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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 General introduction, statement of the problem, and the motivation of the study

1.1.1 General introduction

A society is an organism with different social institutions which perform different functions to ensure the survival of the whole organism (Amoateng, 2007:27). A family is one of the most important social institutions and is regarded as the foundation and building block of communities. It is the source of individual development and identity among community members, irrespective of age (Amoateng & Richter, 2007:244; Kim & Woo, 2011:1051). Hence, the family is deemed "a central institution in human society" (Thornton, Axin & Xie, 2007:3; Pellander, 2014:1473) that structures the lives, activities, and relationships of women, men, and children (Pérez-Padilla, Ayala-Nunes, Hidalgo, Nunes, Lemos & Menéndez, 2015:2). According to the White Paper on Families in South Africa (2012), it is through the family that "each generation is replaced by the next; that children are born, socialised, and cared for until they attain their independence; that each generation fulfils its caring responsibilities to minors, older persons, and the sick."

The family affects, and is equally affected by, the social, economic, cultural, and political institutions (Amoateng & Richter, 2007:1). It is therefore relevant to reconsider the history of South African families from the apartheid era. The apartheid system contributed significantly to different experiences for White and Black families since it promoted White supremacy over other racial groups (Rabe, 2008:169). Such a system forced many African men to leave their families in rural areas and migrate to cities in search of jobs to provide for their families. The system did not promote favourable conditions for African families as only labourers were permitted to live in men-only hostels in the towns and cities. As a result, many African families became fragmented (Gustafsson & Worku, 2006:3; Madhavan, Townsend & Garey, 2008:649).

South Africa adopted the Western family model of family life (White Paper on Families in South Africa (2012) that promotes the nuclear family which consists of a husband, his wife, and their children. This type of family is regarded as ideal and has thus

become the template against which any other family formation is judged (Morgan, 2011:36; Parke, 2013:1). Dominant cultural norms seem to be the yardstick against which normality is defined as it was the case with the Western norms which are often used to determine what is normal for Africans (McGoldrick & Ashton, 2012:251). However, this Western perspective ignored existing extended families among Africans who were concentrated in rural areas. As a culturally diverse society, different family formations exist in South Africa. For example, traditionally, Africans prefer to live in extended households (Amoateng, Heaton & Kalule-Sabiti, 2007:45). Unfortunately, the African family was portrayed as "an indication of pathology" since it was perceived as a deviation from Western norms (Amoateng & Richter, 2007:33). The apartheid system made it impossible for extended families to exist in townships as this was against the by-laws of the municipalities. Municipal officials consistently monitored the number of family members per household, and the movements of visitors in those localities. In terms of section 40(1) of the Constitution of The Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996, the government constitutes distinctive, interdependent, and interrelated spheres, namely the national, provincial, and local spheres. Section 151 of the Constitution provides for the existence of a municipality under the local sphere of government. As the sphere of government which is closest to the people, the main responsibilities of municipalities are to provide basic and essential household services such as water, electricity, sanitation, refuse removal, and local roads.

Family structures and relationships have changed significantly over the years (Vorster, 2008:463; Kasearu, 2010:3; Kefalas, Furstenberg, Carr & Napolitano, 2011:848). These structural changes can be described as follows: "The world in which families exist today is one of economic globalisation. It is a world of religious, racial and economic violence...of the Internet and CNN, of mass communication, of migration – rural to urban and nation to nation, both voluntary and involuntary...a world of people living in villages and country sides are affected by urban and industrial technology" (Adams, 2004:1076). However, as a social construct (Jago, 2011:207; White Paper on Families in South Africa, 2012:11; Atkinson, 2014:226), the meaning and structure of the family remain fluid (Zito, 2015:301). Some authors are of the view that its definition, meaning, and role in society must always be specific in terms of culture, time, and context (Nill & Shultz, 2010:375).

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Although there is an ongoing debate on the changes in family systems, consensus on the causal factors is yet to be reached (Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012:47). Researchers have offered a wide range of explanations (Bianchi, 2014:40), and the causal factors presented here are by no means exhaustive.

Table 1.1: Causal factors towards changes in family systems

Causal factors	Authors
• Urbanisation led to an exodus of people from villages, and some ended up cohabiting in towns and cities either as a matter of choice or for financial convenience.	Adams (2004:1076)
• The increase in women's economic independence seems to have made marriage less desirable, and some therefore opted for cohabitation. Women's education and increased financial independence seem to be responsible for some of these women shunning marriage or searching for a suitable partner. • Unfavourable and/or uncertain economic circumstances compel men to postpone marriage and opt for cohabitation. • The rise in individualism contributed to a shift in norms characterised by an increasing tolerance for non-traditional family formation such as cohabitation.	Williams, Kabamalan & Ogena (2007:1245)
• Cohabitation moved "from being infrequent and stigmatized to being comparatively extensive and generally accepted as a social institution."	Dey & Wasoff (2007:162)
• Secularism and the deinstitutionalisation of marriage contributed towards the prevalence of non-traditional family formation such as cohabitation.	Ojeda (2011:441)
• Marriage and fertility rates have made cohabitation a lifestyle of choice. • Individualisation, transformation of intimacy, and changes in gender roles contributed towards the increase in cohabitation. • In contrast to the traditional roles as housewives, more women are participating in the labour market, thus postponing marriage and opting for cohabitation.	Ochiai (2014:211)
• The diminishing social stigma around cohabitation has resulted in cohabitation enjoying greater social support, thus leading to its prevalence.	Brown, Manning & Payne (2015:4)
• In South Africa, a variety of economic, political, structural, and ideological explanations, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, rural-urban migration and the *magadi* payment have been provided to explain the increase in cohabitation.	Moore & Govender (2013:623)

Causal factors	Authors
• In South Africa, the individualistic culture of people focusing on their needs and preferences as compared to placing the emphasis on other people also contributed to the prevalence of cohabitation.	Botha & Booysen, (2012:154)

Vorster (2008:464) raised the question whether changes in the family system should be regarded as immoral, as normal cultural patterns in a changing society, merely as an indication of changes in family life, or as a result of a crisis situation. Wallace (cited by Adams, 2004:1076) is of the opinion that, whatever the cause, changes in family systems are destructive. Nonetheless, the researcher in the current study concurs with Adams (2004:1076) that "this is an exciting time to be a student of the world families since it is through empirical research such as this that an explanation for the changing social norms, behaviour and attitudes towards partnering can be provided." It should be borne in mind that the goal of social scientists has always been to have a better understanding of how and why individuals enter into relationships (Brien, Lillard & Stern, 2006:451). These interpersonal relationships significantly impact individuals and society at large.

However, there are views that in modern times, no family change has come to the fore more dramatically and rapidly as cohabitation (Popenoe, 2009:429; Snyder & McLaughlin, 2006:564). Cohabitation has transformed from a rare and socially stigmatised behaviour or even illegal practice (Dey & Wasoff, 2007:162; Popenoe, 2009:429) to a normative part of people's existence (Avellar & Smock, 2005:315; Manning & Smock, 2005:989). It has become a permanent construct of family formation (Fomby & Estacion, 2011:46). However, many negative connotations, such as an inferior social arrangement (Lawler, 2004:627), deviant behaviour (Williams et.al., 2007:1244), deviant arrangement (Dey & Wasoff, 2007:159), and living in sin (Lichter & Qian, 2008:861) are synonymous with cohabitation. Even in local indigenous languages, terms with negative connotations such as *masihlalisane* (let us stay together), *vat-en-sit* (a man takes a woman and lives with her), *ukukipita* (literally translated as, to keep it) and *concubine* or *concubinage* are associated with cohabitation (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:287). These terms depict communities' lack of social acceptance of cohabitation (Manning, Cohen & Smock, 2011:122). For example, the Zulus in South Africa regard cohabitation as wrong and unacceptable

(Posel & Rudwick, 2014:287). However, cohabitees no longer rely on society to establish roles but decide independently what it means to be a couple (Sperry, Carlson & Peluso, 2006:4; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2011:118). According to Martigani (2011:567), "what cohabitees think, mean, hope, plan a couple to be, will ultimately be a couple."

Although in Western countries cohabitation was traditionally limited to the marginal sections of society such as the older generations who were previously married (Murphy, 2000:43), widows who did not want to lose their pensions (Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007:520), the poor who could not afford a wedding, or a small group of intellectuals who viewed marriage as a bourgeois institution (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009:135), that picture has changed as cohabitation has increased in all social groupings in countries such as South Africa (Mokomane, 2005:63). The emerging picture of the average cohabitee points to someone who is young, with a low education and income, who values egalitarian gender roles and liberal values, and has no religious affiliation (Jamison & Ganong, 2010:536; James & Daly, 2012:396; Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012:47). However, during fieldwork, the researcher observed that cohabitation is prevalent among young adults from the ages 25 to 34, irrespective of their educational and financial backgrounds. This developmental phase constitutes early adulthood (Schoen, Landale, Daniels & Cheng, 2009:386) that affords young people an opportunity for identity exploration and decision making about family formations, careers, and studies (Shulman & Connolly, 2013:31).

For many young adults, cohabitation is an ideal process which allows them to explore intimate relationships and initial assessments of compatibility with their cohabiting partners (Manning et al., 2011:119; Willoughby, Carroll & Busby, 2011:399). It further affords cohabitees more personal autonomy (González & Treviño, 2010:446; Ganong, Jamison & Chapman, 2015:4). However, in some instances, a wide range of pragmatic circumstances may prompt individuals to enter into cohabitation (Carmichael & Whittaker, 2007:209; Cross-Barnet & Cherlin, 2011:634) such as financial necessity (Hardie & Lucas, 2010:1143), a practical response to allow co-parenting (Tach & Edin, 2011:85), and a need to spend more time together and test the relationship (Jago, 2011:207). It has been observed that some cohabitees slide into cohabitation without any deliberate process (Shulman, Scharf, Livne & Barr, 2013:461; Reid & Golub,

2015:1235). Nonetheless, given its inherent heterogeneous nature and the complexity of motivations to cohabit, it may be difficult to create concise and exclusive categories (Huang, Smock, Manning & Bergstrom-Lynch, 2011:899; Awosan, Sandberg & Hall, 2011:317).

