

**MINISTRY TO REDUCE STRESS IN SINGLE PARENTS: TOWARDS A HOLISTIC
STRATEGY FOR THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH IN EMALAHLENI,
MPUMALANGA, SOUTH AFRICA**

By

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ABSTRACT

Single parents in the Assemblies of God church Emalahleni, Mpumalanga South Africa experience emotional stress both in the church and at home, because there is no ministry to single parents and their children in the church. The church does not have programs to address the emotional needs of single parents and their children. As a result, single parents experience emotional stress. The objective of this study is to explore factors which affect single parents within the Assemblies of God church in Emalahleni, and identify causes that prevent the church from ministering to the single parents. Accordingly, the study investigated the feelings of single parents in the church and further investigated pastors and the local church leadership's understanding of ministry to single parents.

To do this, the study interviewed sixty-two (62) respondents of whom thirty-five (35) were single parents, nine (9) were pastors and eighteen were elders, deacons and committee members respectively from nine assemblies of the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. The study utilized structured and unstructured open-ended questionnaires in in-depth interviews, which were scheduled for single parents, pastors and leadership members to provide in-depth information. Observation method was also used to elicit information concerning emotional stress in single parents.

The study analysed data by using contents analysis which allowed the categories to emerge from the data. Data analysis began with the verbatim transcription of the transcript in isiZulu which was later translated into English. This was followed by the identification and definition of emerging themes and the development of a code list. The initial application of these themes on the transcripts was done manually to identify themes and subthemes. New themes that emerged during this process were defined and added to the code list. Transcripts were recorded if a new theme emerged or if a theme was redefined, and the final code list was then adapted.

The study found that single parenting is difficult and there is no ministry catering for single parents in the Assemblies of God church in Emalahleni, As a result, single

parents experience emotional stress, and they do not communicate among themselves. Though there is no ministry to single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni, single parents still survive. There is a need to teach about single parenting in the church. The study also found that single parents are uncomfortable about approaching the church leadership when they have challenges, because there is no structure responsible for single parents in the church, while on the other hand, there is discrimination and stigmatization of single parents in the church. Pastors need to use biblical principles to minister to single parents. The study further found that single parents are perceived to be a threat to married women in the church. Accordingly, the church should identify single parents in the church; the leadership should visit single parent homes and use some of the tithes offerings in the church to help single parents.

The study concludes that there is no ministry to support single parents who are prone to emotional stress in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. Therefore, the study recommends that the pastors and the local church leadership start teaching all congregants about single parenting, and hold single parent services in their local churches. The study further recommends that a single parent seminar and single parent workshops should be organized at the district level to raise awareness about single parenting in the church. The findings of the study enabled the researcher to design a model called the Biblical Single Parent Ministry (BSPM) for the Assemblies of God Emalahleni.:

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and background

This research sought to find out what support and care single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress, receive in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. The study explored what the church has been doing, and what it is doing at present to minister to single parents. It also looked at what the church can do better to minister to single parents. Findings from the study lead to recommendations towards an effective ministry to single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. The church will then be in a position to improve its ministry geared towards single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress.

The Emalahleni sub-region of the Assemblies of God church in South Africa, in which this study was conducted, is one of the five sub-regions (Sekhukhune, Nhlazatje, Bethal, Dunilton and Emalahleni) of the Mpumalanga Highveld region. It covers areas in and around Emalahleni (formerly Witbank) under Nkangala district municipality, and consists of nine local churches of the Assemblies of God church in Emalahleni. The nine local churches are: Mhluzi, Hendrina, Kriel, Rietspruit, Tasbet Park, Phola, Lynnville, Emmaus, and Damascus.

Four of the nine churches are big assemblies, which consist of between three and four hundred members, while five of them are medium-size churches consisting of between one hundred and two hundred members. Each of the four big churches has one minister and elders and deacons, while each of the five medium churches has one minister and seven committee members.

The researcher is a full-time minister in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. He is one of the forty-five male and one female pastors of the Assemblies of God

churches in the Mpumalanga Highveld region, which has five sub-regions; Nhlazatje, Bethal, Witbank, Sekhukhune, and Dunilton.

According to the minutes of the last women's quarterly meeting held on the 8th September 2017 in Emalahleni, there are four hundred and fifty (450) women in Witbank sub-region; one hundred and forty (140) of these women are single parents (Assemblies of God women ministry 2017). This figure does not include unmarried females raising children alone, as the church categorizes them as sisters (young unmarried women) and they attend girls' meetings which causes confusion. Interestingly, the minutes of the last men's quarterly meeting held on the 18th November 2017 in Emalahleni sub-region mentioned that the region has one hundred and eighty men (180); of these, only eight (8) are single parents.

The researcher frequently ministers in the five above-mentioned sub-regions of the Assemblies of God Emalahleni, and has observed that many single parents need attention and emotional support. His observation concurs with Baloi's argument that not many of the challenges that single parents are facing have been addressed by the church (Baloi 2010:724). Lack of emotional support and care causes them to stay away from church services and activities. Others opt to move away from their faith.

Most single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni are men and women aged between eighteen and sixty-five years of age. Observation and verbal communication between the researcher and the single parents, and with other pastors and congregants, has shown that the majority of the single parents experience emotional stress in one way or another. Some single parents struggle to strike a balance between taking children to school, collecting them and going back to work, attending work-related meetings and coming back home from work. Others struggle financially, because after losing their spouses they are not able to cater for all the household needs with one or no salary. There are also single parents who are stressed by children trapped in substance abuse (drugs

and alcohol). Some of these single parents are unemployed, and as such struggle to feed their children and to pay for their school fees.

Single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni face rejection and stigmatization (Makhubele 2006:11). They do not get support and care, and there are no programs designed for them. The church needs to close this gap, which discourages many single parents from attending church meetings, with some opting to quit their faith.

Current research shows that single parents struggle with drug-addicted children, financial problems, the pain of the loss of a spouse or parent, shock, lack of support from church members, and discrimination in the church (Jacobs 2014:33). They also experience anger, grief, depression, fear, and loneliness (Healy 2013:21; Hunt 2008:5; Makhubele 2006:84). The researcher's personal encounter with single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni, has stirred him to look at how pastors of the Assemblies of God Emalahleni might minister effectively to single parents in the church. Secondly, what strategies the church might follow to improve its ministry to single parents.

1.2 Research problem

The research problem is the heart of the research project, because it establishes the goal of the research (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:56). The problem that the researcher has observed is that single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni, do not receive care and support. This study therefore, seeks to address single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. It asks the following question: How might the Assemblies of God Emalahleni minister effectively to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress?

1.3 Subsidiary questions:

In order to solve the above problem, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current state of single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress within the Assemblies of God Emalahleni?
2. What could be the shape of a ministry to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress within the Assemblies of God Emalahleni?
3. What strategies should be implemented to assist the Assemblies of God Emalahleni to care for single parent families who are prone to experience emotional stress?
4. What biblical paradigms might the Assemblies of God Emalahleni follow to minister to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress?

1.4 Justification for the study

The study was motivated by several factors. Firstly, the researcher has been a full-time minister in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni for 33 years. During all these years many single parents have approached the researcher for advice. After trying to help solve their challenges, the researcher would refer some for professional counselling. The researcher will never forget the situation of a single mother who had separated from her husband, and was staying with her five children. The husband had obtained a personal loan from a commercial bank and used the house as surety. He failed to pay the personal loan, and the bank threatened to repossess the house, because the woman was unemployed, and could not pay the personal loan.

Secondly, the church does not have programs and services designed to support and minister to single parents. Single parents are usually neglected, because it is assumed that they will cope, because they are Christians with God on their side. As a result, some single mothers join support groups outside the Assemblies of God Emalahleni hoping to receive support. Some of them end up leaving the Assemblies of God Emalahleni while others lose their faith In Christ.

Thirdly, unmarried single parents are categorized as girls (young unmarried women) in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. As such, they attend girls' meetings, which are relevant for young girls, but not for single mothers who rear children alone. This group is lost in the church, because they do not fit in to attending mothers' meetings, while teachings from the girls' meetings are irrelevant for them. It is against this background that the researcher embarked on this study with the hope that it will eventually help the church to minister effectively to this marginalized group.

1.5 Objectives

The above background shows that there is no ministry designed for single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. The identified gap continues to leave single parents frustrated, and therefore this matter needs urgent attention. The objective of this study is to explore factors which affect single parents within the Assemblies of God Emalahleni and identify causes that prevent the church from ministering to them.

1.6 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to provide a platform for single parents within the Assemblies of God Emalahleni to narrate their lived experiences and to suggest possible biblical strategies to shape a single parents' ministry to respond to their emotional needs.

1.7 Hypothesis

The Assemblies of God Emalahleni is missing opportunities to minister to single parents because of the lack of relevant support programs in the church. Church programs and preaching seem not to address single parents' emotions and needs. This has created a gap between the church and them as the church has not yet designed strategies, training and programs that are appropriate for them.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

Delimitations refer to what the researcher is not going to do (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:67). The research study was conducted in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. The study included male and female single parent households where the single parent was aged between 18 and 65 years. Grandparents who stay with their grandchildren were not included in this study. All young people who have children and stay with their parents are excluded from the study. Teenagers with children who stay in a household were also excluded from this study.

1.9 Definitions of key terms

1.9.1 Ministry

Ministry is the outward, active and expressive activity of people who regard themselves as belonging to the people of God and the work of the whole church as it seeks to be faithful to the demands and trajectories of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Dalton 2015:11).

1.9.2 Single parent

A single parent refers to the parent who is the only parent to the child, and is responsible for all financial, material, and emotional needs, where there is an absence of the other parent as opposed to a co-parent (Urban Dictionary 2014). The word 'single parent' is used interchangeably with 'lone parent'. In this study the concept 'single parent' refers to both men and women who live with a child or children in a household without a spouse. This category includes couples who are permanently separated by divorce. Some of these people live alone with their children, and they may have decided not to re-marry due to the pain and abuse they had experienced in their marriage relationships.

Included in this definition are widows, and wives whose husbands work in the military, who may be absent for many years before they come home. These women are often left in the home with the responsibility of rearing children alone

in all aspects of life. Even though they are still married, they live the lives of a single parent, because of the long period their husbands are away before they return. Another group that is included in this definition is single parents who adopted a child or children and rear them alone without the help of a spouse in the household.

The last group is that of young women who have had children outside wedlock.

1.9.3 Stress

Stress or a stressor is a particular environment that has a social, biological, or psychological demand that requires a person to adjust his or her usual patterns of behavior (Carr 2014:1).

1.9.4 Emotional stress

Emotional stress is the emotions activated in response to perceiving a stimulus as a threatening-feeling such as anxiety, irritation, frustration, lack of control or hopelessness experienced when we are stressed (McCraty 2006:3).

1.9.5 Reduce

To reduce is to bring down to a smaller extent, size, amount, number or less in degree (Collins Dictionary 2020:1).

1.10 Presuppositions

Presuppositions in research are so basic that without them the research problem itself does not exist (Leedy and Ormrod (2010:59). Participants in this study would co-operate and answer questions honestly, because they would be interviewed both individually, and after that would come together in a focus group discussion. The fact that participants are volunteers, who may withdraw from the study at any time, ensures that those who continue with the interviews tell the truth voluntarily.

1.11 Significance of the study

In exploring factors which affect and cause emotional stress to single parents within the Assemblies of God Emalahleni, the church would benefit from the findings of this study. Firstly, the findings of this research will guide pastors of the Assemblies of God Emalahleni on how to minister effectively to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress. Secondly, pastors will benefit by understanding single parenting pressures and their emotional stressors. Church leaders and congregants will better understand the situations of single parents, and know how to live with them. It will also benefit single parents in learning how to deal with single parenting pressures. The findings of this study will also help Christian churches and church leaders to understand the challenges behind single parenting and therefore design church programs which can also accommodate single parents. They will not cater only for the interests of one group of people while disregarding the daily experiences of single parents.

1.12 Design and Methodology

1.12.1 *Research design*

This study falls within the field of practical theology. Practical theology is the application of theology to life and ministry and is characterized by its theological sub-discipline that seeks to apply theological reflection to solving real-life problems (Smith 2008:203). It includes ministerial studies or pastoral theology, and has preaching, teaching, children's ministry, youth ministry, missions, counselling, pastoring, and leadership as its subdivisions. Practical theology research begins with the identification of a problem or a real-life situation that is not as it should be, and anticipates ending with a workable solution that will change the situation.

There are different models or approaches that are used in practical theology research. They are the Zerfass model, Browning model, Heitink model, and Osmer model. Each of these models begins by studying the practice of the present situation that concerns the researcher (Smith 2008:70). Practical

theology also uses different research methods, which include, literature review, participant observation, interviews, content analysis of documents, and focus groups. Each of these methods is particularly suited to obtaining a specific type of data in the form of field notes, audio recordings and transcripts. They resonate with a research model called Appreciative Inquiry (AI), (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005:8) which allows participants to share their stories and be part of the envisaged solution.

This study employed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005:8) as its research design. Appreciative Inquiry fits in with practical theology methods, because it invites people to participate in dialogues and share stories about their past and present achievements, unexplored potential, innovations, and traditions (Cooperrider 2008:3). Secondly, Appreciative Inquiry encourages full participation and co-operation by its approach which suggests that human organising and change at its best is a relational process of inquiry, grounded in affirmation and appreciation (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom 2010:1). These two elements promote an environment which is conducive to allowing single parents to contribute openly and positively in the study.

Unlike the traditional approach to change, which is problem-solving in nature; Appreciative Enquiry is a positive way to enhance organizational change. It is assumed that every organization has something that works right (Thomas 2018:1). Appreciative inquiry begins by what is positive, not by what is the problem. When participants are acknowledged and appreciated for the good work they have achieved, they normally become willing to contribute positively towards the success of the organization.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) comprises four stages: (1) The discovery phase helps the researcher to understand and describe what the Assemblies of God Emalahleni does to minister to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress. Secondly, this stage also looks at what the church has been doing to support single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress.

(2) In the dream phase, participants explore their hopes and dreams with regard to the ministry to single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. This is their time to think big about what has been happening in the church. (3) The design phase involves participants making decisions about ministry to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. In this phase single parents would be looking at what the ministry towards single parents should entail.

(4) The destiny phase seeks to find out what the shape will be of the ministry in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni, to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress.

In the case of this research, the Assemblies of God Emalahleni and its congregants will engage in commitments that pave the way forward, which will then change the church's systems, structure, processes or procedures with regard to the support of single parents who are likely to experience emotional stress. The destiny phase therefore, focuses on commitments made by all stakeholders on what paths should be followed which will result in changes within the Assemblies of God Emalahleni, Mpumalanga.

1.12.2 Research methodology

The nature of the information and data in this study will be quantitative and qualitative. In-depth interviews, semi-structured questionnaires, focus groups, and participant observation are used to gather quality data about single parents' ministry within the Assemblies of God Emalahleni (Fischer 2006: xvii; Harrell and Bradley 2009:10). This approach allows single parents to narrate their lived stories, and to re-construct their situations to the researcher.

The study requires six chapters. The chapter outline follows this design:

1.12.2.1 Chapter 1: Introduction:

This chapter provides the background of the study, the objective and purpose of the study, delimitations, hypothesis, assumptions, the research problem as well

as the research design and method. It also provides the significance of the study, study setting and population, sampling, recruitment of study participants, research tools, data gathering, analysis and interpretation, trustworthiness, research ethics and overview.

1.12.2.2 Chapter 2: The state of single parents in the church

This chapter is a literary study that discusses the past and present status of single parents in the church worldwide. Single parents' experiences and the church's ministry towards them are explored.

1.12.2.3 Chapter 3: Life experiences of single parents in the Assemblies of God church Emalaheni

This chapter provides information about the ministry of Assemblies of God Emalaheni to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress. It begins with a description of the research methods used to gain knowledge of the ministry of the Assemblies of God Emalaheni to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress. The real-life situation of single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress in the church is presented in this chapter. Participants discuss the past and present ministry to single parents who are prone to experience stress in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. Single parents share their feelings about Assemblies of God church's ministry towards them with regard to the support and care they receive in the church. The researcher conducts interviews using structured and unstructured questionnaires with single parents who are members of the Assemblies of God Emalaheni to find more details about what transpires in the church. Participant observation is also used during the day-to-day ministry of the researcher as a minister in the church.

Secondly, the researcher conducts qualitative research through personal interviews using a structured questionnaire with the leaders of the nine local churches of the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. The purpose of these interviews is to find out how these church leaders presently minister in their respective churches to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress. The leaders gathered with the researcher to discuss recommendations on how the

Assemblies of God Emalahleni might minister effectively to single parents who are likely prone to experience emotional stress.

1.12.2.4 Chapter 4: Dreaming together to implement a biblical single parent ministry in the Assemblies of God church in Emalahleni.

