- Year of becoming a foster parent.
- Number of foster children in care.
- Relationship to foster child/children.

Open-ended questions

- What are your (foster parent) experiences of raising children within a related foster care placement?
- What are the expectations of the foster care system for foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement?
- What social support mechanisms are available for foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement?
- How do you discipline foster children compared to biological children within a related foster care placement?
- How do you manage your emotional well-being while raising children within a related foster care placement?
- What are the financial implications of providing care for children within a related foster care placement?
- What strategies can be implemented to address the challenges faced by foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement?

Interview checklist

To-do list	Check
Arrange the venue on time for the interview	
Schedule the time for the interview with the participants	

Have a copy of the questions	
Pen and paper should be ready for the notes	
The phone must be fully charged to record the interview	

Appendix 7: Ethical clearance



COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

17 August 2023

Dear Ms Mpho Sophia Mosella

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
17139880_CREC_CHS_2023

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 17 August 2023
to 17 August 2024

Researcher(s): Name: Ms. M. S. Mosella
Contact details: 17139880@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Dr S. L. Dhludhlu
Contact details: dhludsl@unisa.ac.za

Title: THE EXPERIENCES OF FOSTER PARENTS RAISING CHILDREN WITHIN A RELATED FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT

Degree Purpose: Masters

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The *low risk application* was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the



Appendix 8: Letter from language editor

EDITING CERTIFICATE



Name: Sylvia Katati

Cell: 067 610 3958

E-mail: phokanesylvia@gmail.com

Qualifications

MSc (Plant Pathology) – University of Stellenbosch

BSc (Hons) Biotechnology – University of Pretoria

BSc (Biotechnology) – University of Pretoria

05 September 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, **Sylvia Katati** confirm and certify that I have read and edited the Thesis titled: “**The experiences of foster parents raising children within a related foster care placement**”, submitted by **Mpho Sophia Mosella**, student number 17139880, for the Master’s in Social Work at the University of South Africa.

Mpho Sophia Mosella was supervised by Dr **S.L Dhludhlu** of the University of South Africa.

I am a Professional Scientist, registered with the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions. Additionally, I am a published Author, Founder and Editor of **Ndazi Research Services**. Hence, I am qualified to edit the final report with cohesion and coherence. The views expressed herein, however, remain those of the Researcher.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Sylvia Katati (Pr.Sci.Nat)

Appendix 9: Turnitin Report

Similarity Report

● 44% Overall Similarity

Top sources found in the following databases:

- 16% Internet database
- 21% Publications database
- Crossref database
- Crossref Posted Content database
- 40% Submitted Works database

TOP SOURCES

The sources with the highest number of matches within the submission. Overlapping sources will not be displayed.

1	University of South Africa on 2023-02-27 Submitted works	28%
2	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet	1%
3	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet	<1%
4	Shannon L. Stewart, Boden Brock, Jordyn Manis, Aadhiya Vasudeva, Je... Crossref	<1%
5	hdl.handle.net Internet	<1%
6	repository.up.ac.za Internet	<1%
7	Mashiloane, Nomlinda. "Exploring the Dynamics of Caring for Adolesce... Publication	<1%
8	etd.uwc.ac.za Internet	<1%