The increase in cohabitation raises many notable concerns about the nature of family life (Voyce, 2008:17) among which is a threat which diminishes the symbolic significance of family life (Lichter & Qian, 2008:861; Baker & Elizabeth, 2014:394). According to Dey and Wasoff (2007:159), cohabitation embodies a "new family practice deliberately framed against traditional normative structures of family life." It challenges the legal and social basis of the family structure which is largely defined by marriage (Tavares & Aassve, 2013:1601; Smith, 2014:5; Hatch, 2015:2). Some societies do not accord cohabitation any thought, but are determined to protect only traditional notions of the family depicted by marriage (Chinwuba, 2010:625). In addition, some scholars regard the increase in cohabitation as one of the driving forces behind the decline of the family as defined by marriage (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009:135).

As one of the factors attributed to changes in the family structure, cohabitation is perceived by others as replacing marriage, a factor considered of major societal concern, considering that marriage typically brings with it many benefits for those involved (Hewitt, Baxter & Baxter, 2011:44). For example, Popenoe (2009:430) posits that married people tend to be happier, wealthier, and live longer. This assertion is debatable considering the escalating number of divorces, some of which can be acrimonious.

Notwithstanding variation in traditions, customs, and norms the institution of marriage has always played a central role in shaping the family in South African society (Kalule-Sabiti, Palamuleni, Makiwane & Amoateng, 2007:89). Marriage is regarded by many as an important family event since it normatively marks the inception of the family formation process. Siqwana-Ndulo (1998:410) maintains that an African marriage is the foundation of a family, and has always been at the core of a unique and complex social organisation underpinned by the value systems unique to African societies.

Within a marriage there is a well-defined code of behaviour for everyone, their responsibilities and obligations.

However, it is widely acknowledged that marriage has retreated in its centrality and relevance as the first step in family formation (Avellar & Smock, 2005:316; Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013:425). Marriage has also lost its authority as the only socially acceptable option available to couples (Kefalas et al., 2011:846). One way to determine the weakening of marriage and its changes in meaning is to look more closely at the progression of cohabitation over time (Le Bourdais & Lepierrre-Adamcyk, 2004:929; Manning et al., 2011:117). More couples are increasingly opting for cohabitation (Gustafsson & Worku, 2006:02; Furstenberg, 2014:13). For instance, almost 1.2 million individuals were reported in the 1996 census as living with a partner in a cohabiting relationship, and that number rose to 2.4 million in 2001 (White Paper on Families in South Africa, 2012). The 2011 South African Census has also recorded an increase in individuals who reported to be living together (see Table 1.2). The census confirmed that the socially liberal environment of cities (Gauteng Province and Western Cape Province) is more conducive to cohabitation given the high number of people who are in cohabiting relationships. Conversely, there are lower numbers of people in cohabiting relationships in rural environments (Limpopo, North West & Mpumalanga Provinces) (Williams et al., 2007:1245). Therefore, cohabitation seems to be more prevalent in urban areas where it is easy for men to persuade women to accept suggestions to live with them without [1] *magadi* being paid to the woman's family (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:284).

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[1] In South Africa, bride price is referred to as *magadi* or *mahadi* in the Sesotho languages, and *ilobola* in the Nguni languages (Bogopa, 2010:2). In other African countries such as Zimbabwe, the payment of *lobola* is referred to as *roora* among the Shona people (Mawere & Mawere, 2010:224). Traditionally, the payment of *lobola* transferred the custody of the children and of the woman's childbearing capacity to the family of the man whom she married (Moeno, 2007:44). The equivalent of magadi is also mentioned in the Bible (Exodus 22, verses 16-17). These verses recounted the laws of God to the Children of Israel which state that if a man commits fornication with a virgin he would be required to marry the girl and pay the girl's father a bride price. Therefore, *magadi* is not only an African tradition but a worldwide practice albeit in different contexts.

Table 1.2: Census 2011 – marital status: Statistics South Africa (2011)

Province	Married	Living together like married partners (cohabitation)
Eastern Cape	1394078	234091
Free State	629631	219599
Gauteng	3254970	1205002
KwaZulu-Natal	1925927	549654
Limpopo	1058047	313551
Mpumalanga	764968	325617
North West	741889	284469
Northern Cape	247083	91248
Western Cape	1767230	384452
South Africa	**11783822**	**3607684**

In an attempt to explain the rise of cohabitation, some authors posed two broad questions as to whether uncertain economic circumstances force couples to postpone or forego marriage, or whether the compositional shifts in the population make it difficult for some people to find suitable marriage partners, and thus resort to put to the test marriage with a less desirable partner (Williams et al*., 2007:1245). The answer to these broad questions is provided by Snyder and McLaughlin's (2006:562) argument that cohabitation is a strategy to share household expenses or lower out-of-pocket costs, and such an arrangement can occur with or without the expectation of marriage. According to Kalule-Sabiti et al. *(*2007:90), what they term "commercialisation of *magadi*" in South Africa has forced many young couples to cohabit rather than marry, as they cannot afford to pay exorbitant *magadi* in order to be married formally. The shift in societal norms and individual opinions are often an explanation for the rise in cohabitation since it is associated with less conservative and less traditional attitudes and values (Gold, 2012:316; Chaney, 2011:515; Sprecher & Hatfield, 2015:03). Notably, cohabitation has ceased to constitute deviant behaviour and has gained a new meaning, especially for the new generation (Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007:528).

Although considerable research has been devoted to cohabitation, less attention has been paid to the formation process of cohabitation at the individual level (Voyce, 2008:17; Kasearu, 2010:3). Issues and analysis on cohabitation often centre on property distribution in the event of a break-up of the relationship (Chinwuba,

2010:624). Furthermore, there seems to be a "dearth of discussion on the intrinsic nature of cohabitation, centering on the very essence of being, the integrity of the parties and their dignity as humans" (Chinwuba, 2010:624).

Extensive literature review on previous studies revealed that the focus was more on the background of the relationship, relationship quality, personal vulnerabilities, and commitment (Stanley, Rhoades & Markman, 2006:501; Mawere & Mawere, 2010:224). Less is known about the motivation and meaning underlying cohabitating relationships (Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2009:233; Huang et al., 2011:877). Limited research has examined individuals' own reasons for cohabiting and how those reasons may be related to how they describe their relationships. Hence, this study was conducted. Given the prevalence of cohabitation, it has become increasingly important to explore the same empirical questions that are often asked about marriage (Avellar & Smock, 2005:315). Most of the findings on cohabitation are largely drawn from quantitative studies (Huang et al., 2011:877) thus calling for a need to "get behind the numbers" with qualitative research through the use of in-depth interviews (Bianchi, 2014:39). Qualitative research often provides explanations of behaviour that is not easily understood through quantitative methods (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:229).

Limited qualitative studies on cohabitation are also evident in South Africa, despite the general belief that there is an increasing trend of this phenomenon (Mashau, 2011:02; White Paper on Families in South Africa, 2012). One prominent reason for this dearth of qualitative literature arises from the difficulties associated with collecting and interpreting appropriate data due to the fact that cohabitation is likely to be interpreted differently by different researchers (Kalule-Sabiti et al., 2007:91). Marriage in South Africa among Africans is a process involving a series of negotiations over several months or years; it is not a single event and this may result in differing perceptions as to when the couple got married. Among many ethnic groups, the first payment is made when the man's family visits the woman's family to introduce themselves and to indicate their son's intention to ask for their daughter's hand in marriage.

Cohabitation in South Africa is likely to be underreported considering that couples may not admit that they are cohabiting and may describe themselves as married due to the perceived negative attitude of this unofficial status (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:287).

People who are perceived to deviate from social norms are often subjected to a variety of social sanctions (Eliason, Mortimer & Vuolo, 2015: 207) such as withdrawal of social and psychological support (Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015:607; Wiegers & Chunn, 2015:43). It has also been observed that cohabitees often elect to hide their relationship from their parents and other family members for fear of being criticised or reprimanded.

1.1.2 Statement of the problem

The problem statement encompasses the overall intention of the study that needs to be clearly articulated to the reader (Creswell, 2016:94). Therefore, the problem statement should provide an explicit account and justification of the reason for the study. It should illustrate and rationalise how the study will contribute to the general discipline of social science (Moule & Goodman, 2014:127; Schmidt & Brown, 2015:78).

Literature review revealed that cohabitation is seldom viewed as a relationship in its own right. Most studies have investigated cohabitation from the perspective of marriage. Only a few researchers have investigated the concept of cohabitation directly. Not all cohabiting relationships result in marriage; therefore, accounts gathered from sources that used the marriage perspective to understand cohabitation have simply provided a partial view (Allan & Crow, 2001:64). Although cohabitation was largely a stepping stone to marriage for earlier generations, for many people cohabitation and marriage are not connected since marital intentions are not universal among cohabitees (Qu, 2003:36). This implies that marriage should not be used as a point of reference to define and understand cohabitation. Defining cohabitation through a marriage lens limits the opportunity to explain the distinction between marriage and cohabitation, and the actual functions that these relationships perform in society (Soons & Kalmijn, 2009:1141; Kasearu, 2010:4).

The assumed comparison between cohabitation and marriage may have misled researchers who have persisted in seeing cohabitation as "short-term marriage" or "a stage of courtship" (Thatcher, 2002:12). Most of the studies on family violence fail to analyse cohabiting relationships separately from marital unions is viewed as a major gap in the understanding of violence against women (Brownridge & Halli, 2000:565).

Kasearu (2010:4) also states that comparing cohabitees and married individuals limits the opportunity to explain whether the distinctions between individuals are based on their socio-demographical and psychological characteristics, or originate from the experiences accumulated in specific types of living together. Therefore, framing the debate between marriage and cohabitation as a unified concept diverts attention from the multitude of cohabiting experiences (Trask & Raeann, 2007:86). Contrary to the assumption that marriage is universal and that all adults would eventually marry (Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007:520; Ellison, Wolfinger & Ramos-Wada, 2012:300), some chose cohabitation as an alternative to marriage and not as a prelude or trial marriage. Hence, it is important to understand cohabitation independently because of its importance as part of a developmental trajectory (Braithwaite, Delevi & Fincham, 2010:2).