In this chapter, participants (the researcher, pastors, elders, deacons, committee members and single parents) decide on steps to be followed and make commitments about action to be taken in order to implement resolutions from their findings. All participants attended in a focus group discussion.

1.12.2.5 Chapter 5: Towards a strategy of implementing a biblical single parent ministry in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni

This chapter explores biblical perspectives on the issue of single parents as recorded in the Old and New Testament books of the Bible. The way in which single parents were treated in the Bible sets precedence on how single parents should be treated in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. The chapter begins from the biblical stance on traditional and non-traditional families as recorded in the Old Testament looking at how single parents were treated. The New Testament pattern is also studied. Findings are used to form recommendations on how the contemporary church should deal with single parents.

1.12.2.6 Chapter 6: Summary, conclusion and recommendations

This chapter summarizes the research and suggests possible areas for further research.

1.13 Study setting and population

The study was conducted in the nine Assemblies of God local churches in Emalahleni, and comprised two groups. The first group consisted of seventy single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. For the purpose of this study, single parent refers to men or women above eighteen years old, who are raising a child or children alone without the help of a spouse. The second group consisted of nine pastors from the nine churches (four big and five medium

assemblies), eight elders from the four big churches, and ten committee members from the five medium churches in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni.

1.14 Sampling

Representative sampling (Vyhmeister 2001:36) was used to choose the willing participants (single parents, pastors and elders) from the nine local churches; Mhluzi, Lynnville, Hendrina, Kriel, Damascus, Tasbet Park, Phola, Emmaus and Rietspruit within the Emalaheni district of the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. The sample includes single parents aged between eighteen and sixty-five years from the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. In the study, male single parents are fewer than female single parents, because there are fewer male than female single parents in the church. The pastor and two elders in each of the big local assemblies who agreed to participate were included in the study. In the medium assemblies, the pastor and two committee members from each assembly were included in the study.

1.15 Recruitment of study participants

Pastors from the nine churches were requested to assist in recruiting participants and to organizing accommodation where the interviews could be conducted. Appointments with the single parents, who had agreed to participate in the study, were secured telephonically on suitable days, excluding Sundays. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted at a convenient place, and a focus group meeting was held after these in-depth interviews. Thereafter, refreshments were served.

1.16 Research tools, data gathering, analysis and interpretation

Two tools were used in this study, namely, open-ended interview questions (available in English and *isiZulu*, Appendix 4) and a demographic questionnaire (available in English and *isiZulu*, Appendix 3) before the start of the study. All the in-depth and focus group interviews were audio- recorded.

Audio files were transcribed verbatim in *isiZulu*, and translated into English by the researcher to ensure that no meaning was lost in the translation process. Some of the *isiZulu* responses were included in the appendix as they are to emphasize the seriousness of ministry towards single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress.

Data analysis resumed with the reading and re-reading of the in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions to identify emerging themes which reflect participants' experience of single parents in the context of a local church to develop a code list (Saldana 2009:3). The researcher developed the first version of the code list, identified emerging themes, reviewed the code list, redefined the themes, organized the themes categorically, and analyse data thematically using quotes (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:141; Harrell and Bradley 2009:135). Themes and sub-themes were identified manually on the transcript, and emerging themes during the process were also defined and added to the code list (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:143). The final section consists of summaries, interpretations, and quotations to support the themes.

1.17 Trustworthiness

Leedy and Ormrod (2010: 103) state that the researcher's findings must be reported in a complete and honest fashion without misrepresenting what they have done, so as not to mislead others intentionally about the nature of their findings. They further say that data should not be fabricated to support a particular conclusion, even if that conclusion seems to be perfect.

The researcher employed triangulation, audit trail, data analysis using computer software, the use of a good digital recorder, observation and peer debriefing in this study to attain credibility and dependability (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:154).

1.18 Research ethics

When a research investigates human beings, or other creatures with the potential to think, feel and experience physical or psychological distress, ethical

implications of the research must be considered closely (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:101). Ethical clearance was sought from the South African Theological Seminary (SATS) Research Ethics Committee (see appendix 1). Permission to conduct the study was also sought from the Assemblies of God Emalaheni's regional council committee where the study was to be conducted (see appendix 1). The researcher obtained written informed-consent forms from participants before the in-depth interviews and focus group. Participants were assured of confidentiality and integrity. The researcher ensured privacy throughout the collection of data, and the focus group was conducted in a private place. Participants' opinions will be treated with respect.

1.19 Chapters overview

Core areas covered in this study include, in Chapter one, the introduction and background, which introduce the research topic—the concept of single parenting and emotional stress in the church. The topic is then introduced by developing the problem statement, research question and subsidiary questions. Justification, the objectives of the study, purpose, and hypothesis, delimitation of the study, assumptions, significance of the study, and design and methodology are given. The study setting and population explained where the study was conducted and the composition of the groups. Other areas covered are sampling, recruitment of study participants, research tools, data gathering, analysis and interpretation, trustworthiness, research ethics and overview.

Chapter two represents the literature review. This chapter covers the main sections of the study and discusses what the literature says about the topic and its relevance to the study.

Chapter three discusses what the Assemblies of God church does to minister to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress. Through the in-depth interviews and focus groups, the researcher and participants discuss the past and present ministry of the Assemblies of God Emalaheni.

Chapter four discusses what the Assemblies of God Emalaheni might do to minister effectively to single parents. Participants provide their recommendations based on their experiences on what they think will reduce their emotional stress. The researcher and participants also agree on steps that need to be followed to make sure that the recommendations are implemented.

Chapter five seeks to find out what the Bible says about single parents, their challenges, and how they were given support.

Finally, Chapter six summarizes the research and suggests possible areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2

THE STATE OF SINGLE PARENTS IN THE CHURCH

2.1 Introduction.

Emotional stress among single African Christian parents has been a concern in the past decades (Baloi 2010:724). This chapter intends to help the researcher, as a minister in a local church, to understand experiences of single parents with the aim of improving ministering to them.

To assist in understanding issues surrounding emotional stress among single parents, a review of related literature began with a general focus on single parenting and concluded with single parents in a local church context. The consulted literature included books, journals, theses, doctoral dissertations, websites and academic online articles. Aspects highlighted in literature included an overview of single parents' emotional stress factors contributing to single parenthood; single parents' needs; rearing children alone; the impact of single parenthood on adolescents' academic achievement and single parents' rejection in the church. Literature also highlighted the following: the positive aspect of single parenting; single parents are not all the same; the effect of stressors on spiritual growth and religious coping styles of single parents; ministry opportunities for single parents; and strategy to assist single parents. Consequently, the chapter concerned itself with experiences of single parents and their emotional stress.

2.2 Overview of single parents' emotional stress

Global Issues (2016: 1) recorded a numerical increase of single parent households in a global survey conducted on the 15th October 2016. It is stated that fourteen percent (14%) of the 2.3 billion children (320 million) were living in single parent households, which were most often headed by single mothers. According to Global Issues, single mothers and single fathers of those children aged between 0 and 17

years face special challenges, including economic hardship, social stigma, and personal difficulties that require society's attention and assistance (2016: 1).

Global issues (2016: 1) further stated that the proportion of children living in single parent households varies considerably across countries. According to this report, countries experiencing high levels of single parent families are, Latvia thirty-one percent (31%), United States twenty eight percent (28%), Liberia thirty-one percent (31%), Kenya thirty percent (30%), the Dominican Republic thirty-five percent (35%), Mozambique thirty-six percent (36%), with South Africa at the highest level, forty percent (40%). It was also reported that the remaining 129 countries carry the burden of between eleven (11) and twenty-four (24) percent of children living in single parent households. Included in these countries are Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

Closer to home, Statistics South Africa (Mballo Brief 2015:12) reported that the number of children living with only a biological mother is far higher than those living with both parents. Forty-two point five percent (42.5%) of children aged below five years lived with only their biological mother, while thirty-six point four percent (36.4%) lived with both biological parents (Mballo Brief 2015:12). Further, two percent (2%) lived with only their biological father, while eighteen point seven (18.7%) lived with neither of their biological parents (Mballo Brief 2015:12).

A reflection on such statistics found that unlike a two-parent family, single parents usually have to deal with work and personal issues as well as parenting (cf. Iso, Chen and County 2012:1). These issues exert a lot of stress on single parents. Similarly, Weldegabreal (2014:51) found that psychological problems such as anxiety and stress are major challenges that single parents face. In addition, the loss of a spouse results in fear, anger and outbursts, tears, deep depression, and a desire to die (Hunt 2008: 5; Healy 2013:357). Makhubele (2006:84) adds that single parents live in pain as a result of loneliness and sometimes poverty, trauma, depression, condemnation, being broken in spirit, heartsore and disillusioned, often struggling with guilt, shame and self-condemnation. Consequently, the majority of

single mothers face economic, emotional and social problems (Kotwal and Prabhakar 2009:203).

Literature also highlighted the significance of the public health sector's intervention in single parent households if the effects of single parenting are to be properly addressed. Ntoimo and Odimegwu (2014:10) indicate that there is a need for welfare benefits for single mothers of children less than five years old in the sub-Saharan countries, where it was non-existent at the time of the research.

Emphatically, Healy (2013:15) adds that welfare benefits help single parent families in closing the gap between very low and medium household incomes, which has a strong effect on the families' ability to pay for housing. Healy (2013:15) further attests that welfare benefits in turn provide children in single parent families with a better chance of moving out of poverty through improved school attendance and education achievement, and better health.

2.3 Factors contributing to single parenting

Literature highlighted several factors which contribute to single parenting. These are, the death of a spouse, divorce, separation of cohabiting partners, abandonment, the never-married who have had children out of wedlock, teenage pregnancy and adoption, incarceration of a spouse, mental illness, and desertion by a spouse (Jacobs 2014:4; Hunt 2008:2; Makhubele 2006:20). In addition, Global Issues (2015: 12) stated that unplanned pregnancy, and intended pregnancy are additional causes for single parenting in many Western societies.

In the South African context, Motsei (2005:70) viewed the absence of a father in the family for longer periods due to work commitments, as another factor that causes a person to become a single parent. Many women in the rural areas of South Africa have to contend with raising children alone because of the migrant labor system (Motsei 2005:70). Such work conditions cause wives to parent children alone during these long periods of absence. Further, the changing view of single parenting, which

is increasingly being viewed as a legitimate alternative to marriage, is another factor that contributes to single parenthood (Tijani and Ogunbanwo 2008:10).

2.4 Single parents' needs and emotional stages

Although single parents are not all the same, they have common needs, and they experience different emotional stages like guilt, shame, resentment, anger, stress, and anxiety about the future (Hunt 2008:7; Weldegabreal 2014:51). Jacobs's (2014: 31–35) study which focused on creating a family-friendly church for single parent households, identified the following needs, survival, personal safety, social or sense of belonging, children-rearing support, esteem need, struggle for legitimacy, self-actualization need, acceptance, encouragement, and understanding of their situation.

The study also found that most single parents experience three distinct stages: the crisis stage (when an individual has just lost a loved one or been divorced), the transitioning stage (when life continues with real challenges), and the emerging stage (when the single parent has got over the grief and is healing from the devastation) (Jacobs 2014:34). Similar to Jacobs, Hunt (2008:7) identifies four stages: the helpless stage (when the single parent is overwhelmed and feels a desperate need for the stability of someone else), the hanging-on stage (when the single parent is in partial denial), the heroic stage (when the individual appears totally self-sufficient), and the hopeful stage (when the single parent realizes that sufficiency is not in one's self or in others, but is found in the Lord).

2.5 Rearing children alone and child related social problems

In the past years several studies were conducted to establish any relationship between unacceptable behavior and single parenting. These have pointed to the following areas of concern:

2.5.1 Single parenting and early sexual encounters among teenagers and youth

Several studies have looked at the relationship between teen and youth sexual encounters and single parenting. In a study done in the rural community in Plateau State, Nigeria Envuladu *et al.* (2013:5) associate early sexual activity in teenagers with single parenting. Similarly to Envuladu *et al.*, Whitehead (1997:11) portrays sexual abuse as the highest risk to children raised by single parent households. Similar research conducted in the United States highlighted the increase of sexual activity among children raised by single parents (Marri Research 2015).

Contrary to Envuladu *et al.* and Whitehead, Dlamini's (2015:127) study among black families in Soweto, South Africa did not find any association of early sexual activity among single parent children at the age of fifteen (15) years and eighteen (18) years, but associated such activity with partial exposure to single parenting.

2.5.2 Single parenting and child mortality rate in sub-Saharan Africa

Some studies have looked at the relationship between single parenting and child mortality. Clark and Hamplova (2013:1522) studied the relationship between single motherhood and child mortality in 11 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The study found that a child raised by a single mother is prone to dying before the age of five. Similar to Clark and Hamplova, Ntoimo and Odimegwu (2014:1) highlight single motherhood as a phenomenon that poses a challenge to a child's health and survival.

Interestingly, a global partnership (the World Bank Group 2018) shared Africa's success story on the decline of infant mortality. This organization found that infant mortality under the age of five (5) has declined in many countries in the region in recent years, and the success story has only barely been recognized.

2.5.3 Single parenting and substance abuse and crime among teenagers and youth

Researchers have studied the relationship between teen and youth involvement in crime and substance abuse and single parenting. Howell (2015:85) conducted a

study in an urban Midwestern community on the correlation between single parent families and crime among African Americans, and found that single parent households are contributors to children's criminal behavior. In the study, Howell (2015:86) concluded that the solution to decreasing the rate of crime begins with addressing issues surrounding single parent households. Pillay (2010:111) found that children raised by single parents in Chatsworth, Durban, South Africa are at a higher risk of being exposed to prostitution, child labor, and criminal activities.

The organization for single parenting added anxiety and stress as psychological effects of single parenting on children, and this leads to behavioral issues when accumulated (Single Parent Center 2017: 1).

2.5.4 *Single parenthood and child poverty*

Marripedia (2016: 1) reports that forty-eight point nine percent (48.9%) of children under the age of eighteen (18) living with single mothers in the United State lived in abject poverty in 2015. Mather (2010:2) shares the same finding in a study conducted in New Mexico, Mississippi, and Michigan in the United States, and quantified this as seven (7) in ten (10) children. Interestingly, the World Bank in 2015 reported a decline in poverty among male- and female-headed households in Africa since late 1990, and that this decline followed improved living standards.

It is worth noting that Skolnick and Rosencrantz's (1997:62) study conducted before the above findings argued that although there is a correlation between single parent families and social problems, the harmful effects of single parent households are exaggerated. They argue that the causes may lie elsewhere and highlighted the need to restore family values or valuing families regardless of their form, which will help solve the world's social problems to a greater degree than focusing the blame on single parents (1997: 63).

2.6 The impact of single parenthood on adolescents' academic achievement

Other researchers looked for a relationship between single parenting and teen and youth school performance. Ochonogor (2014:82) conducted a study among African

single parents in Mamelodi Township, Gauteng province, South Africa. This study found that fewer children raised by single parents achieve good academic results (Ochonogor 2014:82). It also found that there is a strong relationship between adolescent educational achievement and single parenting (Ochonogor 2014:86).

Another study on the influence of parenting on pupils' academic performance in basic schools in the WA municipality, Ghana, further explained that most of the pupils from single parent homes experience low parental involvement in their academic activities when compared to pupils from two-parent families (Abudu and Fuseini 2013:92). De Lange and Dronkers' (2018:139) study on single parenthood and children's educational performance used data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries during 2000, 2003, 2009 and 2012. This study found that children from single parent families perform considerably worse at school, and struggle with Mathematics.

Contrary to the above findings Tenibiaje and Tenibiaje's study (2011:246, 247) on the effects of single-parenthood on the academic performance of secondary school students in Ekiti State, Nigeria found no relationship between single parents and the academic achievement of students; instead they found that the type of home had a significant influence on the behavior of students. Amofa's (2013: 5) study on the effects of single parenting on adolescents' academic performance conducted in the Cape Coast Metropolitan area reiterates the findings of Tenibiaje and Tenibiaje.

2.7 Single parents face rejection and discrimination in the society and the church

Literature revealed that cultural practices and traditions, and discrimination in the church have created stigma around single parents, and this stigmatization has entered the church parameters (Baloi 2010:725; Walker II 2015: 15).

2.7.1 Cultural traditions and practices and single parents

Baloi (2010:725) and Utrata (2015:22) indicate that married women are easily accepted in African and Soviet Union societies. According to Utrata, a married woman is more respected than a female single parent (2015:24). Some years before Baloi and Utrata, Young (1997:71) suggested that some social scientists and politicians concluded that only two-parent families are capable of raising children successfully, while blaming single parents for a variety of social problems that are beyond their control. The South African Organization for single parents 'Single Parent Center' reported that women single parents in South Africa feel the pain of stigmatization due to poverty, their single parenting status, and are under pressure from the society (2017: 1).

2.7.2 Discrimination of single parents in the society and the church

Essien and Basse (2012:248) studied the social and religious challenges of single parents in Nigeria, and found that African single mothers face discrimination, rejection, and blackmail from society, culture, and religion. While Makhubele (2006: 122) had earlier found that single mothers experience marginalization, rejection, lack of support, are suspected of immorality, and denied the opportunity to occupy key leadership positions in the black community church of the Full Gospel Church of God, Limpopo province in South Africa. Baloi's (2010:1) view paints a grim picture about the status of single parents in the church. He mentioned that 'even though the church is within the community, there are church members who portray the kind of attitude that excludes single parents inside church circles.'

2.8 Single parents are not all the same

Literature generally agrees on the painful effects of single parenting on single parents, their children, and society at large. However, some authors add that single parents are not all the same: they react differently to parenting situations. Franklin and Fong (2011:372) state that single parenting's major transitional nature carries pain for all those who are involved, but it differs from one person to another. They further explained that a proper and accurate investigation has to be conducted as

there is no one-size-fits-all approach that works with single parents, and the real needs of single parents and their children should be understood because they are different (Franklin and Fong 2011:372).

In a study before Franklin and Fong, Ziehl (1994:42) compared single parent families among middle-class Muslim societies to those among disadvantaged Muslim communities. Ziehl's view challenges the assumption that single parents are the same: she mentioned that 'it would seem unwise or at worst impossible to find an explanation for single parent families that cuts across the socio-economic divide' (Ziehl 1994:42). She further explained that women opted out of marriage as a sign of strength, because they gained greater economic security, resulting in single mothers reacting differently to challenging circumstances depending on their economic status.

2.9 Positive aspects of single parenting

Although literature indicates that single parents are prone to experiencing emotional challenges, it is worth noting that there are also benefits that accompany single parenting. Miller-Kovach (2009:146) explains that establishing a new household can be an opportunity for a fresh start and an ideal time to set new meal-times, try new food, and do grocery. Healy (2013:9) states that single parents feel happy and relieved to be on their own, because they choose how they spend their time and run their homes without having to consult a spouse, and their children develop a wider range of skills by their involvement in the daily running of the household.

A United States-based newsletter, reported on the 22nd September 2018 that in the midst of raising children alone, there are some overwhelming positive effects of single parenting that deserve attention (*Times-Republican* 2018). The report highlighted the following benefits: it reported that children reared by single parents share responsibilities, learn how to handle diversity and set priorities. While Hakobyan (2018:3) highlighted that single parents show, and model self-sufficiency, a sense of belonging, are free from arguments and raise responsible children.

2.10 How stressors of single parenthood affect spiritual growth and religious coping styles

Church practice and the attitude of Christians deter single parents from attending church activities and services, to their spiritual detriment. Rush (2012:117) conducted a study on how Evangelical churches deal with single parenthood in the north east of England, and found that church culture promotes marriage, and this tendency deters some single parents from attending church. Biblical narratives used in Evangelical churches ignore materials relating to single parents' experience. Like Rush, Makhubele (2006:82) found that some single mothers had stopped attending church meetings in the Full Gospel church in Limpopo, South Africa, because of being ridiculed, and being regarded as threats to both men and women in the church, including pastors, who were suspected of falling in love with them during counselling sessions. Makhubele also suggested that this marginalization of single parents in the church causes them to lose confidence in facing life, their capacity to render maximum service in the church is affected, and they finally stay away from formal church meetings (Makhubele 2006:80).

2.11 Ministry opportunities for single parents

Walker II (2015:32) attests that Christians need to love members of non-traditional families, and that Christian leaders should love and know how to relate to single parents (cf. Jacobs 2014:3; Comez 2012:94). While 'the exploding single parent population creates both a challenge and an extraordinary opportunity for local congregants' (Single and Parenting 2013:1), it is an opportunity to accord them human dignity (Jacobs 2014: 3; Essien and Bassey 2012:248).

The presence of single parents in local churches creates new avenues to design, through their active involvement, and suitable ministry opportunities. These could be, but are not limited to, a car care service where single mothers can bring their cars for oil changes and other light maintenance, have food pantries, clothes closets, a medical clinic, job help, hold parenting classes, and have a handy man (Jacobs 2014:32). Other ministry opportunities to single parents include support groups, Bible

study, relationship support, mentoring, child-care, parent's night out, care team, social media, and two-family meal (Walker II 2015:22–27). In a study conducted before Jacobs, Franklin and Fong (2011:374) found that the local church can provide a thriving environment within its ministry for single parents to grow personally, physically, mentally, spiritually, and professionally.

2.12 Religious participation of single parents

Petts (2012:2) used data from the fragile families and child well-being study in the United States to examine trajectories of religious participation among single mothers, and determine whether these trajectories were associated with early childhood behavior. In this study, Petts found that there is a relationship between single parents who frequently attend church services and their children's behavior. Petts (2012:16) explained that single mothers' frequent participation in a religious service may help them deal with stresses involved in raising children alone, and that their children are less likely to engage in social ills than those whose mothers do not attend church services regularly.

2.13 Strategy to assist single parents

Several works raised the need for a strategy to assist single parents. Collins (2007: 502) mentions that something is wrong with a church that sees single adults as misfits, a church that has no place for unmarried people, one that lacks programs to meet the needs of single parents, and shows no understanding of their struggles. The organization for Single Parenting emphasized the need for an effective strategy to assist single parents, and stated that without a strategy, church leaders are not prepared to handle the level of ongoing care, guidance and practical help that single parents need (Single and Parenting 2013:1). In an earlier study on challenges and coping strategies of single parents conducted in Barkin Lidi, Nigeria it was mentioned that they should be more committed to spiritual activities in order to expand their internal source of encouragement and also allow their children to interact with others from two-parent families (Keswet and Dapas 2010: 7).

Gomez (2012: 95) attests that the church must meet single mothers where they are in life, and make sure that they are not alone, by publicly acknowledging their situations and requesting people to give them encouragement. Similar to the Single and Parenting organization, Jacobs states that the church that will attract single parents is the one which will use gentleness in applying biblical standards to those who are hurting or those living a sinful lifestyle (Jacobs 2013:31).

In addition to what is mentioned above, teaching the leadership of the church about parenting skills, and the importance of addressing the needs of single parents through church programs is a significant practice that will go a long way (Baloi 2010: 17; Maluleke 2006:122; Walker 2012:23), and these kinds of teachings will transform the church and render it a better place for single parents. Single and Parenting (2013:4) added a leadership team of present and former single parents who can minister to other single parents, biblical and Christ-centered instruction, strategies for welcoming single parent families into all aspects of church life, and free or low-cost activities that provide an environment for single parent families to interact with each other and other families in the church.

Gomez (2012:95) further attests that the success of a single parent ministry depends on whether the church takes care of the single parent's child, 'because a single parent will always think of his or her children'. More importantly, the church should inspire all the members to learn to affirm single mothers in the church, as this will encourage them to come out and share their personal experiences with others (Makhubele 2006:137; Baloi 2010:740).

2.14. Summary

This literature review indicated that statistics show a global increase of single parent households, and that all single parents face different kinds of challenges. Statistics show that most children raised in single parent households perform poorly at school and get involved in social ills like gangsterism, alcoholism, and drug abuse, and that they engage in sexual activities early in their lives. It was also noted that although researchers generally agree on the effects of single parenting, some researchers

argue that the effects of single parenting are exaggerated. It was further shown that single parents face stigmatization and marginalization in the church and in the community, and this discourages them from attending church meetings.

Literature also highlighted positive aspects of single parents and their children. Single parents decide what to do, when and where without having to consult a spouse and their children develop a wider range of skills by their involvement in the daily running of the household. The presence of single parents in the church provides ministry opportunities for single parent ministry, and the church needs strategies to assist single parents. Single parents' participation in a religious institution is also highlighted in literature as a mechanism that reduces stress in single parents and lessens the involvement of their children in social ills.

To that end, the local church is encouraged to develop effective strategies to assist single parents and their children. These strategies should be threefold: they must focus on the church leadership, congregants and single parents. While the church leadership must play a leading role in including single parents in all church programs, these programs should focus on equipping congregants with the knowledge of how to relate to single parents and, therefore, accept single parents as they are. These programs should also equip single parents with parenting skills and self-acceptance in the circumstances in which they find themselves.

CHAPTER THREE

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SINGLE PARENTS IN THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH IN EMALAHLENI

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a description of the results of an empirical research aimed at gaining knowledge about the ministry of the Assemblies of God Emalahleni, for single parents. Underlying this chapter is the main hypothesis of the study that states that the Assemblies of God Emalahleni is missing opportunities to minister to single parents because of the lack of relevant support programs in the church. Church programs and preaching seem not to address single parents' emotions and needs. This has created a gap between the church and single parents, as the church has not yet designed strategies, training and programs that suit them.

The study population consisted of single parents between the ages of eighteen (18) and sixty-five (65) years in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni district, Mpumalanga. Thirty-three (33) of the thirty-five (35) participants were females and two (2) were males. Seventeen (17) of the thirty-five (35) participants were widows, eleven (11) were divorcees and seven (7) were females who had never been married. In addition, there were nine (9) pastors and eighteen (18) local church leaders from the nine (9) local churches of the Assemblies of God Emalahleni district.

3.1.1 *Research method, tools and pilot testing*

The researcher used Appreciative Inquiry (AI), (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005:8) a research method which falls within the field of practical theology in this study. Practical theology enabled the researcher to apply theological reflection to solve real-life problems faced by single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. The researcher used demographic questionnaires (available in English and isiZulu) and open-ended questions, (available in English and isiZulu) during audio-recorded interviews and focus group discussions (see Appendix 3). Three single parents; a

sixty-five-year-old divorcee, a 36-year-old divorcee and a forty-nine--year-old never-married mother were used for pilot testing in this study.

3.1.2 Data gathering, analysis and interpretation

Audio-records were transcribed verbatim in *isiZulu* and translated into English by the researcher to ensure that no meaning was lost in the translation process. Data analysis began with the reading and re-reading of the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to identify emerging themes which reflected participants' experience as single parents in the context of a local church, to develop a code list (Saldana 2009:3). The researcher then developed the first version of the code list, identified emerging themes, reviewed the code list, redefined the themes, organized the themes by category, and analysed data thematically using quotes (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:141; Harrell and Bradley 2009:135). Themes and sub-themes were identified manually on the transcripts, and emerging themes during the process were defined and added to the code list (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:143). At the end, the final write-up consisted of summaries, interpretations, and quotations to support the themes.

3.1.3 Research ethics

With the consideration that this research might have ethical implications for participants, the researcher sought ethical clearance from the South African Theological Seminary (SATS) Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1). The researcher also sought permission to conduct the study from the Assemblies of God church in Emalahleni (see Appendix 1). Further, the researcher obtained written consent forms from participants before the actual in-depth interviews and the focus groups (see Appendix 2).

3.1.4 Framework to handle and interpret data

The study has applied the theming approach conceptualized by (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:141; Harrell and Bradley 2009:135) to organize and interpret responses from the respondents. Theming involves reading and re-reading the data to become familiar with the content. It also involves coding the entire data and examining the

codes to identify patterns of meaning or potential themes and collating data to a relevant theme. Themes are then reviewed against the dataset to determine if they represent the data, and that they answer the research question. It also involves defining each theme by developing a detailed analysis of each theme. Further, it involves deciding on an informative name of each theme and doing the final writing. It is suitable for this study to present the respondents' views in narrative form. This approach contributes in responding to the thesis hypothesis mentioned in Chapter one, namely, the Assemblies of God Emalaheni is missing opportunities for ministering to single parents, because of the lack of relevant support programs in the church. Church programs and preaching seem not to address single parents' emotions and needs. This has created a gap between the church and the single parents, as the church has not yet designed strategies, training and programs that suit them.

3.2 Themes identified (single parents)

The following eleven themes were identified; single parenting is difficult, lack of ministry to single parents in the Assemblies of God church, lack of communication amongst single parents, emotional stress in single parents, survival strategy, the need for single parenthood teachings in the church, uncomfortable to approach church leadership, the leadership of single parent ministry, discrimination against single parents, The use of biblical principles to minister to single parents, and single parents seen as a threat to married women in the church.

3.2.1 *Single parenting is difficult*

Thirty-two (32) of the thirty-five (35) participants acknowledged that single parenting is painful and very difficult, while six (6) of the thirty (35) participants argued that the church must interact with single parents to understand their challenges.

It becomes difficult if you are a single parent, because if you have a wife by the way, you guide each other that today we do this or I have got a salary let us do this (a 57-year-old widowed man).

3.2.2 Lack of ministry to single parents in the Assemblies of God church

All thirty-five (35) participants indicated that no single parent ministry exists within the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. Widows and divorcees are grouped with all mothers in the church and fellowship together in the mothers' service. Similarly, male single parents are grouped with all men regardless of their marital status, to attend men's service. They further explained that unmarried single parents are grouped with young women to attend the sisters' service. Thirty-one (31) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that they want to have services for single parents. Eight (8) of the thirty-one (31) participants indicated that they feel left out of Thursday mothers' service, because their issues as single parents are not addressed, and they made the following statements.

In the mothers' services during Thursdays, some are married women. We fellowship together as mothers and you find that some always talk about their husbands. This thing hurts me in such a way that I asked God to close my ears that I may not hear some of these things because they hurt us (50-year-old widow).

There are single parents in our church and I am one of them, but I have never seen anything that communicates to single parents directly (40-year-old woman who had never married).

There is no single parent ministry in this church. They are saying I must stay here with the mothers and when you stay here you must keep up with the expectations of the mothers. Some of the teachings are not relevant for me as a single parent. You find that more attention is given to married mothers (a thirty-six year-old divorcee).

There are single parents in our church, but there is nothing organized that will bring single parents together like in a gathering where they can share ideas and frustrations. Each and every one of us sees for herself in his or her little corner unless you have somebody close to you as a friend to say this is not right in my life (54-year-old widow).

Furthermore, eight (8) of the thirty-five (35) participants explained that unmarried single parents do not qualify to attend either the mothers' service or the sisters' service, because teachings in these services are not relevant to them.

Sometimes you even think of not attending youth services and even those of girls because it happens at other times that in those locals, girls are too young. And, they get married over the passage of time, and those whom I can call our grandchildren are left in the church, amen (a 35-year-old woman who had never married).

There is no ministry for single parents in this church. There are services for sisters and those for mothers. I am a parent at home and when I arrive at the church they say I am a sister. This demotivates me because there is nothing we talk about in the sisters' services besides how a sister must handle herself (45-year-old woman who had never married).

I am a sister with my grandchildren. I do not fit either in the sisters' services or the mothers' service. I do not fit anywhere and I am already in my sixtieth year. When you go to the mothers' they say this person is a sister. It is not easy to fellowship with them (60-year-old mother who never married).

Thirty-one (31) of the thirty-five (35) participants indicated that they wish to be part of a separate single parent ministry in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. They further indicated that the church must have services for single parents where issues pertaining to single parents are addressed.

Though participants concur that single parent ministry is an urgent need in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni, four (4) of the thirty-five (35) participants feel that services for single parents should be relevant, since sensitive and personal matters will be discussed. One participant said:

Personally I will not recommend services separately because as I am saying others are still hurting and need to heal (a 51-year-old divorcee).

3.2.3 Lack of communication amongst single parents

Twenty-six (26) of the thirty-five (35) participants indicated that they are unable to share their single life experiences because there is no platform to share their problems openly, and that single parents are stigmatized in the church. Everyone fights his or her own battles and some end up being overwhelmed by emotional challenges and stop attending church meetings. Others leave the church and establish love relationships with men who are not born again, in order to seek for financial help.

Further, eight (8) of the thirty-five (35) participants mentioned that they are not comfortable to share their emotional challenges with other Christians, including the church leadership, because people do not treat single parents' matters confidentially.

We do not communicate our emotional stressors; everyone keep his or her own problems and when you arrive home those problems are waiting for you (55-year-old widow).

We are not comfortable because we cannot talk to anybody about our emotional challenges (38-year-old woman who was never married).

3.2.4. Emotional stress in single parents

3.2.4.1 Children

Twenty-six (26) of the thirty-five (35) participants indicated that they experience emotional stress at home as their children grow. Children display anger and rebellion when they reach the teenage stage and boys are worse than girls. They also mentioned that boys need a father figure, and if they do not find it they begin to disrespect their mother.

3.2.4.2 Financial constraints

Twenty-one (21) of the thirty-five (35) participants, alluded to financial constraints that cause emotional stress, because they have no other person to help rear children at home. All the financial responsibilities for buying food, paying for school fees, bond or rent and other things, have now become their responsibility. Twenty-three

(23) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that children cause them stress at home.

Furthermore, six (6) of the twenty-one participants (21) indicated that they are emotionally stressed by the giving of offerings in the church. They further argued that as much as they understand that giving offerings is the will of God, those who collect offerings do not care whether you parent alone or not.

3.2.4.3 The lack of a spouse to help in making decisions

Seven (7) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that making decisions alone without a spouse causes emotional stress. They are faced with decisions about when and where to buy a house? Which schools are best for children? How to manage finances in the home? How to plan for the future? They further indicated that they often make mistakes because there is no one to assist.