Literature search on cohabitation in South Africa reveals that there is a dearth of empirical studies on cohabitation as a family formation. Instead, a literature search produced studies that focused on other factors that influence cohabitation as a family formation such as its comparison to marriage, cultural issues, and legal matters. Some of the articles are: *Cohabitation and premarital sex among Christian youth in South Africa today: A missional reflection*, by Mashau (2011); *Is marriage a dying institution in South Africa? Exploring changes in marriage in the context of ilobolo payments,* by Posel, Rudwick & Casale (2011); *The relationship between marital status and life satisfaction among South African adults,* by Botha and Booysen (2013); *The Gold of One's Ring is Not Far More Precious than the Gold of One's Heart: Reported Life Satisfaction Among Married and Cohabitating South African Adults,* by Botha and Booysen (2013); *The ending of a customary marriage. What happens to the ilobolo?,* by Nkosi (2013); *Marriage and Cohabitation in South Africa: An Enriching Explanation?,* by Moore and Govender (2013); *Marriage, land and custom: what's law got to do with it,* by Claassens and Smythe (2013); and *The practical guidelines on the impact of magadi [bride price] on the young Basotho couples prior to marriage*, by Semenya (2014).

Based on the discussion, the problem statement for this study focuses on the place of cohabitation in the context of changing family patterns and in social work knowledge and intervention.

1.1.3 Motivation for the study

Inspiration for this research came from various sources such as clinical experience (practice) and curiosity (Moule & Goodman, 2014:81). Two important reasons prompted the researcher to undertake this study.

First, the researcher interacted with cohabiting couples and realised the difficulties in addressing their challenges. According to Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2009a:101), cohabitation is primarily a moral issue and practitioners may consciously or unconsciously bring their own culture into therapy. Furthermore, social workers, based on their values, are often confronted with a dilemma whether to dissuade people from cohabiting or not. During service delivery to cohabiting couples, the researcher found himself tempted to express his personal views about cohabitation. As a social worker in healthcare, the researcher also experienced challenges in cases where a cohabiting partner could not, for example, provide consent for a major operation to be performed on his or her partner. Furthermore, the researcher could not discuss the patient's medical condition with the partner. In the event of the patient's death, the researcher could not notify the surviving partner but had to locate and notify the blood relatives.

Second, the dearth of social work literature on intervention when rendering services to cohabiting couples motivated the researcher to embark on this study. According to Rhoades et al. (2009a:96), there is a lack of empirical knowledge about the risks of cohabitation for couples who sought assistance from social workers due to the fact that cohabitation has been historically studied mainly by researchers in sociology and demography, professions typically not occupied with intervention. The rise in the prevalence of cohabitation has implications for practitioners who work with couples or individuals and their relationship issues (Rhoades et al., 2009a:109). In addition, Murrow and Shi (2010:409) advise practitioners that they will need to continually enhance their understanding of how cohabitation trends and dynamics relating to the decision whether or not to cohabit, are evolving. Whilst cohabitees who are dating and

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married couples are likely to exhibit similar clinical issues such as disputes with their in-laws, sexual adjustment, and sharing responsibilities (Soons & Kalmijn, 2009:1141), there are unique issues such as a lack of clarity surrounding cohabitation decision making that may become significant in couple therapy (Murrow & Shi, 2010:409).

First, there is a view that cohabiting couples are different from married couples in a number of ways, the most significant difference being commitment to the relationship (Rhoades et al*.,* 2009a:107). Commitment is important for relationship quality, security, and the continuance of a safe and healthy relationship (Stanley et al., 2006:503). However, cohabitation may represent an ambiguous view of commitment that is likely to undermine the ability of some couples to develop a clear and mutual understanding about the nature of their relationships (Stanley et al., 2006:503).

Second, cohabiting couples have been found to lack the ability to make decisions through effective communication and mutual understanding, which can be a source of conflict (Lichter & Qian, 2008:863; Benjamin & Haze, 2011:790; Boisvert, Wright, Tremblay & McDuff, 2011:362). Thus, when difficulties arise, these couples may have difficulty resolving issues, and opt for termination of the relationship as the only viable solution (Hohmann-Marriot, 2006:1017; Vennum, Lindstrom, Monk & Adams, 2014:413). Many, if not most, couples in cohabiting relationships will also be confronted with the problem of not sharing the same expectations for their relationship (Hohmann-Marriot, 2006:1016). This is attributed to the fact that cohabitation reflects a variety of meanings for partners (Qu, 2003:38). Shared beliefs are created when partners co-construct reality within their relationship (Hohmann-Marriot, 2006:1016).

Third, Gold (2012:316) asserts that another potential source of conflict in cohabiting relationships emanates from the fact that cohabitation is characterised by ambiguity and that there is no commonly used term to refer to cohabiting partners. For example, partners can refer to each other as roommates or simply not introduce each other to other people, which could lead to an awkward situation.

Social workers should therefore assist cohabiting couples to co-create a shared belief system about their relationship. Communication is important in helping couples to co-

construct the meaning of cohabitation together (Nuru & Wang, 2014:146). This is crucial considering the general characteristic of cohabitation, namely that it lacks guidelines on how cohabiting relationship should operate (Awosan et al., 2011:316; Fomby & Estacion, 2011:47). Hence, this study was conducted to explore and describe cohabitation from the participants' experiences in order to proffer lessons learned and intervention strategies for social workers.

1.2 Research question

A qualitative inquiry calls for the formulation of the research questions from the outset, and not to rely on hypotheses (Boeije, 2010:24; Creswell, 2016:34). The research question is a concise and interrogative statement that the researcher seeks to answer (Grove, Burns & Gray, 2013:708). It is derived from the problem statement (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:78), and it should clearly link to the goal of the study (Maxwell, 2013:4). A well-formulated research question becomes the *guiding star* that helps the researcher navigate through the process (David & Sutton, 2011:12). Certain authors maintain that good qualitative research is dependent on a good question (Yin, 2011:67; Singh, 2015:267). Creswell (2016:97) suggests that the research question should preferably begin with words such as *how* or *what* but never with *why*, which is relevant in quantitative cause-and-effect discourse. Furthermore, where applicable, the research question should identify the place where the study will be conducted.

In formulating the research question to guide the process, the researcher considered the following criteria for assessing research questions:
- **Specificity:** A good research question should be more concise and describe more clearly issues the study intends to gather information about. Specificity is achieved by maximising concreteness and minimising ambiguity, thus providing greater clarity and precision (Hennik, Hutter & Bailey, 2011:33). Specificity is achieved by subdividing the research question into five to seven sub-questions (Creswell, 2016:93). However, this specificity should not be pursued at the expense of important information in its pursuit of precision (Hennik et al. 2011:33).

- **Relevancy:** The research question should be relevant to the problem area, both theoretically and practically. Theoretical relevancy is achieved if there are gaps or contradictions in current knowledge and theory that can be dispelled by pursuing them. The research questions are therefore practically relevant if answering them will contribute to more effective social policy or treatment interventions (O'Brien & DeSisto, 2013:83).

- **Researchability:** Researchability is determined by asking whether or not the research question can be answered through gathering and analysing data. To measure the researchability of a research question is to determine whether the question is clear within an implied approach, and includes variables of interest within the specific population (O'Brien & DeSisto, 2013:83).

- **Feasibility:** This criterion relates to demands on time and resources (O'Brien & DeSisto, 2013:83). There should be a clear assessment of the required resources to answer the research question.

- **Ethical acceptability:** There should be a clear assessment of risks to the study's participants against possible benefits that would be derived from the study, and all questions should be related to the research goal(s) and objectives. This should be shared and discussed with the participants when obtaining their informed consent to take part in the study (Creswell, 2016:94).

In qualitative research, it is advisable for the researcher to ask one or two grand-tour (overarching) questions (Orme & Shemmings, 2010:69). Central to this study were three interrelated questions:

- From the perspectives of the cohabitees, what is the place of cohabitation in the context of changing family practices?

- What are the participants' experiences in cohabiting relationships in relation to the benefits, challenges, and mechanisms to address these challenges?

- Based on the cohabitees' perceptions and experiences, what are the lessons for social work intervention?

1.3 Goal and objectives

Once the research question is has been decided upon, the researcher should specify the research goal and objectives (Moule & Goodman, 2014:92). The research goal describes the overall intention of the study, which is often characterised by words such as *examine*, *describe*, and *explore* (Moule & Goodman, 2014:80). Therefore, the main purpose of the research goal is to guide decisions regarding the research design to ensure that the study is worth pursuing (Maxwell, 2013:4). Thomas and Hodges (2010:39) define the goal as "a statement indicating the general aim or purpose of a research project". Similarly, Maxwell (2013:23) posits that the research goal should broadly denote the researcher's desires and purpose for undertaking the study as well as its envisaged accomplishments. Thus, the goals of this study are threefold: (i) develop an in-depth understanding of the place of cohabitation in the context of the changing family patterns and lessons for social work intervention; (ii) to gain insight into the participants' experiences in cohabiting relationships in relation to the benefits, challenges, and mechanisms to address any challenges; and (iii) to proffer lessons for social work intervention based on the participants' perspectives.

The objectives are the steps to be taken, one by one, realistically at grassroots level, within a certain time span in order to attain the overall aim of the study (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2008:104). The research objectives specify how the aim will be achieved (Moule & Goodman, 2014:80). They emanate from a breakdown of the research goal into manageable steps to be followed (Babbie, 2007:114). Objectives therefore inform the researcher exactly what needs to be done in practical terms.

In order to achieve the stated goal, the researcher formulated the following objectives:
- To obtain a sample of individuals in cohabiting relationships in Gauteng Province.
- To conduct semi-structured interviews with cohabitees to explore the place of cohabitation in family systems.
- To sift, sort, and analyse the data obtained in accordance with the eight steps of qualitative data analysis constructed by Tesch (in Creswell, 2003:186).

- To describe the place of cohabitation in family systems from the perspective of cohabitees.
- To describe lessons for social work intervention based on the participants' perspectives on the place of cohabitation in the family systems.
- To analyse and interpret the data, and conduct literature control in order to verify the data.
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations about the place of cohabitation in family systems from the perspective of cohabitees.
- To proffer lessons for social work intervention.

1.4 Research approach

A qualitative study was undertaken using the explorative, descriptive, and contextual design as a strategy to accomplish the research goal. According to Maxwell (2013:26), the justification for choosing a qualitative study should be compatible with the research goal and research question as well the research design. A detailed explanation of the application of the research method and justification of its selection are presented in chapter 2 of this report.