3.2.4.4 Stigma

Nineteen (19) of the thirty-five (35) participants indicated that they find it difficult to communicate freely with Christian men and pastors in the church, because it is assumed that single parents have the intention to take other women's husbands. This stigma makes life difficult for single parents. In addition, a single parent must always be careful where to sit in the church, with whom they talk, how to greet other men? Where and when to get help?

You must always take care of yourself as a single parent. That makes us not feel free and we fear these men and fear everything. You prefer that, like myself, I do not want to lie, I told myself that even if my car broke on the N12 (freeway), I will never ask a Christian man in the church with whom I fellowship for help. It is better to ask somebody who is outside of the church. To me I see that this is better (a 54-year-old widow).

Further, six (6) of the thirty-five (35) participants also indicated that some Christian men in the church who are not mature in the Lord approach them to establish love

relationships. This makes it difficult for single parents to enjoy attending church services. Hence, some opt to stay at home or go to other churches.

3.2.4.5 Lack of care and support for single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni

Twenty-two (22) of the thirty-five (35) participants concurred that the church does not provide care for single parents. Nine (9) of the twenty-two (22) participants mentioned that when a Christian's spouse passed on, Christians only come during the week until the day of funeral. After the burial, nobody will show any interest to find out how they are coping with the loss of their loved ones and the well-being of the children. Secondly, no one in the church will ask single parents how they are doing with their children and what their needs are. They further indicated that the lack of care in the church discourages them from fellowshiping, and they end up not attending church services regularly.

After the burial nobody came back. They did not come in such a way that I was thinking to get out of this church the way I was hurting. I was taken care of by another Christian woman who is my next-door neighbour, but not from our church (a forty-eight-year-old widow).

For us men it is not easy, I will tell you that I ended seeing our Christian men here at home on the day when we buried my wife. We just meet at church, greet each other and it ended there (a 57-year-old widowed man).

I would say that we are not taken care of as single parents. The church should want to know how we live when our husbands are no more. How our children conduct themselves, and how we can cope so that we will see that we are taken care of. There are things which our children need from fathers which they are not able to mention to us. So if they were coming closer to us and our children, I think our children would be able to talk (a 59-year-old widow).

Further, nine (9) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that single parents are not all the same; some are working and others are not working. They further indicated

that some of single parents who experience financial difficulties do not receive any help from the church. The same was mentioned regarding those whose children are rebellious, or drug addicts and are involved in other social ills. The church does not help them.

3.2.4.6 Judgmental attitudes

Six (6) of the thirty-five (35) participants indicated that divorcees who have matters to be resolved by the church are pre-judged before their matter could be heard in the church. Once a Christian is divorced or separated, he or she is rejected and is excluded from participating in church programs. Those who try to help them help in secret, because they are afraid to be seen associating with divorcees.

What stresses me is that we are not catered for. When you are a divorcee it's like the church does not go deeper to make sure that they assist you. Instead of helping you, I see that they are judgmental. In fact you do not have a shoulder to cry on. People actually stay far from you because they do not want to be associated with you (a 52-year-old divorcee).

It starts with the way the church views us, especially if you are a divorcee, you are regarded as a failure that you have failed the church and yet they do not have the background of what led to that (a 38-year-old divorcee).

Twenty-six (26) of the thirty-five (35) participants also indicated that single parents in the church feel neglected. It is like they do not have a say in the affairs of the church.

All other groups are organized; there are couples' meetings, youth, girls', mothers', fathers' and Sunday school meetings and it is only single parents who do not have a ministry specifically for them (55-year-old widow).

On the other hand, eight (8) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that they do not have challenges in the church, but only at home.

3.2.5 Survival strategy

Even though there is no specific ministry, support and care for single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni, twenty-one (21) of the thirty-five (35) participants indicated that they still survive. They mentioned that faith and trust in God played a huge role for their sustenance in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. They also explained that they still love the church because of its commitment to true biblical doctrine, good policies and procedures, its teachings and commitment to holiness. They further shared the following reasons as their survival strategy.

Twenty-one (21) of the thirty-five (35) participants indicated that when they face challenges, they pray to God and tell him how they feel without hiding anything. They would cry tears before the Lord and start to feel some sort of relief.

As for me, when something happens and I feel stressed emotionally I go to God in prayer, I cry literally and tell God how I feel and I become healed (57-year-old widow).

I must admit that it has never been easy and it is not easy. There are times when I feel so lonely, so lonely and you cannot keep on visiting other people. You come home, you sit and loneliness is still there. Prayer kept me till this far. When it is tough I go to God and tell him everything without hiding anything; I am lonely, I feel like crying and thereafter I feel relieved (a 54-year-old widow).

Twenty-two (22) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that fellowship, preaching and teachings on Sundays, weekdays, in the mothers' services, revivals, seminars and conventions keep them going. They further explained that teachings and preaching received from the above services are not specific for single parents, but are general for the entire church. However, those who preach and teach touch on issues related to single parents one way or another.

Seven (7) of the twenty-two (22) participants further mentioned that they survive by keeping themselves busy. They indicated that they fellowship consistently; two (2) of the seven (7) participants mentioned that they enrolled on courses with higher

learning institutions, while one (1) of the seven (7) indicated that she read books. Two (2) of the seven (7) participants indicated that they spend more time with their children. Furthermore, fifteen (15) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that they do handwork (work with their hands) and sell products to their communities and in the church. The above, according to participants, shifts the single parents' focus from emotional stress, and helps them forget about their situation.

Six (6) of the thirty-five participants opt to ignore what is said about them and how they are treated. They further explained that they asked God to close their ears so that they might not hear what is being said, and their eyes so as not to see what is happening, because some of these things hurt them.

You know God helps us much in that He closes our eyes that we may not see some of these things. Like maybe in our mothers' services on Thursdays, many of our mothers have husbands. When we fellowship, you find that they talk about our husbands, our husbands. I asked God to close my eyes and ears so that some of these things I may not see and hear because they hurt us (a 54-year-old widow).

Eight (8) of the thirty-five (35) participants also mentioned that single parents are helped by some Christians in the church and outside the church. They further mentioned that there are also pastors both from Assemblies of God and other churches who volunteer to help single parents in secret. Others mention they are helped by their family members and friends.

What strengthened me much is that I had individual supporters inside and outside our church. I was also helped by other pastors from other churches that would come and advise me. I was also praying to God (a 55-year-old divorcee).

Seven (7) of the thirty-five (35) participants indicated that they attend single parent services at other churches outside the Assemblies of God church, because of their relevant teachings. They further explained that they attend these services every year.

Personally, I attend single parent services at another church because they have services for single parents. They treat different topics; those for widows, divorcees and the never-married and they teach you to accept your status. Now, in our church those services are not there and you are compelled to go out and search for them in other churches (a 41-year-old widow).

Seven (7) of the thirty-five (35) participants highlighted that the church needs to pray for single parents.

The church must pray for single parents that they succeed in whatever they do to make a living (a 50-year-old widow).

3.2.6 The need for single parenthood teachings in the church

Fifteen (15) of the thirty-five (35) participants emphasized the need for teachings on single parenthood in the church. Christians should be taught about single parenthood in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. They further indicated that teachings on single parenthood will close the gap between single parents and the church, and the relationship will improve. Congregants do not understand single parents and single parents do not interact. Five (5) of the thirty-five (35) participants mentioned that those who minister from the pulpits sometimes hurt single parents because of a lack of knowledge, understanding and training on single parenthood.

Seven (7) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that single parent's children face challenges which stresses their parents. They further mentioned that these children should be brought together, be taught and counselled as some of them are hurting emotionally, and end up blaming their parents for the difficult situations they are going through.

We need to bring all single parents' children together, have services for them especially those children who are grown. They must be taught because some of them are hurting emotionally (a 56-year-old divorcee).

The church must first extend a hand towards single parents, because it is far from single parents (a 54-year-old widow).

3.2.7 Uncomfortable to approach church leadership

Twenty-eight (28) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that they feel uncomfortable about approaching the church leadership or the pastor when they have problems because of the church tradition and protocol not to approach the local church leadership and pastor. They further explained that women are encouraged in the women's services to report to their chairlady when they have problems. The chairlady is the one who will take their matter to the church leadership, and the church leadership will then report the matter to the pastor. Alternatively, women may report to the pastor's wife or may ask another woman to accompany them to the pastor. According to the church tradition and practice, the above practice is associated with respect. It is further highlighted that the practice was put in place because many pastors were tempted to establish love relationships with women who came alone to their offices and mission houses for counselling. They also stated that single parents do not feel comfortable with this practice because some of their problems do not reach the pastor. On the other hand, some of their problems are heard being discussed by other people and this discourages them from following the protocol.

As I respect myself I cannot phone the pastor and go to him knowing that his wife is not available. I rather take another mother to accompany me. And then if I want to go to leadership I can approach the chairman's wife and he will advise how I can go to the leadership, and this is respect (a 55-year-old widow).

I am afraid to approach the leadership in the church when I experience problems because if now I talk to another man, their wives do not understand us well (55-year-old widow).

3.2.8 The leadership of single parent ministry

Thirteen (13) of the thirty-five (35) participants believe that pastors and their wives, organizers and mothers' chairladies may lead single parent ministry in the church. However, twenty-two (22) of the thirty-five participants feel that single parent ministry should be led by a person who has practical experience in single parenting, and he or she must be an experienced elderly person. They further argued that somebody who is not a single parent knows nothing about single parenting and its challenges. He or she will therefore not understand them when they talk about their challenges and therefore talk only theory.

I believe that involving single parents in the leadership of single parent ministry will be the right thing to do because they have experience in single parenting. They know the limitations of single parents that you will not be able to attend all services as a single parent from Monday to Sunday (a 36-year-old widow).

3.2.9 Discrimination against single parents

Twelve (12) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that single parents experience discrimination in the church. Those in leadership positions tend not to listen to single parents who have received a word or revelation from the Lord.

Another thing that I can mention is poor communication with us, that if there is something that came up in the church you find that as a single parent you are being overlooked. They do not treat you the same as the others, but talk to you as if they are talking to a small child, forgetting that even though you do not have a husband you are a parent (a 60-year-old widow).

3.2.10 The use of biblical principles to minister to single parents

Twenty-one (21) of the thirty-five (35) participants stated that the church does not use biblical principles to minister to single parents, because they talk about love, but they do not practice it.

The church must take care of us; they must visit us in our homes, ask us about our situations; children, the husband, what is happening at home, and how we cope with the situation (50-year-old divorcee).

I think that we know love as a church, we understand love, we speak of love, but it is difficult to practice it in the church (a 32-year-old woman who has never married).

3.2.11 Single parents are a threat to married women in the church

Nine (9) of the thirty-five (35) participants explained that single parents in the church are a threat to married women. According to participants, married women feel uncomfortable when single parents sit close to their husbands in the church. They further explained that this attitude frustrates them, and they feel lost and isolated. As a result, single parents are afraid to talk with men freely in the church, or to take a lift in other Christian men's cars when there is a need.

It is difficult in a way that it is not possible for me as a single parent to sit in front or just behind a married man in the church. If it happens, his wife becomes unsettled, she would look at her husband, go out and come back, looking at her husband until the man leaves and take another seat. It is like we are not supposed to be in the church as single parents (57-year-old divorcee).

In the church I might say that when married women look at us single parents they think we are going to take their husbands. Men are not safe in a way that when you look at this woman you can see that she does not accept you, she is unapproachable (a 36-year-old woman who has never married).

3.3 Recommendations

Participants made the following recommendations: The church must recognize, acknowledge and appreciate single parents. They must show concern by finding out what are the challenges and needs of single parents in the church. A single parent ministry must be established in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. As a matter of

fact, the church must organize a symposium, initiate services, workshops, and seminars for single parents. This will provide an opportunity for single parents to share their frustrations and emotional stressors in the church and away from home. The church will then be able to understand the challenges faced by single parents, and thus come up with strategies to empower and teach single parents on how to deal with parenting issues. Further, single parents will have an opportunity to get to know each other, and share their experiences on how they overcame challenges among themselves.

Participants also recommended that the church must run workshops for pastors, the leadership and all Christians on how to handle single parents. It must show concern, love and care to single parents in the church. The pastor and his or her leadership and all Christians should be ready at all times to ask about the welfare of the single parent, his or her children, and be willing to give emotional and financial support where there is need. The church must therefore extend a helping hand to single parents who are struggling to make a living.

Having made the above recommendations, participants also emphasized that the present reporting system must be reviewed, as it discourages single parents from reporting when they have problems. The church must establish a communication structure which will be responsible for single parents in the church. This structure should be led by people who are single parents themselves, and be old enough to be able to guide and teach young single parents. It will further enable single parents to open up when they have challenges.

3.4. Themes identified from pastors and the local church leadership

The researcher also conducted in-depth interviews with pastors and the leadership from the nine local churches of the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. The following themes were identified: lack of ministry, programs and structures, single parents experience challenges, identification of single parents in the church, leadership visits

to single parents' homes, stigma, training of the leadership and the church, teachings in mothers' services, biblical teachings and the use of tithes in the church.

3.4.1. Lack of ministry, programs and structures

Pastors and leadership in the nine local churches acknowledged that there is neither ministry nor formal programs which are put in place to address single parent's issues in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. They also conceded that there are no communication structures between single parents and the church, and that single parents have been neglected for decades. Further, they reiterated what was stated by single parents, that the only structure available is that of mothers 'mothers' committee and mothers' organizers' which is responsible for all women regardless of marital status. In the same way there is a men's committee and men's organizers which are responsible for all men. It was also mentioned that the church focuses on five groups only; men, mothers, youth, girls and Sunday school, but nothing has been done for single parents.

In our church we have single parents, but unfortunately we do not have a formal program that is focused on them, and there is no communication structure (a church committee member).

Traditionally in our denomination, speakers are modelled to address couples. Single parents are invited, but are not addressed in our meetings, and they are always there, but their needs are not taken care of (a church committee member).

In (8) of the nine (9) churches, the leadership and pastors agreed that single parents need their own service where they will be free to share their challenges, and that they may feel recognized.

3.4.2 Single parents experience challenges

Pastors and leadership in eight (8) of the nine (9) churches acknowledged that single parents experience emotional stress both at home and in the church. However, in six (6) of the eight (8) churches, the leadership indicated that they assumed 'single

parents in the church are doing well, because they fellowship like all other Christians and they never complain'. Whereas in two (2) of the six (6) churches, the leadership indicated that they thought that single parents in their local churches do not experience stress, because of the perception that everybody who stays in town is believed to be doing well (Appendix 5, section B). Hence, the church does not have mechanisms to address single parents' challenges both in the church and at home.

3.4.3 Identification of single parents in the church

According to the pastors and leadership in five (5) of the nine (9) churches, the church has neither identified single parents nor sought to know how many are in their local churches and what their emotional, spiritual and social needs might be.

The church has not identified how many single parent families there are in the church and how they live, because you cannot help a person if you do not know his or her family status. The church must know how many children are the in each family and what their needs are (a pastor).

3.4.4. Leadership visits to single parents' homes

Leadership in eight (8) of the nine (9) churches acknowledged that they do not visit single parents families to check how they are with their children, and what their spiritual, emotional and social needs are. In two (2) of the eight (8) churches, the leadership stated that single parents' homes are visited by Christian individuals. The leadership did not make formal visits to single parents' homes. As a result, they do not know what is happening in single parent homes, and can only help single parents who report to them that they have problems at home. They further confessed that single parents who do not come to report are not helped.

3.4.5 Stigma

In six (6) of the nine (9) churches, leadership stated that single parents are isolated and forgotten. It also emerged that married women do not trust single parents because they believe that 'they are going to take their husbands' (Appendix 5, section B). This attitude has caused men who are in the local church leadership to

distance themselves from single parents. Other pastors also distance themselves from single parents because they fear that associating and being seen in the presence of single parents will feed into the already negative attitude about single parents in the church. According to the pastors and leadership in five (5) of the nine (9) churches, this negative attitude has been caused by teachings in the mothers' services. Women are taught not to be found close to men in and outside the church, they must not climb in the front seat of a car if given a lift by men, and they must not approach men if they have problems, but go via their wives. However, in one (1) of the six (6) churches, the leadership believes that Christians have created unnecessary fear amongst themselves. They further indicated that all congregants should come together, and be workshopped on this matter.

I think this issue must be discussed in the church; Christians live by assumptions and fear of something which is not there. It should be communicated that single parents are born again Christians and Christian men in the church are also born again Christians. We are not waiting to see people who will portray worldly behaviors in the church; we are brothers and sisters in the Lord (an elder in the church).

3.4.6 Training of the leadership and the church

The leadership in six (6) of the nine (9) churches mentioned that they also need training about single parents, because these issues slipped out of their minds, they never thought of them. Hence, the leadership and pastors in seven (7) of the nine (9) churches appreciated the study as an eye opener (Appendix 5, section B). Further, it was revealed that the Assemblies of God church in Emalahleni, has never addressed the issue of single parents in the church. The church is concentrating on other groups; men, women, youth, girls, and Sunday school while neglecting single parents. The leadership further stated that the entire church also needs teachings and should be workshopped about single parents in order to promote the awareness of the entire church about issues pertaining to single parents.

Leadership and pastors in three (3) of the nine (9) churches stated that the church must identify capable Christians with skill and knowledge within the church. They must be trained on how to deal with single parents' matters. In five (5) of the nine (9) churches, pastors and leadership further indicated that outside speakers experienced in single parenting should be invited to come and address the church on single parenthood. In addition, leadership in three (3) of the nine (9) churches indicated that the church must have trained counsellors who will address fear and frustration about single parents in the church.

Another thing, we will not know if we are not taught as the leadership. Unless somebody comes and open our eyes we will not know. Just as a teacher cannot teach children without training, in the same way we as the leadership cannot address single parents without training (an elder in the church).

In addition, pastors and leadership in three (3) of the nine (9) churches stated that Pastors and leadership should be workshopped on the need to be open, approachable, and fatherhood. Single parents will find it easy to open up when they have problems to a leader with the above qualities

3.4.7. Teachings in mothers' services

In five (5) of the nine (9) churches, leadership reiterated what was shared by single parent participants that teachings which are taught in mothers' services instilled fear, discrimination and suspicion about single parents in the entire church. Women are taught not go to the mission house or to Christian men in the church when they experience problems, unless they are accompanied by other women. They must either go to the pastor's wife or approach other Christian men's wives, who will then talk to their husbands, and those men will then go to the pastor. They also mentioned that this fear is also aggravated by Christian men who state openly that pastors must not visit single parents in their homes. Even though this practice is meant for a good reason to protect women, men and the gospel, it suggests that Christians cannot be trusted when it comes to male and female relationships.

For me, I will refer this problem to mothers' services; this is what mothers teach in their services. I remember they nearly broke my car when five of them wanted to take the back seat. I was attending a church meeting and five mothers asked for a lift. To my amazement, no one among them wanted to take the front seat, because they are taught not to do that. They insisted on taking the back seat and the car was out of balance. I had to stop and ask them, how we would be able to drive (a church committee member).

3.4.8 Biblical teachings

Leadership and pastors in four (4) of the nine (9) churches highlighted the power of biblical teachings in the church. They argued that pastors must commit to genuine biblical teachings, so as to boost single parents' faith in God. They further explained that single parents empowered with the word of God are able to cope with single parenthood and its challenges.

3.4.9 The use of tithes in the church

In two (2) of the nine (9) churches, leaders concurred that according to the word of God, a portion of tithes offerings in the church should be used to support widows, orphans and those who are in need. However, they are unable to help because tithes are controlled by the regional office. Further, they indicated that the Assemblies of God Emalahleni failed to practice what scripture says. It was also mentioned in one (1) of the two (2) churches that because of other commitments in the church, monies which were supposed to support widows and the needy end up being used for building projects, because of the lack of finance.

We do not do the word because even these tithes in the church are not ours, we do not have a say as they are controlled by the office. We cannot do anything here because we take instructions from the authorities (elder in the church).

This has been an eye opener, we will have to sit down and check what we can do about single parents who are in need (elder in the church).

3.5 Summary of recommendations from pastors and local church leaders

The following recommendations were made by pastors and the leadership of the nine churches of Assemblies of God Emalaheni. The church must follow biblical principles to minister to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress. As such, a ministry to cater for single parents should be established in the church. A communication structure between the church and single parents must also be established. This structure will facilitate single parents' ministry, and will thus take care of single parents' spiritual, emotional and social needs. Capable Christians must be identified and trained to serve in the single parent ministry.

Further, it is recommended that pastors and church leadership should be trained on how to handle single parents. They should be taught that a leader must be approachable, open and display fatherhood to enable single parents to open up when they have challenges. In addition, leaders should also be taught about the importance of impartiality when dealing with Christians. Leaders must not take sides when addressing single parent issues.

Church leaders should de-stigmatize single parents by visiting their homes and helping them when there is a need. They must show love and care to single parents, as this will make single parents feel free and welcome in the church. The entire church should also be taught on how to live with those who rear children alone. It was further suggested that local churches must invite people with knowledge and expertise about single parents and their needs to come and address both the church and single parents. Further, the church must have trained counsellors to reduce fear around single parents in the church.

Teachings which instil fear and skepticism in single parents and the church at large should be corrected and eliminated. Christians must be made aware that single parents are part of the body of Christ, and if they have challenges, they must feel free to go to their pastor, the leadership or to whichever Christian they feel free to go to. Single parents should not be stigmatized. Trust should be promoted and fear be

removed among Christians. Christians should trust each other, so that freedom of communication with whomever must be encouraged.

It was also recommended that single parent ministry should be led by the church leadership and the pastor. Single parents should be identified in local churches and be given responsibility to take care of single parent matters. Further, it was recommended that pastors should discuss the issue of single parents involving all the higher structures of the church at the district level, the regional level and on the national level. On the other hand, local leadership must also take the initiative and address single parents' challenges at the local level.

It was emphasized that the pastor and all those who are in the leadership must play the role of a father to single parents and their children in the church. They should portray love and care for single parents so that single parents might feel accepted in the church.

3.6 Summary

This chapter provided the results of in-depth interviews of single parents, pastors and the local church leadership of the nine local churches in eMalahleni. The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim in isiZulu and translated them into English. Data was analyzed and themes were identified which reflected participants' experiences.

Themes identified from interviews with single parents are: the difficulty of single parenting, the lack of ministry towards single parents in the church, lack of communication amongst single parents, emotional stress in single parents, a survival strategy, the need for teachings in the church, uncomfortable when approaching church leadership, the leadership of single parent ministry, discrimination against single parents, the use of Biblical principles to minister to single parents, and the perception that single parents are a threat to married women in the church.

Participants recommended that a single parent ministry be established in the Assemblies of God church, so that single parents may be recognized,

acknowledged, and appreciated. The church must organize a symposium, initiate services, workshops and seminaries for single parents. Pastors, the leadership and all Christians must attend workshops and be trained on how to minister to single parents in the church. The church must show concern, love and care to single parents, and for this purpose come up with a communication structure which consists of single parents and elderly people.

Themes identified from the pastors and the local church leadership interviews in the nine churches are: lack of ministry and programs and structures, single parents experience challenges, identification of single parents in the church, leadership visits to single parents' homes, stigma, training of the leadership and the church, teachings in mothers' services, biblical teachings and the use of tithes in the church.

Pastors and local church leadership recommended that a single parent ministry and communication structures between the church and single parents be established. A portion of tithes offerings in the church should be used to take care of single parents who are in real need, as this is according to the word of God.

CHAPTER FOUR

DREAMING TOGETHER TO IMPLEMENT A SINGLE PARENT MINISTRY IN THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH IN EMALAHLENI

4.1. Introduction

This chapter is the dreaming phase of Appreciative Inquiry research methodology. The participants and the researcher were part of the process through a focus group, which was divided into three smaller groups, to discuss ways of implementing an effective single parent ministry in the nine assemblies of the Assemblies of God church in Emalahleni. The exercise of this phase was to engage part of the hypothesis that states that the Assemblies of God Emalahleni lacks relevant support programs in the church.

Six (6) pastors, fifteen (15) leaders and thirty-five (35) single parents participated in the focus group discussion. Three (3) pastors and three (3) local church leadership members did not make it to the focus group. The researcher divided the focus group into three (3) smaller groups; two groups of nineteen (19) each and one (1) of eighteen (18). The first two groups consisted of two (2) pastors, five (5) leaders and twelve (12) single parents, while the third group consisted of two (2) pastors, five (5) leaders and eleven (11) single parents. These three focus groups responded to the following questions:

- (a) What strategies should be implemented by the Assemblies of God church to improve the status of single parents?
- (b) What steps can be followed by the Assemblies of God church to shape ministry to single parents?
- (c) How can the Assemblies of God church use biblical principles to address single parents' emotional stress?

(d) What strategies should be put in place to improve the relationship between the church and single parents?

The researcher facilitated discussions in all three focus groups and used a tape recorder to capture all discussions and saved them in a computer. Four steps formed part of the focus group discussions. First, the researcher tested whether the tape recorder was working. Second, the researcher asked each question and allowed the participants to respond one at a time. For clarity a follow-up question was asked when there was a need to redirect respondents in answering the interview questions. Third, the researcher sent the recorded discussion to an independent person to transcribe the recordings. Fourth, the researcher then translated the transcribed discussions, typed them to engage with the data before data analysis. The researcher further analysed the data himself to make sure no meaning was lost in the process.

The following represents the dreams of participants as they responded to questions:

4.1.1 *What strategies should be implemented by the Assemblies of God church to improve the status of single parents?*

Responses from participants were:

4.1.1.1 Implement a single parent ministry

Participants in all three (3) focus group discussions stated that the church must include single parent meetings in the church year planner with clear dates showing when and where single parent meetings will be held. This should be displayed on all noticeboards to be seen by all members of the church.

I suggest that yearly when the church year planner is prepared, single parent meetings must also be included that will take place yearly because it will be in the year planner (a 44-year-old never-married woman).

I support the motion that we are in the church and we need to have single parent ministry, because even though we are in the church we do not know how to

handle ourselves. You find that you have now become a single parent. Though you are in the church, you do not know how you need to walk. Now on the way you find that others are left behind as there is nothing done by the church to guide you that we walk like this. It is quiet, there is nothing; we are just helped by God (a 52-year-old widow).

It was indicated that the church leadership should have a program to visit single parent homes. They must know when they are visiting single parent families and how often.

The leadership must meet and guide each other that we must visit these Christians in their homes (a church leader).

Widows and widowed support program: Participants also stated that the church must have a system which clearly explains what support will be given after the death of a loved one. According to participants, the church must continue to have services after burial and offer help when there is need.

I want to highlight the issue of widows. Everything is done until burial and after that nobody goes. When you say let us go, they say here at home we do not have the ten days; that is not done. This is the reason why we do not go and we will see the Christian at church if he or she comes back. What can we do, because if we go again, it will be like we do things like the world? (Church elder)

It is easy, we do not look at what will people say, but we are going there. If they see us and think we go for ten days, we do not go for ten days, but to strengthen her. We use to say it is still ok now, but after burial reality begins. After burial we must go again for some days encouraging or strengthening the one who lost a loved one (a pastor).

Coming together as single parents will help us much. There are things which another person will not understand when you talk as a single parent, but will be understood by a person who is in the same situation. Now if there might be a way

that we can have single parent services we will be happy for it, as we will be able to cry together, advice each other and support each other. And say, sister if it is like this, do this as there are things which you will not mention on Wednesday (girls' meeting) as there are young girls, and there are also things related to single parents which are not mentioned on Thursdays (women's meetings) (a 54-year-old widow).

4.1.1.2 Relief aid for single parents in the church

It emerged from the three (3) focus group discussions that an offering named, 'relief fund' is collected weekly in the nine churches of Assemblies of God church in Emalahleni, to assist the needy, and that tithes are collected every Sunday. In all three (3) groups participants agreed with one voice that a portion of these offerings must be used to alleviate poverty in single parent homes, and also help single parents start businesses. This will enable them to support their families. Participants further expressed that Christians should be encouraged to bring clothes and food parcels to the church to help single parents and their children. Also, food might be prepared every Sunday so that those who have nothing in their homes may have food after church service.

It is clear brethren that our relief fund needs to have a committee which will include single parents, so that all people will be able to receive help accordingly (leadership member).

Let the church be taught, encouraging Christians to share what they have with the needy. Now the committee will see, as now the church will know the situation of single parents. All members take what they have and put it aside for those who are in need (a 51-year-old widow).

Participants also stated that special meetings for male teenagers from single parent homes should be established to address their hurt and frustrations. Also, Christian couples must be encouraged to adopt at least one single parent family to provide support.

Now these young widows' children are still young. These children misbehave until they are addicted to drugs. Men must go to these young single parents and check how is the situation, because boys are troublesome. They must help reprimand these children. We need to be helped, especially for these young widows, and those who go must go with their wives (59-year-old divorcee).

4.1.2 What steps can be followed by the Assemblies of God church to shape ministry to single parents?

Participants in the focus groups agreed on the following steps:

4.1.2.1 Single parent' statistics in the church

In two (2) of the three (3) focus groups, participants agreed that pastors and local church leadership in the nine (9) churches of the Assemblies of God Emalahleni must begin a single parent ministry by collecting statistics on single parents.

I think it would be good to have statistics as a church that we might know who are our widows, divorcees and the never-married, their children and situations in the families (a 45-year-old never married woman).

I support the last speaker; she mentioned a very important thing. I want to add that all local churches should know all the family lives of single parents; how many single parents do we have, how many children are there in single parent families and what problems they have with their church? It is painful to see children sitting at home not attending school, while the church never wanted to know (a pastor).

4.1.2.2 Training pastors and local church leadership

It was indicated in two (2) of the three (3) focus group discussions that pastors and the local church leadership need to be trained in the pastors' fellowship meetings, on how to minister to single parents, to enable them to minister to single parents effectively.

Adding to what the father has said, I agree on the issue of training. A pastor is a shepherd and a widow will not say I am a good shepherd if I am not trained. During

training we will be able to guide each other on how to serve single parents (55-year-old pastor).

Now what is important, the leadership must be enlightened. Pastors must teach and advise each other that we must do like this and that. We are not the same. Others do not have eyes to see what problem this person has, while others could see what the needs of other people are. And the pastor in our midst must look at us and teach us as leadership (a church elder).

4.1.2.3 Authorisation to establish a single parent ministry

Even though participants in all three (3) focus groups agreed on steps to be followed to establish a single parent ministry, participants in one (1) of the three (3) focus group discussions, however, advised that a request should be sent to the Regional Counsel Committee (RCC) so that this matter might also be referred to the National Executive Committee (EXCO) to be included in the conference agenda for further discussion. However, participants in all three (3) focus group discussions made it clear that referring this matter to the national executive should not stop nor delay local churches from implementing single parent ministry. They argued that taking care of single parents is the will of God and supported in scripture.

This suggestion is good, but there is the other side of it. Let me say we start single parent ministry here in eMalahleni and district or maybe here in Emmaus. In our services we used to have speakers from other regions. Now, if that speaker will say I have heard that here in eMalahleni and district you have single parent ministry, this thing was not done here in the Assemblies of God church. Now, for that reason I will suggest that though it is good that it should start in the church, let it be approved by national leadership that no one coming from above will say we are out of order. It must be agreed on all sides (church elder).

4.1.3 How can the Assemblies of God church use biblical principles to address single parents' emotional stress?

Participants stated the following:

4.1.3.1 Prayer

It emerged in one (1) of the three (3) focus groups that single parents need prayer. It is believed that some of challenges faced by single parents cannot only be addressed through social aid programs, as they are hereditary and spiritual. Hence, others follow false prophets believing that they will receive deliverance, work, healing, marriage and prosperity. They need prayer. Participants indicated that the church must pray for single parents and their children, and ask for God's intervention in the areas of employment, temptations, and peace.

There are single parent families to which you will give money to start businesses, but they eat everything. Some of these things are inherited curses. Some finish schooling and do not find jobs. Some of these things are spiritual; we need to break the curse through prayer (a 51-year-old widow).

Prayer will help us; let us ask the church to engage in prayer and fasting and seek the face of God; praying for the welfare of single parents (a 62-year-old pastor).

4.1.3.2 Care and support for single parents

Participants in all three (3) focus groups also highlighted that God wants the church to take care of single parents and their families. The church must show concern, love, and care for single parents and their children by asking them about their children, visiting their homes, giving financial support as needs arise and talking to their children.

Our church never had care. We lose many young single parents because after having lost her husband, she is not helped on Thursdays during mothers' services, and sees the mothers' service as being useless (a 59-year-old widow).

I recommend that churches must start to have a bag for the needy in which Christians will put gifts. Many people are running away to the ministries because

they are provided with food and clothes. There should be a committee elected specifically for that (a 52-year-old widow).

4.1.4 What strategies should be put in place to improve the relationship between the church and single parents?

Participants mentioned the following:

4.1.4.1 De-stigmatize single parents

Even though participants in all three focus groups agreed on steps to implement single parent ministry, participants in two (2) of the three (3) focus groups emphasized that the church must de-stigmatize single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni.

Christians must be brought together and be shown this danger and the stigma created in single parents, so that they see it. Now, we are Christians and are pastors. When I visit single parents, I must stay outside and when they have problems they cannot come to me. This thing is frustrating (a 63-year-old pastor).

Now, we as single parents, we ask that let us trust each other. There comes a car to my house and you conclude that I am in love with that person (a 38-year-old unmarried woman).

In the church scripture must be read and revealed that if you see a person with another do not think negative thoughts, and these men who propose love affairs with single parents in the church must be reprimanded, that this is wrong according to God's word, and the pastor must advise us (a 38-year-old never married woman).