1.5 The place and role of theory in a qualitative study

Qualitative research is associated with many different theoretical perspectives, and it is therefore challenging to reach consensus on what constitutes good qualitative research (Creswell, 2016:251). Moreover, this challenge also poses a dilemma for the examiners on how to assess qualitative research, which may have important long-term career implications for the researcher (Cassel & Symon, 2011:633). The onus is therefore on qualitative researchers to demonstrate the worth and validity of their work by including additional evidence about the legitimacy of their methodology (Creswell, 2016:32).

Certain qualitative researchers feel obliged to legitimise their studies by applying highly structured forms of presentations, which may not yield independent thinking (Hibbert, Sillince, Diefenbach & Cunliffe, 2014:281). Crucial to this challenge is the

relevance, relationship, purpose, role, and place of[2] theory in a qualitative study (Anfara & Mertz, 2006:267). Conventionally, most researchers were in favour of adopting a strong, well-defined theoretical framework to guide any empirical study, regardless of the research approach (Wu & Volker, 2009:2722; Yin, 2011:166; Green, 2014:35). Such decision was premised on two assumptions: first, that the theory plays an important role in research to provide a framework for establishing the validity and significance of the study (Creswell, 2016:58); second, that the "application of theory is necessary to advance knowledge from what is already known towards the next steps to be taken" (Angeles, Dolovich, Kaczorowski & Thabane, 2014:100). Moreover, theory is the "basis on which a researcher decides which facets of reality to investigate, which methodology to employ, and how to interpret the empirical data" (Bendassolli, 2014:164). Therefore, there is considerable risk of "reinventing the wheel" if researchers ignore existing theories (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010: 191).

An opposing view on the role of qualitative study questions is whether theory limits the emergent characteristics of qualitative research by interfering with discovering and anticipating findings (Wu & Volker, 2009:2722). Similarly, authors assert that although the review of literature prior to conducting the study may inform a new study, it may also inadvertently hinder the emergence of phenomena by creating an unwanted lens, which may lessen the value of conducting a qualitative study (Yin, 2011:61; MacFarlane & O'Reilly-de Brún, 2012:607; Bendassolli, 2014:164). Any review of literature prior to conducting the study will "contaminate, constrain, inhibit, stifle, or impede the researcher's analysis of codes emergent from the data" (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006:30). The aim is to enter the field of research with no preconceived ideas (Giske & Artinia, 2007:276; Bainbridge, Whiteside & McCalman, 2013:276). Hence, authors caution that qualitative researchers should avoid reading pertinent or

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[2] The terms *conceptual framework* and *theoretical framework* are often used interchangeably. Green (2014:34) suggests that the concept *theoretical framework* is applicable when the study is underpinned by one theory, whereas the term *conceptual framework* draws on concepts from various theories and findings to guide research. Moreover, some authors use the term *conceptual framework* to refer to theory (Wu & Volker, 2009:2720). However, in the context of this study, the term *theory* broadly denotes the pertinent scholarly knowledge on the phenomena.

comprehensive literature until data collection has been completed (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010:188; Yin, 2011:62).

However, despite an array of arguments that seek to provide logical guidelines for the use of theory in qualitative studies, the process of building a conceptual framework in qualitative studies is not straightforward since confusion exists on how to define and apply theory in a practical sense within a qualitative study (Anfara & Mertz, 2006:267; Wu & Volker, 2009:2721; Jabareen, 2009:50). Unfortunately, a novice qualitative researcher may mistakenly think that this principle of emergent theory means that there is no need for critical review of literature (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010:191). Nonetheless, there is no single correct way of including theory in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2016:59). Instead, the application of theory in a qualitative study should be adopted in a flexible and creative manner and at different stages of the research procesowens (Giske & Artinian, 2007:78; Wu & Volker, 2009:2722; Creswell, 2016:59). It is suggested that reference to theory in a qualitative study should be made at the beginning of the study to identify gaps in knowledge and to frame the research problem as well as at the end of the study by comparing the findings with others (Koch, Niesz & McCarthy, 2014:133; Creswell, 2016:59).

For the purpose of this study, extensive literature was reviewed during the proposal stage to provide an introduction and a general overview of the phenomenon. This process also facilitated the identification of existing gaps. The theories used to understand cohabitation are presented in chapter 2 of this report. Additionally, some of these theories are incorporated in the presentation and interpretation of the research findings in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

1.6 Ethical considerations

The concept *ethics* is defined as moral philosophy, including the study of morality and the norms and standards of behaviour that are used by people in order to do what is right (McLaughlin, 2007:46). Research ethical guidelines are meant to prevent any possible exploitation of the participants (Morrel, Epstein & Moletsane, 2012:616). They further present the researcher with an opportunity to think about the research process in detail, and raise awareness on the details of the research process (Matthews &

Ross, 2010:72). The relationship that develops between the researcher and the participants brings with it ethical demands, especially if it shares features of a therapeutic relationship in social work.

Research of good quality should reflect clear ethical decisions that inform its design and conduct (Duke & Bennett, 2010:111). Ethics in qualitative research has implications for the formulation of the research topic, research question, and the presentation of the research findings (Neale, 2013:6). Researchers should therefore be able to explain how they will address the ethical considerations within a qualitative study (Franklin, Rowland, Fox & Nicolson, 2012:1727).

Prior to conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants, the research proposal was presented to the University of South Africa (UNISA) Social Work Departmental Research and Ethics Committee (DR&EC) for approval. The committee comprises independent experts whose responsibility it is to help ensure that the rights and welfare of potential participants are protected, and that the study will be carried out in an ethical manner. According to Damianakis and Woodford (2012:709), these institutional research bodies were created to observe ethical protocols that serve to address the risks and benefits for participants. However, some authors have expressed concern about the expertise on qualitative research among members of the institutional research bodies, either due to different training or an inability to conceptualise qualitative research (Creswell, 2016:32; Opsal, Wolgemuth, Cross, Kaanta, Dickmann, Colomer & Erdil-Moody, 2016:1137). Highly qualified and experienced individuals within the Social Work DR & EC at UNISA have exceptional insight into the qualitative research process.

Participants were recruited through so-called gatekeepers such as pastors and social workers who service a particular area. This, however, poses ethical challenges. Within the research context, gatekeeping refers to the process where a decision to participate in a study is made on behalf of the potential participant (Duke & Bennet, 2010:118). In view of the understanding that the involvement of gatekeepers may restrict individuals in making their own autonomous decisions regarding their participation in the study, the researcher ensured that participants gave informed, written consent, without any undue pressure.

During the process of the study, the researcher observed the following ethical considerations: obtaining informed consent, assuring confidentiality and anonymity, protecting participants from harm, and strict management of information. Ethical issues in qualitative research cannot be completely predicted in advance (Haahr, Norlyk & Hall, 2014:8). Hence, the researcher did not only address ethical issues at the beginning of the research process but also during the interviews as participants raised their concerns.

1.6.1 Informed consent

Informed consent implies that all participants should be fully informed about a research project before they agree to take part (Holland & Rees, 2010:98). Participants should know what they are consenting to (Matthews & Ross, 2010:73) and should take part voluntarily without any threat or undue pressure (Lapan, Quataroli & Riemer, 2012:32). Therefore, obtaining consent from the participants in a research project is not merely the signing of a consent form.

All the participants were provided with adequate information about the purpose of the study, what participation entails, who makes up the research team, what questions they will be asked, whether their identities or comments attributed to them will be identified in the report, how the research findings will be disseminated, their right to exit the study at any time, and the right to make a complaint (McLaughlin, 2007:58, Creswell, 2016:142). After providing this information, participants were requested to write their names and append their signatures to give consent for their participation in the study (cf. Addendum A). The consent form was, where necessary, translated into the participants' indigenous languages to ensure that they understood the information provided to them.

The notion of informed consent was, however, not without its difficulties. Three participants insisted on providing verbal consent instead of the prescribed written consent, but after a detailed explanation about the importance of signed consent all the participants agreed to append their signatures. However, Lewis (cited by McLaughlin, 2007:58) cautions that the difficulty with an oral agreement is that in any dispute it will be one person's word against that of another, and thus recommended

written or audio-recorded consent (Holland & Rees, 2010:98). Eventually all the participants gave written consent to participate in the study.

1.6.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality refers to the commitment that the researcher will under no circumstances disclose information shared by the participants (McLaughlin (2007:61). In qualitative research, absolute confidentiality cannot be assured considering that the participants' excerpts are included in the research findings (Morse & Richards, 2013:1004). However, anonymity was maintained by ensuring that the contribution of comments in reports, presentation, or externally published works cannot be linked to individual participants. Anonymity means that those outside the research team will not know the identities of participants (De Vos et al., 2008:62). This includes direct input of comments that are linked to a name or specific role, and indirectly where a collection of characteristics may make it possible to identify a participant in the study.

Authors caution that anonymity can be compromised where participation is arranged through a third party, for instance an employer, or in case studies where there is structural linkage between samples (Lewis, cited by McLaughlin, 2007:61). In those situations, absolute guarantees are not practical, and research participants should be aware of this before they agree to participate. In order to protect participants by ensuring their anonymity and treating the information they had shared confidentially, the researcher substituted their real names with pseudonyms. A balance was maintained in the presentation of data in its original state whilst avoiding the risk of inadvertently revealing the participants' identities and those of others included in their personal accounts (Mero-Jaffe, 2011:243; Damianakis & Woodford, 2012:709). The participants were also made aware of the limitations of anonymity in instances where they were referred to by a third party and in instances where their stories may be known to other people (Gibson & Brown, 2009:61).

1.6.3 Protecting participants from harm

Research interviews have the potential to be intrusive and distressing to the participants (Gibson, Benson & Brand, 2012:19). It is therefore important that the researcher considers, from the outset, whether it is likely that participation may be harmful to individual participants, and if so, to put contingency measures in place to

minimise the risks (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:60). This may arise directly in studies on sensitive topics or indirectly when sensitive subjects are raised in relation to otherwise non-sensitive issues (McLaughlin, 2007:64). Possible risks of participating in a qualitative study include being identified or causing emotional distress (Opsal et al., 2016:1143). It has also been observed that researchers may expose participants to possible harm by being excessively eager to create a close relationship in order to encourage participants to share intimate experiences (Haahr et al., 2014:12).