My sister spoke a mouthful. Secondly, I will turn to our mothers. We regard them as saved Christians, but where gossip is concerned they are not saved. Much is with the mothers. If they see me standing with another woman, they phone my wife to say come and see. Let us repent, we are a family and are saved (church elder).

As this matter has come out, there is no more way to keep quiet about it. The church must be told that brethren, we are not the same. We have these people, and what we did to them was wrong, let us correct it (a 53-year-old widow).

I would ask that the church welcomes us; we have not just decided to be divorcees. We also liked to have a good reputation, but the situation forced you to be what you are. The church must make us fellowship peacefully. They must not say she failed in her home and what will she tell us. God bless you (a 65-year-old divorcee).

4.1.4.2 Single parenting awareness campaigns

Participants in two (2) of the three (3) focus group discussions indicated that the pastor and leadership should organize single parenting awareness campaigns.

The regional leadership must further encourage regional committees of all regional organizations (women, men, youth, sisters and Sunday school) to have slots on single parenting in their monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings to extend single parenting awareness to all Christians in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. It will also enable Christians to understand issues related to single parents.

Maybe during the other conventions there should be a teaching on single parenting, that they remind us that even those who are not single parents may understand us as there is a lot of misunderstanding. In addition, in the quarterly meetings let there be topics related to single parents which will raise awareness in all Christians (a 44-year-old never-married woman).

If the church does not know about the problem they have, they will not repent. Let us go to the issue of a seminar where Christians will be made aware (a pastor).

4.1.4.3 Bible-based teachings

Participants in all three (3) focus groups highlighted teachings from the Bible as an effective way of reducing stress in single parents. They indicated that there is a need for biblical teachings about single parents in the church. It was stated emphatically that the pastor and local church leadership must provide preaching and teachings

which touch on issues pertaining to single parenting, because young single parents do not know how to approach single parenting challenges. Secondly, Christians do not know how to handle single parents. It is for these reasons that the entire church must be taught on issues pertaining to single parents which include; giving support to single parents, praying for them, helping them where there is need, accepting them and talking to their children, to name just some.

God has a place for single parents. From Genesis to Revelation there are relevant verses for these people. For example, God is a husband for widows. In other words they are not lost, but have their own place in God. Now who are we as churches if we do not have a place for them? We have left part of a department that God has in him (55-year-old pastor).

I think maybe our pastors could help us by talking about single parenting on Sundays during preaching (a 44-year-old married woman).

What is important is obvious; teachings. These teachings are not going to be only for single parents, but for the entire church (church elder).

I think awareness and education are needed, brethren (a 52-year-old widow).

This matter must be taught in the churches. In another church I heard them saying that no girl must go to the mission house. Now this thing has been taught, and must be uprooted through teaching (a 63-year-old pastor).

4.1.4.4 Seminar for single parents

In addition, participants in one (1) of the three (3) focus groups stated that a seminar for single parents must be arranged in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni, where all single parents will be invited, including those who did not have an opportunity to participate in the interviews. All Christians, except children, will also be invited to attend the seminar. The purpose of this seminar will be to enable all single parents to participate freely in a meeting relevant to them, to raise awareness about single parenting in the church and to develop in all Christians a better understanding about

single parents' challenges in the church and at home. This seminar will provide single parents with an opportunity to share their experiences, and to ask questions regarding their situations. They will also be able to get to know and understand each other and share life experiences amongst themselves. The seminar will further enable single parents who were not part of the interviews to submit their views, so that all experiences of single parents might be covered and addressed accordingly.

Greetings with all protocol observed. I propose that a seminar be arranged in the region where all single parents will be called, including those who did not get the opportunity to be interviewed, so that all single parents may give their problems, because maybe some of the problems they have were not covered in these interviews. In this seminar we would need to call everybody, though maybe we might exclude Sunday school children. We will also call all couples, because as a single parent in the church, even if I got an opportunity to talk with Mr. X, if I talk to him I become a threat to his wife, while there is something spiritual he can help me with (a 42-year-old never-married woman).

In fact pastor, we know the problem is there. This thing needs to be corrected, let us talk about it; seminars will help (a 57-year-old widow).

The lived experiences of single parents demonstrate and uphold part of the hypothesis that states that the Assemblies of God Emalahleni lacks relevant support programs in the church. Church programs and preaching seem not to address single parents' emotions and needs. This has created a gap between the church and them, as the church has not yet designed appropriate strategies, training and programs.

4.2 Summary

This chapter presented dreams of three focus group discussions where pastors, local church leadership and single parents from nine churches of the Assemblies of God church in Emalahleni, came together to discuss a strategy to implement single parent ministry in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. The dreamed strategy involved the following: implementation of a single parent ministry, relief aid for single

parents in the church, single parents' statistics in the church, training pastors and local church leadership, authorization to establish a single parent ministry, prayer, care and support for single parents, de-stigmatizing single parents, single parenting awareness campaigns, Bible-based teachings and seminars for single parent

CHAPTER FIVE

TOWARDS A BIBLICAL STRATEGY OF IMPLEMENTING A SINGLE PARENT MINISTRY IN THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH IN EMALAHLENI

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the destiny phase of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) research methodology. The second, third and fourth chapters explored the first three phases of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), namely, the discovery phase, the dream phase and the design phase. The destiny phase explores single parenting in the Bible and presents a strategy to implement a biblical single parent ministry in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. The objective of this phase flows from the main hypothesis that states that the Assemblies of God Emalahleni is missing opportunities of ministering to single parents because of lack of relevant support programs in the church. Church programs and preaching seem not to address single parents' emotions and needs. This has created a gap between the church and single parents as the church has not yet designed appropriate strategies, training and programs.

5.2 The biblical view of a traditional family

This section explores two themes, namely, the traditional family and suggesting a single parenting strategy in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni by applying a systematic theology approach to ground the study in theology rather than in social science. Insights from social sciences will also be included.

Systematic theology focuses on what the whole Bible teaches on a given topic (Grudem 1994:21) and employs biblical theology as its basic building blocks (Peppler 2010:3). It also attempts to highlight some universal principles or timeless truths, and organize them into a comprehensive theological position to provide 'an organized life-relevant fashion' (p. 4).

According to the *Sociology guide*, the traditional family is a small group composed of husband and wife and children that constitute a unit apart from the rest of the community, in which the wife works in the home without pay while the husband works outside the home for money (Sociology guide 2019:1). This view is clearly biblical. Jacobs states that God never designed us as human beings to parent alone. That was not His design in the first book of the Bible, nor is it today. He created a man and woman to raise children (Jacobs 2010:35). Walker II adds that one wonders where the burden of single-parenthood is in the Bible, because the traditional family has been instituted from Adam and Eve (Walker II 2015:7).

5.2.1 God originated traditional family

Genesis 1:26-27, God reveals as the originator of traditional family,

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

God blessed them and said 'be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen 1:28). This was reiterated by God after the flood to Noah and his sons 'and God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth' (Gen 9:1).

Grudem explains that God did not create human beings to be isolated persons, but in making us in His image He made us in such a way that we can attain interpersonal unity of various sorts in all forms of human society (Grudem 1994: 454). He further indicates that interpersonal unity comes to its fullest expression between men and women in marriage, where husband and wife become in a sense two persons in one (1994:454). It is also explained by Stamps that the union of a man and a woman was to form family relationships (Stamps 2009:34).

The last post-exilic prophet, Malachi, reiterates the biblical view of a traditional family, 'Did He not make the one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what

was the one God seeking, Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth' (Malachi 2:15).

Jesus's statement during his conversations with the Pharisees also referred to a traditional family, 'Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, therefore what God has joined together let no one separate' (Matt 19:4, 6). The apostle Paul does the same in Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20-21. *Benson Commentary* on Matthew 19:4 states that when God created mankind, he made people of both sexes.

5.2.2 The traditional family includes children

A traditional family includes children born in the union of a wife and husband. This is identifiable in the narrative before God established a covenant with Noah after the flood. God instructed Noah to get into the ark with his sons, wife and his sons' wives (Gen 6:18). This tendency is also identified in Noah's grandchildren, Abraham (Abram, later renamed by God as Abraham) and Moses. First, God proclaimed that He had chosen Abraham that Abraham might command his children and his household to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right (Gen 18:19). Second, he gave Moses and the nation of Israel the Ten Commandments. The fifth Commandment includes children, namely, 'honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you' (Exod 20:12). Third, God commanded Moses and the nation of Israel to pass these commandments to their children (Deut 6:4–9). Stamps, indicates that parents are seriously obligated, and it is an opportunity to give their children the instruction and correction which are a necessary part of a Christian upbringing (Stamps 2009:2298).

Jesus brought the position of children within the family and the community when he rebuked his disciples saying 'let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven' (Matt 19:13–15). Stamps, adds that Christ was deeply concerned about the well-being and the spiritual salvation of children, and this certainly applies to their upbringing and home life (2009:1798).

5.2.3 Love and care in the traditional family

The traditional family is meant to provide love and care for all its members. The story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:9 echoes this sentiment: God asked Cain, where is your brother Abel? And Cain answered, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' The conversation between God and Cain accentuates the expected caring relationship between the two brothers. On the other hand, Byron explains that Cain's act of killing Abel represents a compelling illustration of what it means to hate one's brother (2007:526). Byron further mentions that being the only two male people of their generation in the world, Cain's murder of Abel meant that Abel's potential descendants were denied life (2011:91). Jesus instructed His disciples to love one another (John 13: 34–35), and in the same way John exhorted Christians to love one another (1 John 3:15) saying that everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Paul reiterates the same caring relationship among family members, that anyone who does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:8). He also gave several family–member relations dynamics, namely, when he instructed Titus to teach young women to love their husbands and children (Titus 2:4); exhorted fathers not to provoke their children to anger, but rear them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4) and instructed children to honor their father and their mother, that it might go well with them and that they might live long in the land (Eph 6:2-3).

5.3 A biblical strategy for implementing a biblical single parent ministry

This section begins by exploring socio-economic and religious contexts that challenge a biblical view of a traditional family and moves to a discussion of God's care and provision for single parents in the Bible, and concludes by providing practical ways to implement a single parent ministry in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni.

5.3.1 Socio-economic and religious contexts that challenged a biblical view of a traditional family

Even though God instituted the traditional family from the beginning, and intended children to be raised in such families, other forms of family are identified in the Bible. Different circumstances in the Bible caused single parenthood. Lot is the first single parent identified in the Bible. He stayed with his daughters after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Hagar, Ishmael's mother, is the second single parent mentioned in the Bible. Her story is given more attention than that of Lot.

Genesis 16 narrates the story of Hagar, a female Egyptian slave in Abraham's household who bore Abraham (her master) and Sarah (her barren mistress) a boy child after Sarah gave her husband, Abraham, to have a conjugal relationship with Hagar to bear her a child. This practice is called surrogacy.

Kartzow explains that in a slave society, slave owners not only owned the time and working capacity of their slaves, but also owned their reproductive bodies (2016:93). This tradition is also seen later in the book of Genesis when Laban gave his two slave girls, one to Leah and the other to Rachael (Gen 29:24, 29). Kartzow reiterates the findings of Gunkel that according to Israelites' custom, parents could give to a young wife a slave who was a foreigner as a dowry, to be her personal property, unlike the other maidservants, at the disposal of her husband (1900:323). Consequently, according to this Israelites' custom, if a wife is barren, she may offer another woman as a substitute and adopt the child. Kartzow states that in the history of Israel, surrogacy was used by female slaves to help their female owners avoid the social stigma of barrenness and be socially and culturally accepted, to fulfill their gender roles, and to be saved from isolation and trauma (2016:93).

As such, allowing Abram to have a conjugal relationship with Hagar created serious tensions between Sarah and Hagar and Sarah mistreated her. Hagar responded to her mistreatment by running away from Abram's household. Spangler and Syswerda explain that Hagar was a foreigner and slave, who let pride overtake her and later became a lonely woman, with few resources, who suffered a harsh punishment for her mistake (2007:34). She returned to the household after an angel appeared to

her and instructed her to go back to her mistress and submit to her. Some years after Sarah conceived and gave birth to a son, tension resurfaced between the two. Consequently, Sarah insisted that Abraham should send her and her son away from the household. Surprisingly, God affirmed Sarah's decision to Abraham (Gen 21:12). Her fate was that she lost her position and provision in the household and became a single parent wandering in the desert (Gen 21:14–20). This practice of sending concubines away with their children is also noticed in Genesis 25:6. Abraham gave all his concubines and their children gifts and sent them away prior to his death.

The next sections discuss other factors that challenged the view of a traditional family in the Near East world. Two main social conditions, namely, the death of a husband and institutionalized divorce, emerged and challenged the view of a traditional family in the Near East world. Four other conditions are also identified. First, is the socio-religious condition of Lot and his wife; second, Zibiah, king Joash's mother Hephzibah and King Manasseh's mother; third, the prophet Hosea's ministry and marriage life; fourth is Israel's exile socio-religious condition. These six conditions are discussed below.

5.3.1.1 The death of a husband

The death of a husband created a new form of family, namely, a single-parent family among nations in the Near East, including the nation of Israel (Baloi 2010:726) and created an unfortunate socio-economic condition for wife and children. According to Baker's dictionary, the widow's inheritance rights were minimal as the land was inalienably connected to the family of the male to whom it was apportioned (2020:1).

To prevent such practices among the Israelites, God commanded the nation of Israel to care for the marginalized widow (Exod 22:22-23). This provision is reiterated in Deuteronomy (24:17–21). In the New Testament, the widow's socio-economic conditions emerged as Jesus used widows as examples in his teaching, namely, the teaching to pray and not give up (Luke 18:1–8) and the widow's offering in the temple (Mark 13:42). He also raised a widow's son (Luke 7:11-17). The widow's socio-economic conditions confronted the apostles and the believers; they were

forced to find a working and lasting solution (Acts 6:1-6). Paul also addressed the socio-economic conditions of widows (I Tim 3:3-16). These views about widows demonstrate that this new form of parenting was recognized, and special provisions were made for it, first among the nation of Israel, and second among believers in the early Church.

5.3.1.2 Institutionalized divorce

Divorce among Near Eastern nations was common. Bradley found that other ancient Near Eastern laws were similar to Hebrew law: a man remained bound to provide for his family even after divorce (2007:13). Bradley also found that a monetary compensation of sixty shekels, which was a huge amount, was to be given by a husband to his wife to legally divorce her, so that the wife might receive sustenance (2001:14). The discussion about divorce and marriage between Jesus and the Pharisees gave the grounds Moses provided for husbands to divorce their wives (Matt 19:3–12). According to the narrative, it was a common practice among the Jews for husbands to divorce their wives, a practice that contradicted the original design of marriage (Matt 19:7–8). I also think that this practice could be linked to Ezra's institutionalising the divorce of foreign wives among those who had returned from exile (Ezra 10:3–12). Malachi also raised the matter of divorce among those who had returned from exile (Malachi 2:13–16).

The socio-religious condition of some family members in the Old Testament followed by those of Israel in exile is discussed next.

5.3.1.3 The story of Lot and his wife

The story of Lot illustrates a different socio-religious context of single-parenthood. Lot's wife died after defying God's command not to look back during the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; she turned into a pillar of salt (Gen 19:26). This unfortunate event caused her husband, Lot, to live with their two daughters who were pledged to be married in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:30).

5.3.1.4 Zibiah, king Joash's mother and Hephzibah king Manasseh's mother

After the death of her husband, king Ahaziah, Zibiah lived as a single parent (2 Kgs 9:27–28). Athaliah, the mother of King Ahaziah began to kill the rest of the royal family when she realized that her son was also dead (2 Kgs 11:1). It is stated that Ahaziah's sister, Jehosheba, the daughter of king Jehoram then stole Ahaziah's child son Joash away from among the king's children who were about to be killed and put him and his nurse in a bedroom (2 Kgs 11:2).

Hephzibah, Manasseh's mother became a widow after the death of her husband, King Hezekiah. Their twelve-year-old son ascended the throne and ruled until the age of fifty-five (2 Kgs 21:1, 21). Manasseh's age shows that his mother was responsible for raising him until he was mature enough.

5.3.1.5 The ministry of the prophet Hosea

The most intriguing narrative about single parenting is the prophet Hosea's prophetic ministry that demonstrated the relationship between God and Israel (Hos 6:6; Matt 9:13). God instructed him to marry a harlot to demonstrate this relationship. At some point she left him to live with other men (Hos 3:1-3). This forced the prophet Hosea to be a single parent.

5.3.1.6 Israel's exile socio-religious conditions

The Israelites compared their exile in Babylon to a widow left with her children. They felt that they had become orphans, fatherless; and their mothers were like widows (Lam 5:3). *Ellicott's commentary* elaborates more that the phrase 'Our mothers are as widows' refers to their husbands, who although living were carried into exile, and the Israelites were as destitute as though they had been deprived of them by death (*Ellicott's commentary* 2012:1). *Barnes commentary* further explains that the particle 'as' suggests that the whole verse is metaphorical. Our distress and desolation are comparable only to that of fatherless orphans or wives just bereaved of their husbands (*Barnes commentary* 2019: 1).

The post-exilic writing also emphasized how to treat widows (Psa 146: 9). Walker mentions that single parenthood stems from the idea that God is the father of the

fatherless, as it gives this exact phrase in Psalm 68:5, and that God tells His people to honor the widows and visit the orphans in James 1:27 (2015:7). Baloi reiterates the same that the church as an institution is called to minister to the unique needs of the single-parent family; and it must also be counselled and taught to be prepared to provide single parents with a supportive and caring climate of acceptance (2010:17).

5.4 God's care and provision for single parents in the Bible

Both the Old and New Testaments explain God's care and provision for single parents. Spangler and Syswerda state that the Bible tells how God himself has a special love and care for single parents (2007:225). Psalm 68:5 mentions that God is the father of the fatherless and protector of widows, while Paul emphasizes that children should care for their widowed mothers (I Tim 5:4).

5.4.1 Examples of provision in the Old Testament

God promised Hagar that she would have a son, because He had listened to her affliction and that God would multiply her offspring so that they could not be numbered (Gen 16:10–12). The *Benson Commentary* on Genesis 16:10 explains that the phrase 'I will multiply thy seed exceedingly— Hebrew multiplying' refers to multiplying it in every age, so as to perpetuate it (Gen 20:19) as is evident in the Hagarenes, Saracens, and various other tribes of Arabs who were descendants of Ishmael, and they have been and still are a great people (2020:1). Secondly, God provided water for Hagar and her child in the desert after she was chased away from Abraham's household (Gen 21:19)

God's provision in the life of the widow at Zarephath and her child is noticed when He sent his servant Elijah to go to her house to be served another form of meal. Elijah found her with only a handful of flour in the jar and little oil. God's intervention and provision caused the jug and the oil to never finish, as Elijah proclaimed 'For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, the jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth' (1 Kgs 17:14).

A widow of a prophet experienced God's provision through the ministry of Elisha the prophet. She cried to Elisha when a creditor threatened to take her two children into slavery (2 Kings 4:1). The prophet instructed her to borrow vessels from her neighbours, get into her house, close the door and pour into these vessels. She then had enough oil, which she sold and paid her debts (I Kgs 4:3–7).

5.4.2. Examples of provision in the New Testament

Luke narrates the story of Jesus raising the son of the widow of Nain. Jesus' actions demonstrated care and provision (Luke 7:13–14). Lastly, the apostles ensured that they cared for widows in the Early Church (Acts 6:1–6) and Paul also emphasized that the children of widows should care for their mothers (I Tim 5:4).

Contrary to the above, there is a strong resistance in the church to care for and support single parents. Baloi mentions that single parents in the African community are subjected to social stigma, and are suspected of having no intimate feelings and are anti-social (2010:725). Motapanyane adds that despite the large numbers of single mothers, deviant stereotypes of madness associated with single motherhood have persisted, and myths about single parents' madness affect how they are received in social circles and perceived in the job market (2016:118). The two reiterate Dowd's view that single-parent families are characterized as part of the underclass, broken and deviant, as compared to the nuclear, traditional, patriarchal family (1997:1).

5.5 Practical ways to implement a biblical strategy for a single parent ministry

It is, however, clear that there is no biblical reference to single parents resulting from children born out of wedlock and its implication for the church, and how the situation should be addressed. Scripture talks about widows and divorcees, but nothing about single parents caused by having children out of wedlock. However, the church is encouraged to demonstrate love and care for this marginalized group (Mark 12:31) as it addresses single parenting.

This section provides practical ways to implement a biblical single parent ministry (BSPM) in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. The literature and the Scripture echo the need for caring for single parents. Single parents' views in this study also reiterate what is in the scriptures and in literature. All these three sources form the basis for implementing a practical strategy to care for single parents in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. The following points are recommended for adopting a Biblical Single Parent Ministry (BSPM):

5.5.1 Identify single parents and their socio-economic conditions

The church leadership in each local church in the area of study is encouraged to establish a Biblical Single Parent Ministry (BSPM) by first gathering relevant statistics of all single parents and their households. This involves designing a spreadsheet to gather the following details:

1. Names and surnames
2. Physical Address
3. Telephone/mobile numbers
4. Age
5. Widow/Divorced/Unmarried/Separated
6. Academic status
7. Employment status
8. Number of children, age and their gender
9. Children's grades if in Primary or High school
10. Children's year of study if attending tertiary education
11. Establish if there are any post-Grade twelve unemployed children

12. Establish if there is any employed child in the house

5.5.2 *Raise awareness about single parents in the church*

Biblical Single Parent Ministry (BSPM) aims to create awareness about single parenting in each local church in the area of study. All church members excluding children will be encouraged to be part of the BSPM.

5.5.3. *Single parents' meetings*

Biblical Single Parent Ministry (BSPM) should be a platform for single parents to establish their need-specific meetings in each local church in the area of study. The frequency of these meetings should be on the church's year planner, and be displayed on church noticeboards with clear dates.

5.5.4 *Address single parents' socio economic and spiritual conditions*

Biblical Single Parent Ministry (BSPM) should be a platform to demonstrate that God provided for the needs of single parents in the Bible according to their different socio-economic conditions and their spiritual needs. He provided Hagar and her boy child with water in the desert (Gen 21:17–19). The widow of Zarephath was provided with food during a severe drought (1 Kgs 17:11–12), and a widow of a prophet was provided with so much oil that she was able to pay her debts (2 Kings 4:1–7). Further, Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:13–14). The apostles and the early church provided food to widows in the church (Acts 6:1–6). After identifying single parents, and raising awareness and establishing single parent meetings, the church must provide for their individual needs in the following ways:

5.5.4.1 *Relief aid for single parents*

Encourage each local church in the area of study to establish a relief aid committee responsible for single parents' needs. This committee should then raise funds to help single parents who are struggling to support their families. Christians must be encouraged to share what they have with the needy. They must be encouraged to bring clothes and food parcels voluntarily to the church, and these clothes should then be distributed by the elected committee to single parents who are in need.

5.5.4.2 Prayer meetings for single parents

The church must offer up prayers to God for His divine intervention with single parents and their children. Among others, prayers should be said for employment, peace, and financial stability in single parent households.

5.5.4.3 De-stigmatize single parents in the church.

Congregants in each local church in the area of study should be guided through scripture to associate with single parents in the church. They should be encouraged to refrain from gossip and practice love for one another and welcome single parents and their children.

5.5.4.4 Provide support for single parents

Encourage each local church in the area of study to provide support for single parents by conducting single parent teachings on how to deal with single parenting challenges, and organising seminars and workshops for single parents where they will be able to share experiences among themselves. Special meetings for male teenagers from single parent households should also be encouraged. Pastors should be encouraged to attend training on ministering to single parents and their households. Qualified church members in the area of Social Sciences and qualified theologians within the church should be encouraged to assist in developing training material for pastors.

5.5.4.5 Provide support for single parents' children

Frame of *'News Christianity today'* states that in an ideal world, children would be born only to caring and responsible parents who provide for them physically, mentally, and economically (1994:42). Lamb adds that congregations need to love children from single parent homes, mentor them through youth programs (2 Tim 2:1-2), offer free Bible-based counselling, adopt them and intentionally support them by making them a part of the congregation's budget, which can make a difference in helping to alleviate horrible crimes against helpless children, who are often kidnapped and sold as sex slaves (2017:8).

The outcome of this chapter confirms the main hypothesis that states that the Assemblies of God Emalahleni misses opportunities to minister to single parents because of the lack of relevant support programs in the church. Church programs and preaching seem not to address the emotions and needs of single parents. This has created a gap between the church and them as the church has not yet designed appropriate strategies, training and programs.

5.6 Summary

This chapter explored the biblical perspective of two themes, namely, the traditional family and single parenting in the Bible. God is revealed in the book of Genesis as the originator of the traditional family. He intentionally created two human beings of opposite genders (Adam and Eve) to join in a marriage union, to reproduce, multiply and fill the earth. It is from this union that children are born into the family where love and care are provided to all family members.

Another form of family; single parenting, challenged the traditional family due to different circumstances. The death of husband or wife and institutionalized divorce are the two main challenges to the traditional family, and caused Lot, Zibiah, king Joash's mother and Hephzibah king Manasseh's mother, Hosea, the Zarephath widow and others to live as single parents in the Old Testament. The New Testament also mentions the widow of Nain, Christ mentioned the widow who gave all she had at the temple, the Early Church provided widows with food, and James associated pure religion with caring for widows whilst Paul taught that children should care for their widowed mothers. The above evidence portrays God's care for single parents in the Bible by providing for their socio-economic and religious conditions, though the contemporary church is reluctant to practice love and care for single parents.

Literature, the Bible and single parents' views provide practical ways to implement a Biblical Single Parent Ministry (BSPM) in the area of study. It aims to provide support for single parents and to address challenges that single parenting faces both at

home and in the church. This chapter concluded by providing practical ways to implement the BSPM.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research work undertaken, summary of the findings, the conclusions drawn, the recommendations made as an outgrowth of this study and recommendations for further study.

6. 2 Summary of findings and conclusions

The focus of the study was to determine what support and care single parents receive in the Assemblies of God Emalahleni. It also looked at what the church could do to minister to single parents in a better way.

The study commenced with the following research title: 'Ministry to reduce stress in single parents: towards a holistic strategy for the assemblies of God church in Emalahleni, Mpumalanga South Africa. It sought to answer the following research question: how can the Assemblies of God church in Emalahleni minister effectively to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress? The following subsidiary questions were then asked to solve the research problem:

- a) What is the current state within the Assemblies of God Emalahleni of single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress?
- b) What could be the shape of a ministry within the Assemblies of God Emalahleni to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress?
- c) What strategies should be implemented to assist the Assemblies of God Emalahleni to care for single parent families who are prone to experience emotional stress?

d) What biblical paradigms could the Assemblies of God Emalaheni follow to minister to single parents who are prone to experience emotional stress?

The researcher hypothesized that the Assemblies of God Emalaheni misses opportunities of ministering to single parents because of the lack of relevant support programs in the church. Church programs and preaching seem not to address single parents' emotions and needs. This has created a gap between the church and the single parents as the church has not yet designed strategies, training and programs that are appropriate.

The third, fourth and fifth chapters of the study confirmed the hypothesis.

To encourage full participation, the researcher used Appreciative Inquiry (AI), (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005:8) as the study's research methodology, because of its nature to invite people to participate in dialogues and share stories about their past and present achievements, unexplored potentials, innovations, and traditions (2008:3). Secondly, Appreciative Inquiry encourages full participation and co-operation and by its approach promotes an environment which is conducive to allowing single parents to contribute openly and positively to the study.

The researcher then planned to interview thirty-five (35) single parents from nine (9) local churches in the Assemblies of God Emalaheni. Six (6) pastors and fifteen local church leadership members of the nine (9) churches were also interviewed in separate interviews. All participants, single parents, the local church leadership and pastors finally came together in a focus group discussion to design the way forward. The researcher used demographic questionnaires (available in English and isiZulu) and open-ended questions, (available in English and isiZulu) during audio recorded interviews and focus group discussions (see Appendix 3). Three single parents, a sixty-five-year-old divorcee, a thirty-six-year-old divorcee and a forty-nine-year-old unmarried mother formed part of the study.

The study identified the following themes; single parenting is difficult, lack of ministry catering for single parents in the Assemblies of God church, lack of communication

amongst single parents, emotional stress associated with single parenting, survival strategy of single parents, the need to teach about single parenting in the church, single parents feeling uncomfortable about approaching church leadership, the leadership of single parent ministry, discrimination of and stigmatization of single parents, the use of biblical principles to minister to single parents, single parents being a threat to married women in the church, identifying single parents in the church, leadership visits to single parents' homes, and the use of tithes in the church.

6.3. Biblical single parent ministry (BSPM) and a suggestion to implement it

The study found that both Old and New Testaments concur about God's love, care and provision for single parents and their children. Spangler and Syswerda reiterate this position when they mention that God himself showed special love and care to single parents (2007:225). Incidences that portrayed care of single parents in the Bible included amongst others; provision of food for a widow with her child, enabling a widow to pay her debts, raising a widow's only son from the dead, providing food for widows and the early church encouraging single parents' children to take care of their parents. The above biblical position enabled the researcher to design a model called the Biblical Single Parent Ministry (BSPM) for the Assemblies of God Emalahleni.

The second step was to design a strategy to implement this model by suggesting that the Assemblies of God Emalahleni identify single parents and their socio-economic conditions, raise awareness about single parents and their situations in the church by training pastors, the local church leadership and congregants (excluding children) about single parenting through a single parent symposium, seminars and workshops, including single parent events in the church's year plan, address single parents' socio-economic and spiritual conditions by establishing a relief aid committee responsible for raising funds and encouraging Christians to bring clothes and food parcels to the church, use qualified church members in the area of Social

Sciences and qualified theologians within the church to assist in developing training material for training pastors on single parenting.

The local church must be encouraged to address the needs of male teenagers from single parent homes and provide them with counselling and establish a communication structure responsible for single parents' matters led by single parents.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

Given that it was not possible to cover all facets of the study on “ministry to reduce stress in single parents: towards a holistic strategy for the assemblies of God church in Emalahleni,” there is a need for further work in this area. It is suggested that further investigations be made on the following:

- 1) Since single parent numbers keep on increasing in the church, and scripture portrays care and provision for single parents, there is a need to examine why the Assemblies of God Emalahleni fails to minister to single parents?
- 2) To understand what causes the top leadership of the Assemblies of God church Emalahleni, to ignore single parent ministry.

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APPENDIX 1: APPROVAL LETTERS



ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

[BACK TO GOD]

MPUMALANGA HIGHVELD REGION

P.O. BOX 3313, WITBANK 1035
4th FLOOR - HANSA BUILDING
21 AIRWAYS Street,
WITBANK, 1035
Tel/fax 013 6509872
email: aoahighveld@telkom.net

18.01.2019

Pst. M.J. Mphogo
P. O. Box 22625
Middleburg
1050

RE: APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN WITBANK AND DISTRICT AOG.

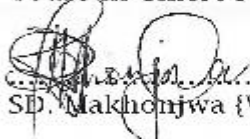
Grace and peace of our God to all who love and serve our LORD Jesus Christ with undying love, godliness faithfulness & holiness.

The Regional Council Committee hereby approving your request to conduct research in the 9 Local Churches in Witbank and District. The approval is based on the assumption that the research will be conducted along the lines you laid out in the proposal without any deviation. Should your research differ vastly from the proposed request as stated in your request, it would be necessary to make another request to the RCC for a new research proposal.

The study must comply with the ethical norms of bodies that protect the interests of the research participants. Eg. Promotion of access to information Act 2 of 2000. The report on the research findings must be made available to the RCC office without being reminded.

We anticipate your positive cooperation and understanding.

Yours in Christ's Service


SD. Makhonjwa {V. Secretary}



Ethical Clearance Statement

Name of researcher: Julius Mphego

Research programme: MTh

Student number (if applicable): 11298

Title of research: Ministry to reduce stress in single parents: towards a holistic strategy for the Assemblies of God church in Witbank, Mpumalanga South Africa.

Primary supervisor: Dr Modisa Mzondi

Supervisor contact details: modisa@sats.edu.za

Research Committee reference: REC2018_11298

Date of statement: 14 December 2018

SATS hereby states that we have received and approved the application for ethical clearance for the above research project. Parties involved in this research are requested to provide the researcher with relevant and reasonable support needed for the purposes of the project, as outlined in the official application.

For further details or correspondence, please contact the supervisor or the undersigned.

J. B. Malherbe

Johannes Malherbe (DTh)

Head of Academics
South African Theological Seminary

johannes@sats.edu.za

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www.sats.edu.za

Registered with the Department of Education as a private higher education institution under the Higher Education Act, 1997
Registration certificate number 2001/HED8/005

APPENDIX 2: ENGLISH CONSENT FORM

Statement concerning participation in a research project

Name of the study: Ministry to reduce stress in single parents: towards a holistic strategy for the Assemblies of God church in Witbank, Mpumalanga, South Africa.

I have read the information/heard the aims and objectives of the proposed study and was provided the opportunity to ask questions and given adequate time to rethink the issue. The aims and objectives of the study are sufficiently clear to me. I have not been pressurized to participate in any way. I know that sound recordings will be taken of me. I am aware that this material may be used in scientific publications which will be electronically available throughout the world. I consent to this provided that my name is not revealed.

I understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from it at any time and without providing any reasons. I know that this study has been approved by South African Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee. I am fully aware that the results of this study will be used for scientific purposes and may be published. I agree to this, provided my privacy is guaranteed.