In an attempt to protect participants from potential harm, the researcher was at all times sensitive to the participants' discomfort, and ensured that they were willing to continue. On certain occasions, it was necessary for the researcher to terminate the interviews and allow the participants to regain their composure before asking them whether they wished to continue or revisit previous answers. In anticipation of instances where the researcher may be requested to offer professional advice or counselling during the course of the research process, he identified and contracted with a competent professional who could offer appropriate support and counselling should a participant become distressed.

1.6.4 Management of information

Management of data refers to the manner in which information is stored in a way that will ensure that the integrity of participants is maintained at all times (Sutlieff & Chelin, 2010:164). A major ethical concern is to ensure that research participants' privacy is protected, and the confidentiality of identifying data is maintained (Bull, Cheah, Denny, Jao, Marsh, Merson, More, Nhan, Osrin, Tangseefa, Wassenaar & Parker, 2015:305). The researcher ensured that security of the data was protected in the following manner:

- Audio-tapes, notes, and transcripts of recordings, which are regarded as important tools in qualitative research, were locked in a cabinet that only the researcher has access to. Access to any information pertaining to the study which was stored electronically was secured with a password.
- In order to prevent any public identification of participants, their names were not written on tapes, notes, and transcripts. Lists containing the real names and

pseudonyms/numbers allocated to the participants were not stored together with tapes, notes, or transcripts of the recordings.

- No unauthorised individual was permitted to access the raw data. Access was limited to the researcher, the promoter, and an independent coder (Laybats & Tredinnick, 2016:78). Recordings and transcripts of the recordings will be erased or destroyed two years after the researcher's completion of the studies.

1.7 Clarification of key concepts

Under the subheadings discussed below, the key concepts central to this study are clarified, and the context in which the terms were applied in the study is provided.

1.7.1 Cohabitation

A definition of cohabitation is difficult and complex (Mashau, 2011:2) due to the variety of meanings attached to it; it is therefore often misunderstood, especially when translated into different languages (Lonardo, Manning, Giordano & Longmore, 2010:791). The term is also vague and could be problematic (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013:424). For instance, it may be difficult to state with any certainty if the partners are cohabiting when they maintain separate residences but spend most of their time together.

According to Mashau (2011:6), the term *cohabitation* broadly refers to a situation in which two people, who are in a sexual relationship, live together without having gone through a ceremony of marriage. The White Paper on Families in South Africa (2012) defines cohabitation as a union in which two adults who are in an intimate relationship stay together without any contractual agreement, with or without children (White Paper on Families in South Africa, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, cohabitation refers to any intimate union between a man and woman who share the same residence without having gone through any of the marital processes as prescribed by either The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act No. 120 of 1998 or the Marriage Act No.25 of 1961.

1.7.2 Cohabitees

The terms to describe individuals who are in cohabitation are used differently. Some authors refer to such individuals as *cohabitors* (Manning & Smock, 2005; Hohmann-Marriot, 2006), *cohabitants* (Soons & Kalmijn, 2009), *cohabiting couples* (Popenoe, 2009; Rhoades et al., 2009), *cohabitees* (Mashau, 2011), and *cohabiters* (Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012). However, all the terms denote individuals who engage in cohabitation (cf. definition of cohabitation).

The term *cohabitee* was used for this study. Mashau (2011:3) used this term to describe individuals who choose to live together in an intimate relationship without having gone through a formal process of marriage (cf. the definition of marriage). Moreover, such individuals must have lived together for a minimum of 12 months prior to their participation in the study.

1.7.3 Family

The concept *family* is difficult to define and it cannot fit into any single model. It may differ in some respects from communities and countries. The ongoing debate about what constitutes a *family* in African and Western contexts is acknowledged (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998; White Paper on Families in South Africa, 2012; Amoateng & Richter, 2007), including a tendency to overstate the uniqueness of African households by comparing it with a simplified model of Western households (Rabe, 2008:167). The traditionally Western description of the ideal family is epitomised by the nuclear family comprising two married heterosexual parents and their children (Perry, 2013:182). It is therefore not possible to provide a standard definition (White Paper on Families in South Africa, 2012).

Amoateng and Richter (2007:4) broadly define a family as "a societal group which is related by blood, marriage, adoption, or affiliation with close emotional attachments to each other that endure time and go beyond a particular physical residence." The White Paper on Families in South Africa (2012) defines a family as a societal group that is related by blood (kinship), adoption, foster care, or the ties of marriage (civil, customary, or religious), civil union or cohabitation.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of a family as provided by the White Paper on Families in South Africa (2012) was adopted.

1.7.4 Marriage

The South African population is diverse with indigenous, religious as well as Westernised groups. As such marriages entered into vary from one group to another in terms of their religion and ethnicity (Puri, Shah & Tamang, 2010:1877). Certain individuals enter into a marriage which is governed by their traditional practices, notably indigenous groups. Others prefer to enter into a marriage governed by their religious beliefs, such as the Hindu and Muslim groups, and there are those who prefer the more common marriage called a civil union.

Traditionally and biblically, marriage entails a heterosexual union that brings a man and woman together so that children are born and raised in that union (Jowett, 2014:42). Such a union is an exclusive and permanent commitment that is intended to remain in existence until death (Cade, 2010:230). In South Africa, the Marriage Act No. 25 of 1961 governs the civil union between spouses, whereas the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act No. 120 of 1998 was enacted on the 15 November 2000 to give recognition to customary marriages concluded in terms of the customs and traditions observed among indigenous population groups in South Africa.

In the context of this study, marriage refers to a union between two people entered into in terms of any of the two Acts (The Marriage Act No. 25 of 1961 or The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act No. 120 of 1998).

1.7.5 Social work practice

Social work is broadly defined as an "organized activity that aims at helping to achieve a mutual adjustment of individuals and their social environment by applying social work intervention to solve, eliminate and alleviate social problems as well as helping individuals to acquire specific skills" (Megahead, 2016:2). Similarly, Anastas (2014:571) defines social work practice as a helping profession that is founded on the principles of human rights and social justice.

However, Anastas (2014:571) asserts that when discussing the influential definitions which are globally recognised is merely one way of defining the term *social work practice*. One definition of social work practice that was agreed upon by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in 2014, is as follows:

"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing."

The definition agreed upon by the IFSW and IASSW was adopted in this study. This definition is based on a strong theoretical base, and it recognises the importance of indigenous knowledge (Ornellas, Spolander & Engelbrecht, 2016:3).

1.7.6 Social work intervention

Social work intervention refers to the application of effective strategies that are based on theory and empirical evidence (Jenson, 2014:567). Although the definition of the term *effectiveness* is complex and vague, within the social work domain the term denotes the ability to ensure that the best results for the target population are achieved (Makaros & Itzhaky, 2012:565). Similarly, Megahead (2016:2) concurs that social workers should be guided by evidence when applying techniques and methods to enable individuals, groups, and communities to meet their needs.

In this study, social work intervention refers to the application of proven and authentic strategies which are based on a scientific base of social work practice to help clients improve the quality of their relationships (Brekke, 2012:455).

1.7.7 Social worker

The definition of the term *social worker* is contextual. In South Africa, a social worker legally means a person registered under Section 17 of the Social Service Professions Act No. 110 of 1978 in that the South African Council for Social Service Professions

(SACSSP) may, "on application made in the prescribed manner, register as a social worker any person who holds the prescribed qualifications and satisfies the prescribed conditions, and who satisfies the council that he is a fit and proper person to be allowed to practise the profession of social work." In practice, the term *social worker* refers to an individual who graduated from a social work programme at Bachelor's level, and who applies knowledge and skills to provide social work services to clients (Sweifach, Linzer & LaPorte, 2012:3). According to Ornellas et al. (2016:4), the IFSW (2014) broadly describes a social worker as a change agent who supports individuals to cope with difficulties and struggles they are experiencing within their environment.

In the context of this study, a social worker refers to any person who is registered as a social worker in terms of section 17 of the Social Service Professions Act No. 110 of 1978.

1.8 Structure of the research report

It should be borne in mind that unlike quantitative research where there is generally consensus on what the report should look like, there is no generic structure for a qualitative research report (Cassel & Symon, 2011:643).

The research report is divided into the following chapters:

In chapter 1, an introduction and general orientation to the research are provided with specific focus on the following: introduction and problem formulation and problem statement; the research goal and objectives of the study; the research approach and design; ethical considerations; limitations of the study; clarifications of key concepts; and the content plan of the study.

In chapter 2, the theoretical interpretations of cohabitation are presented. Eleven theories, which were used to clarify cohabitation, are presented in this chapter with particular focus on their historical backgrounds, their main features, how they were used to explain cohabitation, their benefits and shortcomings, and the researcher's impressions.

In chapter 3, a comprehensive application of the qualitative research process is presented.

In chapter 4, the research findings are presented and discussed, and thereafter literature control is applied to compare and contrast the findings with what has been written in the literature on the topic. This chapter focuses on the biographical profile of the participants; theme 1 on the description of reasons for couples to move in together and theme 2 on the participants' accounts of how their families, friends, colleagues, and wider communities learned about their cohabiting relationships, and their reactions.

In chapter 5, the research findings are presented and discussed, and thereafter literature control is applied to compare and contrast the findings. This chapter focuses on the participants' reflections on their experiences of being in cohabiting relationships.

In chapter 6, the research findings will be presented and discussed, and thereafter literature control to compare and contrast the findings will be applied. This chapter focuses on the participants' conflict management strategies and social work interventions.

In chapter 7, the lessons for social work intervention derived from the findings are provided.

Chapter 8 entails the summaries of the previous seven chapters, followed by conclusions derived from the research process and the research findings based on three themes are presented. The last section focuses on recommendations pertaining to the qualitative research process, research findings and suggestions for future studies.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter presents a brief outline of the research, a general introduction of the topic of cohabitation, and an overview of how society, family, the community, and all other

related matters and challenges around couples living together, impact cohabitation. The chapter unpacks the problem statement with a view to identifying the gap in the literature on cohabitation. The motivation of the study is also outlined, based on the experiences of the researcher working with cohabitating couples, and the difficulties experienced in intervening in cohabitating relationships. A qualitative research approach is used which underlines the importance of theory as it relates to the topic under study. Ethical considerations are considered paramount in ensuring a research study of substance and value. A brief introduction to each of the eight chapters in this study is also provided.

CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF COHABITATION

2.1 Introduction

Cohabitation is a complex phenomenon (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009:143; Tobin, 2013:281; Baker & Elizabeth, 2013:255) that has evolved over time, and conceptualised differently. For instance, in the Dutch context it is characterised as having started as an alternative way of living, which developed into a contemporary phase before marriage and finally became a strategy for moving into a union gradually (Carmichael & Whittaker, 2007:203). In South Africa, cohabitation is conceptualised as a union between two adults who are living in the same place of abode without any legal agreement (White paper of families in South Africa, 2012:3).

This chapter aims to provide relevant information on how cohabitation is conceptualised through different theories. It is inconceivable that a single theory could address all issues in order to explain a single phenomenon (Stryker, 2008:17) such as cohabitation. A theory is "a set of theoretical statements that provides an understanding and explanation about a class or classes of phenomena" (Wu & Volker, 2009:2720). Furthermore, a theory consists of "a systematically presented set of propositions about relationships between various concepts" (Wu & Volker, 2009:2720). However, the use of theory in a qualitative study is a contentious issue. Some authors maintain that the intention of qualitative researchers is not to test any theory but to generate one based on acquired data (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010:190; Creswell, 2016:43) whilst others contend that if researchers, irrespective of the approach, ignore existing theories they are more likely to "reinvent the wheel" (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010:191).

Moreover, inclusion of a theory in qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, is used differently (Wu & Volker, 2009:2720) at different stages, for different purposes (Giske & Artinian, 2007:78). Literature may be woven throughout the study without having a separate chapter on literature review (Creswell, 2016:58), as is the case in the current study.

The theories are presented according to definition, key assumptions, main features, and how they are used to understand cohabitation, including the advantages and disadvantages of each theory. The theories included in this chapter are by no means exhaustive. Their selection and inclusion were directed by the data. Due to the explorative nature of the study, assigning one particular theoretical framework to understand cohabitation was not deemed appropriate considering that the phenomenon may have more than one meaning at the same time in a particular society (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013:424). Additionally, the role and meaning of cohabitation in the family system vary substantially across socio-economic, institutional, and cultural settings.

2.2 Commitment theory

Commitment in intimate relationships received limited empirical attention in the literature on cohabitation (Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2012:370). Commitment theories seek to understand the reasons advanced by individuals to enter into cohabitation (Baxter et al., 2010:1512). Hence, these theories were developed to explain reasons why individuals remain in less satisfying cohabiting relationships, with particular focus on factors that make it less desirable to terminate a relationship. Although there is no consensus on what constitutes commitment within a romantic relationship (Owen et al., 2011:821), most of the research on commitment in cohabitation broadly categorise three overlapping theories that seek to understand the reasons for cohabitation (Baxter, Haynes & Hewitt, 2010:1511), the development thereof (Knopp, Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2015:119), and the couples' internal and external motivations for remaining in unsatisfying cohabiting relationships (Rhoades et al., 2012:370).

The motivation to enter into and remain in cohabitation may have nothing to do with a personal desire to remain in a relationship, but cohabitees may be compelled, by external circumstances such as a moral obligation to remain together, social pressure from friends and families, concern for children, or financial considerations, to do so (Baxter et al., 2010:1511; Rhoades et al., 2012:370). These external circumstances

are not necessarily negative but may motivate the couple to stay together, even during turbulent times (Owen et al., 2011:822). These factors, regarded as constraints to commitment, are helpful in explaining reasons why it is difficult for individuals to leave low-quality relationships (Knopp et al., 2015:120).

Any constraint which impacts commitment is also a strong determinant of a cohabiting relationship that transitions into marriage. This process of marital transition is termed *inertia* (Baxter et al., 2010:1512). One of the key assumptions of relationship inertia is that, regardless of the relationship quality, cohabiting couples may end up married based on the fact that they intend staying together (Jamison & Ganong, 2010:538). Similarly, some authors are of the view that cohabitation does not necessarily increase the level of dedication in a relationship (Knopp et al., 2015:120). Within cohabitation, dedication refers to the willingness to be in a relationship regardless of external obligations such as unfavourable social conditions or the need to meet parental expectations (Rhoades et al., 2012:371). This dedication may boost an individual's sense of couple identity and willingness to sacrifice one's own needs for the benefit of the relationship (Baxter et al., 2010:1512). Therefore, it has been suggested that the constraints or dedication to a commitment should not be treated as two distinct domains (Knopp et al., 2015:120). Social workers are cautioned not to impose their preconceived notions of commitment on couples; instead, they should take into account how the couples construct their own commitment (Sniezek, 2013:1). Commitment is therefore a personal choice that depends on how individuals or couples interpret and express their relationship.

2.3 Identity theory

This theory was formulated due to the dearth of empirical research on how individuals construct their identities in relationships (Stets & Carter, 2012:120; Carter, 2013:203; Gottlieb & Sevigny, 2016:335). Scholars responded to this gap in knowledge by conceptualising this theory to enhance people's understanding of identity, the relationship between individuals' experiences of themselves as well as the language they use to create their identities (Zingsheim, 2011:24). The identity theory is regarded

as the most explicit theory that seeks to explain the relationship between social ties and the self (Walker & Lynn, 2013:152).

The theory conceptualises identity as an internal self-structure that provides meaning, and seeks to define an individual (Ries, Hein, Pihu & Armenta, 2012:324; Kyle, Jun & Absher, 2014:1023; Gottlieb & Sevigny, 2016:336). Such identity is reflected through attitudes and behaviour (Griffith, 2011:621). Nonetheless, the self-structure is not fixed (Fish & Priest, 2011:183; Stets & Carter, 2011:195). Instead, it is continually reconstructed as aspects are added or discarded (Zingsheim, 2011:25). A distinction between private and collective identities is that the former refers to how individuals perceive themselves separate from the beliefs and values of the larger group to which they belong (Soulsby & Bennet, 2015:1). On the other hand, collective identity refers to how individuals perceive themselves in relation to how they are viewed as members of a particular group (Soulsby & Bennet, 2015:1). As such, individuals construct their identities through continuous interaction within their social context (Griffith, 2011:621; Guenter, Van Emmerik, Schreurs, Kuypers, Van Iterson & Notelaers, 2016:576).

The key assumption of this theory is that individuals' behaviours are primarily motivated by identity (Kyle et al., 2014:1023). The theory posits that individuals always strive to behave in a manner that is consistent with their identity (Stets & Carter, 2011:192) since human beings are fulfilled by a sense of belonging. Sociologically, this theory is used to explain that identity is linked to behaviour and is deeply embedded in the social context (Merolla, Serpe, Stryker & Schultz, 2012:150; Walker & Lynn, 2013:151; Carter, 2013:205). Hence, individuals continually seek to maintain a fit between their identities and how they are perceived by others in an effort to verify their identities (Trettevik, 2016:264). When their identities are positively verified, individuals are more likely to experience positive emotions. For example, in an effort to adhere to expectations, cohabitees in a conventional community which denounces cohabitation may either terminate the relationship or formalise the relationship through marriage. In certain circumstances, cohabitees living in communities that denounce cohabitation may feel under pressure to reconsider their living arrangements.

The identity theory is deemed suitable to explore interactions and relationships among individuals who assume multiple roles in complex families, such as cohabitation

(Berger & Bzostek, 2014:98). Entering cohabitation seems to trigger individuals' identity exploration as they seek to understand what it means to be in such a relationship, both privately and publicly (Kerpelman, McElwain, Pittman & Adler-Baeder, 2016:103). Moreover, this theory is useful in explaining the prevailing gender inequality in cohabiting relationships (Miller & Sassler, 2012:428). For instance, although cohabitation is said to be characterised by egalitarian attitudes, female cohabitees still adhere to societal norms of how a woman should conduct herself (Chaney, 2011:516).

Identity theory has also been applied to explore financial and asset management within cohabitation (Barlow, Burgoyne, Clergy & Smithson, 2008:37). The manner in which finances are managed in such relationships may be a possible indicator of how the cohabiting couple perceive themselves within the relationship (Vogler, Brockmann & Wiggings, 2008:45). Evidence shows that the separate management of finances within cohabitation suggests that couples are not functioning as a single financial entity but that they continue to maintain their individual autonomy (Ashby & Burgoyne, 2009:519; Raijas, 2011:558). Opening a joint bank account is more likely to be viewed as creating a "we" identity in a relationship (Steuber & Paik, 2014:1155).

Within many indigenous cultures in South Africa, identity theory is ideal to unpack individuals' decision to cohabit within communities which are against such an arrangement, based on moral issues. It has been widely documented that where individuals assume a moral identity such morality could influence their behaviour in any given situation (Stets & Carter, 2012:122; Carter, 2013:204). However, the identity theory has been criticised for overly emphasising individual identity with little or no regard for the social context (Zingsheim, 2011:25). For instance, although some dating individuals may wish to adhere to cultural prescripts in terms of their moral identity, unfavourable social conditions may coerce them into cohabitation. Therefore, the decision to cohabit does not always reflect the cohabitee's identity.

2.4 Social learning theory

The social learning theory was developed by a cognitive psychologist, Bandura (1977, 1986), in an effort to understand human nature, with a focus on how people observe and model their behaviours, attitudes, and emotions from their social context (Yun & Kim, 2015:1169; Merrill, Subbaraman & Barnett, 2016:249). The social learning theory is helpful in explaining what people observe and learn from their significant others as well as how this process of learning unfolds (Rader & Haynes, 2011; Baxter et al., 2010:1512). Hence, this theory is ideal to explain the marital aspirations among the majority of female cohabitees in a context where marriage is the acceptable family formation.

Social learning theory is premised on the assumption that individuals do not exist in a social vacuum; instead, they learn about the acceptability of a certain behaviour based on their own experiences, observations of others, and direct teachings from important others such as parents (Manning et al., 2011:118; Yoshida & Busby, 2012:203; Weiser, Weigel, Lalasz & Evans, 2015:3). Consequently, individuals' behaviour and relationship decisions are more likely to be influenced by their families' experiences (Weiser et al., 2015:5).

Rather than relying on their experiences and actions, individuals learn by observing the actions and behaviour of others (Cuillier, 2008:552). The theory acknowledges that individuals will not automatically assume behaviour that they observe from others as they possess a need to maintain their personal self that distinguishes them from other individuals (Ogunfowora, 2014:1470). This is evident in instances where Africans still enter into cohabitation despite communities' reluctance to recognise this as a form of family. This assertion is similar to the basic assumption of self-determination (cf. self-determination theory).