I hereby give consent to participate in this study

Name of volunteer	Place	Signature	Date
-------------------	-------	-----------	------

Statement of the researcher

I provided verbal and written information regarding this study

I agree to answer any future questions concerning the study as best as I am able.

I will adhere to the approved protocol

Name of researcher	Place	Signature	Date
--------------------	-------	-----------	------

CONSENT FORM-isiZULU

Isitatimende esimaqondana nokuhlanganyela kuPhrojekthi yocwaningo

Igama locwaningo

Inkonzo Yokwehlisa ukuhlukumezeka kubazali abakhulisa abantwana bebodwa:

Ngizwile izinhloso nezinjongo zocwaningo oluhlongoziwe futhi nganikezwa nethuba lokubuza imibuzo nganikezwa nesikhathi esanele sokuphinde ngicabange ngodaba. Inhloso nenjongo yocwaningo kucace ngokwanele kimi. Azange ngicindezelwe ukuthi ngihlanganyele nganoma iyiphi indlela. Ngियाqonda ukuthi ukuhlanganyela kulolu Cwaningo yoHlolo ngokokuzithandela, ngokuphelele nokuthi ngingahoxa kulo noma nini ngaphandle ngogunikeza isizathu.

Ngiyazi ukuthi lolu Cwaningo ligunyazwe yi-South African Theological Seminary Ethics Committee. Nginolwazi olugcwele lokuthi imiphumela yalolu Cwaningo izosetshenziselwa izinhlozo zesayensi futhi ingashicilelwa. Ngिया kuvuma lokhu, uma nje ingasese lami liqinisekisiwe.

Lapha nginikeza imvume yokuhlanganyela kulolu cwaningo

Igama levolontiya

Isignesha

Usuku

Indawo

Isitatimende somCwaningi

Nginigezele ngolwazi ngomlomo kanye/noma olubhaliwe maqondana nalolu cwaningo. Ngiyavuma ukuphendula nanoma yimiphi imibuzo yesikhathi esizayo maqondana nalolu cwaningo ngendlela engingakhona ngayo. Ngizobambelela kusivumelwano senqubo esigunyaziwe.

Igama loMcwaaningi

Isignesha

Usuku

Indawo

APPENDIX 3: PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name:

Demographic Data			
1.	What is your gender	Male	
		Female	
	Which category includes your Age?	18-24	
		25-34	
		35-44	
		45-54	
55-65			
2.	What is your Marital status?	Separated	
		Married	
		Divorcee	
		Widowed	
		Unmarried	
	How long have you been in this marital status		
3.	What is your employment status?	Fully Employed	
		Part- time Employment	
		Unemployed	
		Self Employed	
		Schooling	
		Retired	
4.	What is your Educational Level?	Primary Education	
		High Education	
		Tertiary Education	
5.	Where do you stay?		
6.	Whom are you staying with?		
7.	How many children do you have?	Boys	
		Girls	
8.	What is the name of your local church?		

APPENDIX 4: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

ITHEBULA LEMIBUZO YOKUFUNISISA NGABAZALI ABAKHULISA ABANTWANA BEBODWA

1. Sinjani isimo sabazali abakhulisa abantwana bebodwa ebandleni lase Assemblies of God la eMalahleni and district?

Imibuzwana

- Ngicela ungitshele ukuthi bathini abazali abakhulisa abantwana bebodwa nge nkonzo yabo ebandleni lase Assemblies of God.
- Yiziphi izinhlelo noma izindlela ezibalulekile ezakha inzikonzo zabazali abakhulisa abantwana be bodwa ebandleni lakho?
- Yini into oyithanda kakhulu ngebandla la se Assemblies of God njengomzali okhulisa abantwana eyedwa?

2. Yini yezinye zezinto ezenza a bazali abakhulisa a bantwana be bodwa ukuthi bahlukamezeke emoyeni okanye izinto ezibabeka engcupheni yokuhlukumezeka emoyeni?

- Kulezo zimo zonke ozikhulumile, udlule kanjani okanye unqobe kanjani?

3. Ngokuya ngawe zikhona yini izinkonzo ezibhekene nabazali a ba khulisa abantwana bebodwa abahlukumezekile emoyeni okanye abasengcupheni yokuhlukumezeka emoyeni e ebandleni lakho na?

Imibuzwana

- Uma zikhona, Ngicela ungichazele kabanzi ngalezo Zinkonzo.
- Ngokuya ngawe, ziyamukeleka yini lezinkonzo ezibhekene nabazali a bakhulisa a bantwana bebodwa futhi abahlukumezekile emoyeni okanye abasengcupheni yokuhlukumezeka emoyeni?
- Ngokuya ngawe lezinkonzo ziya kwazi uku bhekelela izidingo za bazali a ba khulisa abantwana be bodwa na?
- Uma ngabe ebandleni lakho azikho lezinkonzo, ungathanda ukuthi kwenziweni kubazali a ba khulisa a bantwana be bodwa, futhi abahlukumezekile e emoyeni okanye a ba sengcupheni yokuhlukumezeka emoyeni.

4. Yeziphi izimiso zebhayibyeli ibandla la se Assemblies of God elingazilandela ukukhonza abazali abakhulisa abantwana bebodwa, futhi abazali abahlukumezekile emoyeni okanye abasengcupheni yokuhlukumezeka emoyeni?

Imibuzwana

- Yeziphi izimiso zebhayibyeli ibandla lakho lizenzayo kulezi ozibalile okanye ozishilo?
- Ngo kubona kwakho, esiphi izimiso ze Bible ezilungele ukukhonza a bazali a bakhulisa abantwana be bodwa labo a ba hlukumezekile okanye a ba se ngcupheni yokuhlukumezeka?
- Lisiza kanjani ulwazi lwe zimiso zeBhayibheli ukuthi amaKristu akwazi ukumelana nokuhlukumezeka e moyeni?
- AmaKristu alisebenzisa kangakanani ilwazi lwezimiso zeBhayibheli ukumelana nezimo eziletha ukuhlukumezeka emoyeni ezmpilweni zabo?

5. Yini engenziwa yibandla lase Assemblies Of God ukulungisa ubuhlelwane phakathi kwenkonzo nabazali abakhulisa abantwana bebodwa futhi aba hlukumezekile emoyeni okanye abasengcupheni yokuhlukumezeka emoyeni?

Imibuzwana

- Yiziphi izindlela zoku xhumana ngezigaba ezinga miswa?
- Ubani ofanele ahole izinhlelo zabazali abakhulisa abantwana bebodwa e Assemblies of God?
- Inkonzo ingasebenzisa ziphi izindlela ukwenza abazali abakhulisa abantwana bebodwa ukuthi bathathe ichaza ezinkonzweni zabazali a bakhulisa abantwana bebodwa na?
- Inkonzo ingasebenzisa ziphi zindlela ukwenza bonke a bazalwane bathathe ichasa ezinhlelweni zabazali abakhulisa abantwana bebodwa?

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE SUMMARY TABLE

MINISTRY TO REDUCE STRESS IN SINGLE PARENTS: TOWARDS A HOLISTIC STRATEGY FOR THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH IN WITBANK, MPUMALANGA, SOUTH AFRICA

<p>RQ 1: What is the current state of single parents within the Assemblies of God church in Witbank and district?</p>
<p><i>Probes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell me about single parents' views or perceptions about single parent's ministry in the Assemblies of God church?• What are the significant developments that shape ministry to single parents in your local church?• What is it that you like most as a single parent in the Assemblies of God church?
<p>RQ. 2. What are some of the issues that make single parents vulnerable to emotional stress?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• From the issues you mentioned, what was your coping strategy?
<p>RQ. 3. In your view does your local church have any ministry for single parents who are experiencing or vulnerable to emotional stress?</p>

Probes

- If yes, could you tell me more about those ministries?
- In your view are these ministries acceptable to single parents who are experiencing emotional stress.
- In your opinion are these ministries able to address the emotional needs of single parents.
- If there are no ministries in your local church, what would you like the church to do for single parents who are experiencing emotional stress.

RQ 4: What biblical principles could the Assemblies of God church follow to minister to single parents who are experiencing or vulnerable to emotional stress?

Probes

- Amongst the principles you mentioned, which ones is your church practicing?
- In your view what biblical principle is the most appropriate in ministering to single parents who are experiencing or vulnerable to emotional stress
- How does the knowledge of biblical principles assist Christians in coping with emotional stress?
- To what extent do Christians apply biblical principles in dealing with emotional stress in their lives?

RQ 5: What strategies should be implemented by the Assemblies of God to improve the relationship between the church and single parents who are experiencing or

vulnerable to emotional stress?

Probes

- What communication structures should be put in place?
- Who should provide the leadership for single parents' ministry in the Assemblies of God church in Witbank?
- What are some of the strategies the church should implement for single parents to participate in single parents' ministry?
- What are some of the strategies that the church should implement to encourage all Christians to participate in the single parents' ministry?

RESEARCH QUESTIONARE SAMMARY TABLE

**MINISTRY TO REDUCE STRESS IN SINGLE PARENTS: TOWARDS A HOLISTIC
STRATEGY FOR THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH IN WITBANK,
MPUMALANGA, SOUTH AFRICA**

RQ1. What strategies should be implemented by the Assemblies of God church to improve the status of single parents?

- What is it that the church can do to show care to single parents who are prone or vulnerable to experience emotional stress?

RQ.2. What steps can be followed by the church to shape ministry to single parents?

- How can a local church design services which are specific to single parents?

RQ3. How can the church use biblical principles effectively to address single parents' emotional stress?

RQ 4: What strategies should be put in place by the church to improve the relationship between the church and single parents?

- What communication structures should be put in place?
- Who should provide the leadership for single parents' ministry in the Assemblies of God church in Witbank?

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEWS RESPONSES

SECTION A: SINGLE PARENTS

Single parenting is difficult (32 participants)	The church must interact with single parents (6 participants)	Unmarried single parents do not qualify in mothers' and girls' services (8 participants)	Single parents are unable to share life experiences with Christians (26 participants)
There is no single parent ministry in the Assemblies of God church (35 participants)	There is no communication among single parents (26 participants)	There are no programs to help single parents (26 participants)	The church is supportive to single parents (1 participant)
I do not support single parent ministry (4 participants)	The church must have single parents' services (31 participants)	Single parents are not treated the same with other Christians (6 participants)	We attend at other churches (1 participant)
Survival strategy widow (19 participants)	The church does not care (22 participants)	Single parents are taught to do hand work 1	Discrimination- Divorcees are not used in the church (12 participants)
Single parents are stressed by children (23 participants)	The church must pray for single parents (7 participants)	Stigma (19 participants)	Single parents are misjudged (6 participants)

Single parents are stressed by finances (21 participants)	There is no platform for single parents (3 participants)	I survive through prayer and fellowship (17 participants)	Single parents are stressed by offerings (6 participants)
Single parents survive through prayer (21 participants)	Hand work helps me to survive (4 participants)	I was helped by my family (6 participants)	Single parents are not the same (9 participants)
In the church I have no challenge (8 participants)	Men propose single parents in the church (6 participants)	Remarrying must be encouraged in the church (1 participant)	Single parents survive by keeping themselves busy (7 participants)
Lack of spouse to help in decision making (7 participants)	Single parents survive through fellowship (22 participants)	I enrolled a course with a tertiary institution (2 participants)	I read books (1 participant)
Single parents survive through spending more time with their children (2 participants)	Single parents survive through doing hand work (15 participants)	Other single parents opt to ignore how they are treated (6 participants)	Other single parents are helped by Christians from other churches (8 participants)
Single parents attend single parent services at	Single parent children face challenges which	The church failed to use Bible principles (21)	Single parent ministry should be led by single

other churches (7 participants)	stress their parents (7 participants)	participants)	parents (22 participants)
Single parents feel uncomfortable to approach church leadership (28 participants)	Bringing up teenagers is hectic 1	Single parent children must be taken care of (4 participants)	We need service for older sisters-single parents alone (3 participants)
I received help from another pastor from another church (4 participants)	I do not want to attend with young woman (6 participants)	After burial nobody came back (9 participants)	We are left out in the mothers' services (8 participants)
We must talk in the mothers' service about stigma in single parents 1	Single parents must be prayed for that they remarry (4 participants)	Single parents are a threat to married women in the church (9 participants)	Single parents ask God to close their eyes and ears (4 participants)
Single parents must report to the mothers' committee 11 widow	Single parents do not report to leadership (2 participants)	The church must find out what single parents need (4 participants)	Single parents are hurt in mothers' services (5 participants)
Outside speakers should be invited to	We meet 1	Leading a family alone as a single	The church, mothers and single

come and address the church on single parenthood (2 participants)		parent is a challenge (92 participants)	parents must be taught about single parenthood (15 participants)
I am well taken care of (2 participants)	They must elect elderly mothers full of the Holy Spirit to lead single parent ministry (8 participants)	Pastor's wives, elderly mothers, or organizers may lead single parent ministry (13 participants)	

SECTION B: PASTORS AND LEADERSHIP

No formal program nor structure for single parent (9 churches)	Nothing is done for single parents (8 churches)	No special meetings for single parents (9 churches)	Mothers' committee is responsible for all women. (8 participants)
Twenty percent of tithes was supposed to help single parents (2 churches)	The church has never identified single parents and their status at their homes (5 participants)	Married women think single parents are here to take their husbands (5 churches)	The church must show love to single parents H
There is a need for single parent ministry (8 churches)	We specialize in ministering to single parents E	Other women do not trust single parents they think they are going to take other women's husbands (3 churches)	Pastors must treat women the same E
Our church never taught about single parents H	An outside speaker must be invited by the local to come and teach about single parents (3 churches)	The local church must have a space for single parents in its local year planner M	Pastor's wife should receive single parents complaints M
No single parents ministry (8)	Experienced elderly Christians	We lose other single parents E	Leaders need training single

churches)	should be identified, trained and take care of single parent needs (5 churches)		parenthood and the entire church must be taught (6 churches)
Leadership assumed that single parents are doing well (6 participants)	Leadership thought single parents do not have stress (2 churches)	Single parents are isolated and forgotten (6 participants)	Christians created unnecessary fear in the church (1 church)
Our church only concentrate on the five groups D couples and single parents are left out	Traditionally in our church single parents are not trusted (5 churches)	Single parent ministry needs to be in cooperated in the procedures of the church D	Leaders must be open and approachable and live beyond reproach and pastors must portray fatherhood DEP (3 churches)
Leadership never made time to visit single parents (six churches)	The local church must have a structure of trained counsellors (three churches)	The church must identify capable Christians to deal with single parents (3 churches)	It is an eye opener and we saw the gap DEMWPT
Single parents are stressed by multi roles D	Pastor and local leadership should lead single parent ministry (5	Pastors, mothers organizers and all other leaders should come	We need to pray to God for wisdom DT

	churches)	together including the higher structures and discuss this matter DEPW	
Strategy to protect single parent from moving from church to church D	We were supposed to foresee for those who are in real need E	Leadership assume that they are OK as they are working (6 churches)	If the single parent reports we do something for him or her E
Single parents are stressed by children, finance, rent etc. E	This matter must be communicated in the church E	Pastor's wife must address single parent issues E	Fear of nothing (5 churches)
Men must be taught to speak well H	In pastors preaching topics related to single parents must be treated with M	We are unable to serve single parents because of our superiors (4 churches)	The church must be taught also from the Bible (4 churches)
Teachings on Thursdays (mother's service) are the ones which instil this fear (5 churches)	We need to have a single parent workshop (three participants)	Men must have a slot in men's services about single parents H	The local churches must start little by little H
We do not practice the word with regard to single	Problems are unique depending on the locals WP	Pastors must teach the word so as to boost single	Christians should be reminded always how to

parents (5 churches)		parents (4 churches)	report their problems MP
Pastor and the leadership must sit with single parents and find out what are their challenges (2 churches)	Pastor and the and his wife to take the lead P	Christian men distance themselves from single parents (4 churches)	Too much offering R
We are happy for this initiative (3 churches)	The church must have trained Counsellors (3 churches)	The issue of protocol must be revisited. (3 churches)	Single parents must be addressed, the church must be addressed and men must be addressed (4 churches)
Money supposed to be used for single parents is used for building (1 participant)			

APPENDIX 6: VIEWS OF FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENTS

Question	Responses+	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
What strategies should be implemented to improve the status of single parents?	Implementation of single parent ministry	✓	✓	✓
	Social aid to single parents	✓	✓	✓
What steps can be followed to shape ministry to single parents?	Single parents statistics			✓
	Training pastors and leadership	✓	✓	
	Seminar for single parents		✓	
	Authorization of single parent ministry	✓		✓
How can the church use biblical principles to address single parents' stress?	Pastors preaching	✓	✓	✓
	Care for single parents	✓		✓
	Prayer for single parents		✓	✓
			✓	
What strategies should be	Removing stigma in single		✓	✓

<p>implemented to improve relationship between the church and single parents?</p>	<p>parents</p> <p>Awareness campaigns in single parenting</p> <p>Teachings in the church</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>
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