Researchers use social learning theory to investigate attitudes towards cohabitation, its prevalence and the increase thereof, including the role of the family as the most important socialising unit (Cunningham & Thornton, 2005:710: Kasearu, 2010:3; Manning et al., 2011:118). It also explains the dramatic increase in incidences of

cohabitation as the individuals' positive attitudes towards it develops (Cunningham & Thornton, 2005:710). Furthermore, it is suggested that if individuals believe that the transition to cohabitation is an appropriate choice as a family formation, then it is likely that they will adapt their attitudes positively and enter into cohabitation (Cunningham & Thornton, 2005:710).

Social learning theory is also used to explain religious teachings as a form of family socialisation that seeks to establish acceptable behavioural conduct (Manning et al., 2011:121). However, authors concede that cohabitees do not simply accept their family beliefs and conduct themselves accordingly; instead, they develop their own beliefs (Manning et al., 2011:118). Similarly, during the emerging adulthood phase, individuals strive to develop their own young-adult social identity (Merrill et al., 2016:250). Cohabitation therefore becomes a preferred family formation for individuals who do not rely on externally imposed obligations such as cultural expectations and parental preferences. Moreover, cohabitation affords previously marginalised groups such as women a voice in intimate relationships, and in determining their own relationships without being overly concerned with external obligations such as pressure from families. However, this assertion concerning cohabitation within African communities places emphasis on individual fulfilment and tends to ignore the social context. Many Africans still wish to adhere to the societal expectations pertaining to family formation. Hence, in communities where marriage is a preferred family formation, people will still marry regardless of their wishes.

2.5 Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory explains choices and behaviours that are consistent with people's intrinsic needs (Knee, Hadden, Porter & Rodriguez, 2013:307) such as the need to regulate their own behaviour, the need to interact effectively with the environment, as well as the need to feel a reciprocal connection with others (Garn, Matthews & Jolly, 2010:264). Curiosity and the need to engage in activities that will provide challenge and satisfaction have been noted as well (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010:76). This theory provides guidelines on how human beings develop motivation to meet their needs (Garn et al., 2010:264).

This theory is based on the assumption that individuals have certain intrinsic needs which they seek to fulfil in order to achieve an optimum level of wellbeing (Diener & Ryan, 2009:394). Human beings strive to meet these needs throughout their lives by selectively engaging in activities that would support the fulfilment of those needs (Gottlieb & Sevigny, 2016:337). Rather than relying on prescribed social norms, individuals have inherent choices on how to construct their lives and identities (Hughes, 2015:707).

The self-determination theory endorses individuals' full involvement in the relationship rather than feeling coerced, guilty, or not knowing the reason for being in the relationship (Knee et al., 2013:307). Furthermore, self-determination theorists purport that individuals have moved away from traditional norms and expectations when it comes to romantic relationships. People therefore enter into a romantic relationship for its own sake without any obligation (Smith, 2014:3). However, such autonomous behaviour is likely to thrive only in social contexts that are supportive and accommodative (Koehn et al., 2016:1086).

The theory also addresses the situational factors that facilitate maximum self-fulfilment (Knee et al., 2013:307). It should be noted that a conducive social context may facilitate the fulfilment of the individuals' intrinsic needs, whilst a hostile one may hinder such an accomplishment and thus lead to passive engagement in behaviour (Koehn, Gillison, Standage & Bailey, 2016:1086). However, this theory concedes that not all individuals' choices are self-regulated or emanate from within a person (Knee et al., 2013:307). For instance, individuals' behaviour may be motivated by autonomous intentions; however, such individuals are still likely to experience and accede to pressure to satisfy internal or external expectations (Seiffge-Krenke, 2013:116). Hence, the self-determination theory offers explanations of cohabitees' continued evaluation of marriage despite their increasingly less traditional attitudes towards romantic relationships (Hughes, 2015:707). Internally, cohabitees may be more disappointed in themselves for remaining in cohabitation against the traditional norms that they have internalised as their own (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010:77). This dilemma may be detrimental to cohabitation considering that young women have been socialised to aspire to marriage, which some communities still regard as the highest

status for a woman. People who live in urban areas are more likely to cohabit for various reasons such as the need to share financial costs or raise their children together.

2.6 Family systems theory

Family systems theory originates from the term *system*, which denotes a "complex of elements or components directly or indirectly related in a casual network, such that each component is related to at least some others in a more stable way within a particular period of time" (Teater, 2014:18). Within the family context, systems theory defines a family as a group of interdependent individuals who organise themselves as a unit to achieve family functions or goals (Seiffge-Kenke, 2010:499; Nomaguchi, Brown & Leyman, 2015:3).

This theory assumes that:

- The parts of a system are interconnected and interdependent (Teater, 2014:21). Any change in one part of the family impacts the whole system (Kelly & Ganong, 2011:108) since individual family members are embedded in the larger family system (Cox, 2010:95). Therefore, they cannot be completely understood separately from the context of the whole system since the functioning of an individual is not only related to the individuals themselves but to the system as a whole (Galovan, Holmes, Schramm & Lee, 2014:1847; Nomaguchi et al., 2015:3).

- The family is a dynamic system which also exercises flexibility to encourage individuality and autonomy among family members (Seiffge-Krenke, 2010:497; Yoshida & Busby, 2012: 2014). This assumption is premised on the understanding that although interdependence is crucial for family functioning, it is acknowledged that it may also stifle individual development (Galovan et al., 2015:8). Furthermore, the authors claim that families which lack individual autonomy reflect dysfunction. Additionally, the family permits individuals to function autonomously but still remain emotionally connected to the relationship (Haefner, 2014:865). However, individual autonomy was found to be gendered since females tend to struggle with separating themselves from

the family unit, whereas males prefer autonomy, although they may still wish to retain some connection (Yoshida & Busby, 2012:205).

Although the family systems theory is core to the family functioning, it seems there is a dearth of studies which adopted this theory to explain cohabitation directly. One explanation for the dearth of studies is that cohabitation is not perceived as having reached the status of a family which deserves empirical attention. However, one of the key findings of the studies which used this theory to explore communication patterns in cohabitation which found that disharmony and family imbalance are often associated with cohabitation. The study further found that the formation of cohabitation requires reorganisation and the establishment of new roles, which may then create instability in the relationship (Pace, Shafer, Jensen & Larson, 2015:26). Within social work, this theory is deemed ideal for the assessment of the family system during intervention as it enables social workers to assess how cohabitees are influenced and affected by their family system with regard to their decision to cohabit.

2.7 Life course theory

The concept *life course* is broadly described as a *complex social process*, which seeks to explain how individual development is embedded in the social structure (Huinink, Brüderl, Nauck, Walper, Castiglioni & Feldhaus, 2011:88). The objective of the theory is to describe expected social roles and activities that define all the stages of the individual's life (Eliason at al., 2015:205). Similar to the social learning theory, the life course theory stresses myriad contexts of development by linking human development to the broader social context such as the family and community (Barr, Sutton, Simons, Wichrama & Lorenz 2016:2). In certain instances, individuals who have reached adulthood may wish to embrace this phase by entering into an intimate relationship to meet their cultural expectations.

Life course theory is commonly used to investigate the social influences on attitudes towards family formation (Li, 2014:294) such as early or delayed parenthood in intimate relationships (Eliason et al., 2015:207), leaving the parental home, raising children in cohabiting relationships, and the prevalence of cohabitation itself (Barr et

al., 2016:2). Although choices during transitions are personal events, it has been noted that they do not occur in isolation but in the broader social context (Fitzpatrick, Blazek, Kazmierczak, Lewandowska-Walter, Pastwa-Wojciechowska & Blazek, 2014:930). Some young African adults who leave their parental homes to enter into cohabiting relationships may not enjoy acceptance from their parents who believe that they should only leave home after marriage (Barr et al., 2016:2). However, parents are happy to see young adults from rural areas migrate to bigger cities in pursuit of well-paying jobs.

This theory shows that the expected normative sequencing of events, which becomes part and parcel of a life course, might undergo considerable change (Li, 2014:294). One of the reasons for this change is that certain factors in life events that may affect different transitions in individuals' lives pertaining to timing, order, and duration (Carpenter, 2010:158). For instance, young people spend a considerable amount of time pursuing higher education, and postpone parenthood. This theory assists with an understanding of cohabitation in relation to human development and the roles individuals play during each stage in a particular social context.

2.8 Fishbein and Ajzen theory of reasoned action

The Ajzen and Fishbein theory of reasoned action was developed to explain the mechanisms of human behaviour in decision-making processes (Kasearu, 2010:5; Ries et al., 2012:323). This theory has been widely used as a model to predict behavioural intentions and behaviours within relationships (Kasearu, 2010:5).

The theory is based on three hypotheses: that individuals are capable of making rational decisions when confronted with alternatives (Han & Kim, 2010:660); that most human behaviours are predictable, based on intention (Han, Hsu & Lee, 2009:520; Han, Hsu & Sheu, 2010:326); and that individuals are motivated by attitude to engage in a particular behaviour (Ries et al., 2012:232).

This theory was adopted to explore individuals' motivation to enter into cohabitation, and the relationship quality and cohabiting relationships in terms of their future

outcomes (Guzzo, 2009:180; Murrow & Shi, 2010:398). Before individuals enter into cohabitation they consider factors such as its advantages and disadvantages as well as their perceptions of the norms governing cohabitation, and their own compliance to those norms (Guzzo, 2009:183). Therefore, this theory disputes the notion that the decision to cohabit is not deliberate. Instead, it seems that dating couples make deliberate decisions regarding the transition of the relationship to cohabitation (Murrow & Shi, 2010:398). As such the theory is helpful in understanding how cohabitees progress from casual dating to cohabitation. Of major concern is that it appears as though the decision-making process between cohabitees is not always characterised by openness.

2.9 Soulmate theory

An inherent assumption of the soulmate theory is the belief that finding the right partner is crucial to developing a satisfying relationship (Cobb, DeWall, Lambert & Finchman, 2013:280). According to this theory, individuals believe that there is that one partner who is the right one (Burnette & Franiuk, 2010:145). Hence, those who are of the view that they have found their ideal partner report healthy relationship satisfaction. The theory includes the growth belief, which states that relationship challenges can be overcome and that relational distress helps the relationship grow and develop (Cobb et al., 2013:280). Furthermore, the soulmate theorists view conflict as an opportunity to enhance closeness between partners rather than something that is destructive to the relationship.

This theory is useful in understanding people's beliefs about relationships in relation to entering and staying in violent relationships (Franiuk, Shain, Bieritz & Murray, 2012:821). Individuals who believe in the soulmate theory are likely to be more accommodative of their partners' conduct by forgiving their transgressions (Burnette & Franiuk, 2010:145). Those who forgive their partners' repeated transgressions are more likely to remain in abusive relationships as they will be focusing more on the positive aspects of their partners and less on their manipulative behaviour. Such individuals are also inclined to hold on to the belief that the good in their relationship overshadows the bad (Franiuk et al., 2012:824). Within cohabitation, this theory seems

to be associated with women's repeated forgiveness of their men's transgressions. In most African communities, it is widely believed that women are more likely to overlook flaws in their male partners with the hope that they will change.

2.10 Financial expectations and family formation theory

The inherent assumption of the financial expectations and family formation theory is that couples who enter into cohabitation often delay childbearing due to the unstable financial position to get married (Gibson, 2009:147). Such couples believe that they should get their finances in order before they transition to marriage or have children as they believe that marriage and childbearing should be preceded by certain prerequisites such as obtaining formal academic qualifications, having stable employment, and being financially independent (Coy & Miller, 2014:237).

Financial expectations and family formation theory are appropriate to understand the circumstances preceding marital progression and childbearing in cohabitation (Gibson-Davis, 2009:146). However, the theory explains that childbearing is not always associated with financial stability but it is more aligned to the life course process. Some authors contend that the need to meet certain cultural requirements before marriage contribute to the prevalence of cohabitation (Coy & Miller, 2014:237). For instance, among Africans, the payment of *magadi* demonstrates that the groom is financially ready to take care of his new family (Heeren, Jemmot, Tyler, Tshabe & Ngwane, 2011:74). This theory also recognises that the man's economic position in cohabitation is strongly associated with marital progression (Schneider, 2015:157). However, it should be borne in mind that within many African communities in South Africa the financial status of women seems to have little or no bearing on the decision to make the transition to marriage. Women cannot contribute towards *magadi* but may take care of the financial needs of the couple whilst their partners save money towards the payment of *magadi.*

2.11 Interpersonal theory

The central assumption of this theory is that interpersonal behaviour is positively associated with relationship quality since a couple's personality traits impact each

other (Kilman, 2012:132). Interpersonal behaviour is categorised as complementary and anti-complementary. The former refers to an individual's behaviour that fits with that of the partner, whereas the latter refers to behaviour which does not fit, for example an individual may have a friendly personality that is opposed to his/her partner' hostile personality (Kerpelman et al., 2016:404). According to the interpersonal theory, well-adjusted couples seem to demonstrate more complementary interpersonal behaviour, whereas distressed couples reflect non-complementary interpersonal behaviour (Kerpelman et al., 2016:404). Complementary behaviour is highly beneficial where people need to cooperate and share their lives in intimate relationships. Conversely, individualistic personality traits such as aggression, argumentativeness and selfishness are associated with increased relationship distress (Galinha, Oishi, Pereira, Wirtz & Esteves, 2012:416).

The interpersonal theory of personality is mostly used to examine the connections between personality traits and relationship quality (Letzring & Noftle, 2010:353). In cohabiting relationships, the interpersonal theory is useful in understanding the couple's adjustment to their new responsibilities in terms of accommodating each other on a day-to-day basis and providing support to each other (Soulsby & Bennet, 2015:9). Moreover, the theory is applicable when researchers seek to understand how interpersonal behaviour influences partners' decision-making processes. Conversely, cohabitation may not be an ideal platform for couples to become acquainted with each other's personalities as some cohabitees may not reveal their true selves. It is assumed that couples who do not have intimate knowledge about each other's personalities are likely to experience relational distress.

2.12 Symbolic interactionist theory

This theory describes the role of cultural symbols in relationships (Silver & Lee, 2012:209) by explaining behaviour from a "dramaturgical perspective" (Kelley & Gruenewald, 2015:5). This is premised on the assumption that "human beings live in the world of meaningful symbols and they continuously react, enact and respond to those symbols" (Hausmann, Jonason & Summers-Effler, 2011:320). The inherent assumption of the symbolic interactionist theory is comprehensively captured as

follows: "[t]he world to which humans react and on which they act is a symbolized world, a world specified by meanings attached to the objects comprising it…the point of view of participants in social interaction must enter decisively into satisfactory accounts or explanations of that interaction" (Stryker, 2008:18).

The symbolic interactionist theory suggests that individuals place symbolic importance on objects, people, and relationships based on meaning-making processes derived from social interaction (Gillespie & Cornish, 2009:19; Willoughby, Hall & Luczak, 2013:5). This suggestion is based on the assertion that symbols are important features of human life and that human beings create, enact, and respond to symbols (Hausmann et al., 2011:320). These symbols are socially constructed, understood, and experienced as they reflect values, attitudes, and beliefs (Honeycutt, 2009:305; Kaasila & Lauriala, 2010:856; Rousell, Monaghan & Javerlhiac, 2010:108; Kelley & Gruenewald, 2015:5).

The theory is applied to cohabitation in order to explore the symbols or meanings that couples attach to their interaction in everyday life, which increase or decrease the couple's commitment to the relationship (Rousell et al., 2010:108). This theory further explains how and why certain cultural symbols are significant to the quality of the relationship (Adamsons, 2010:144). Although the symbolic interactionist theory is often criticised for not being based on sound empirical evidence (Hausmann et al., 2011:321), it seems to be effective in understanding how cultural symbols contribute towards the quality of cohabiting relationships. In cohabitation, tangible examples such as a couple buying a house together, the merging of finances, as well as childbearing are likely to communicate the couple's commitment and dedication to the relationship. Similarly, introducing a partner to one's family may be another sign of one's commitment to the relationship.

2.13 Feminist theories

There is no universal definition of feminism or one school or type of feminism. Feminism is broadly defined as the acceptance that male domination or patriarchy does exist but that women reserve the right to eradicate it, with a deliberate focus on

any violence and injustices against women (Mackay, 2015:334). The purpose of the feminist theory is to "advance and promote changes in the social structure and eventually empower women" as it is premised on the belief that women deserve to share equally in every aspect of their lives (Li, 2014:295). Although no specific reference is made to feminist theories in chapters 4, 5, and 6 on the presentation of the study findings, this theory is deemed important for further consideration in cohabitation studies due to fact that cohabitees are not immune to the patriarchal society (Brownridge & Halli, 2000:570). The summary below illustrates some of the studies which adopted the feminist theory to understand the experiences of women in cohabitation.

Using feminist theory, Sassler and Miller (2011:484) explored traditional gender relations in cohabitation, with particular focus on how power manifests itself to the advantage of men and detriment of women. This study is premised on two assumptions that even though there is a belief that cohabitation does not conform to traditional gender roles, studies continue to show that women remain disadvantaged as compared to men in terms of the allocation of domestic labour; that the manifestation of covert power continues as men still hold the power to determine the direction of the relationship whilst women remain subservient and at their mercy.

The feminist theory has also been used to unpack and explain male dominance and women's submissiveness in cohabitation (Enander, 2010:6). Such studies are based on the assumption that "social institutions such as families are essentially patriarchal and contribute to patterns of subordination and repression for women who exist within them" (Li, 2014:295). On the other hand, the association between women's economic dependence on men and abuse have been explored through feminism (Choi, Cheung, Cheung & David, 2014:1430). Women's inferior economic position makes them vulnerable to abuse, compromise their position to negotiate and men take advantage of this.

As a result of the criticism levelled at feminist theories for failing to influence policies regarding gender equality and social justice, globally, Calkin (2015:305) adopted the feminist theory to "convince policy makers that gender equality matters for development and human wellbeing". The South African government has established

a Ministry in the Presidency to advance women's socio-economic empowerment and gender equality. The establishment of this department can be regarded as an achievement for feminists as it marks an important point in the history of the new democratic dispensation, that concerted efforts are directed towards redressing injustices against women even though very little has been achieved thus far.

The feminist theory was also used to explain the role of religion on intimate relationships within a patriarchal society (Llewellyn & Trzebiatowska, 2013:245). Religion is viewed as a system that perpetuates patriarchy and many other injustices such as sexism. The bible contains many verses which affirm men's dominance over women. For instance, in Ephesians 5 verse 22, women are instructed to submit to their husbands as heads of households. Women, on the other hand, "shall have no dominion over a man" as stated in 1 Timothy 2 verse 11. These verses have the potential to be misinterpreted and used to exacerbate the dominance of men over women. However, it is through religion that patriarchal teachings can be deconstructed and new transformed attitudes and teachings accentuated (Llewellyn & Trzebiatowska, 2013:253).

Stigmatisation of women who decide not to get married but rather enter into cohabitation is challenged through feminism (Evander, 2010:6; Li, 2014:295). Women have the right to make autonomous decisions on matters pertaining to family formation (Martínez & Khalil, 2012:239) even though this may be difficult at times considering that their lives are embedded in a socio-cultural context (Wang & Nehring, 2014:579). Hence, feminist theories are often criticised for not considering the structural barriers that may prevent women from realising their desired choices (Worth, 2016:604). Moreover, feminist theories are criticised for treating all women as a single homogenous group. For instance, Chaney (2011:513) contends that there should be more studies that address the experiences of African women as a unique group without relying on the experiences of white women as universal considering that their experiences differ despite both groups belonging to the same gender. In this context, feminist theories can also help to explain the choices that African women make pertaining to family formation.

2.14 Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the theories which were used to interpret cohabitation, with particular focus on their basic assumptions and main features. A brief discussion on how each theory is used to interpret cohabitation is also presented.

Empirical research has been conducted on common theories such as commitment theory, social learning theory, life course theory, identity theory and feminist theories. Nonetheless, social learning theory seems to be the most useful for examining how cohabitation is conceived, maintained, or terminated since it combines a wide variety of factors of behavioural learning components. On the other hand, limited research has been devoted to less popular theories such as financial expectations and family formation theory, symbolic interactionist theory, the Fishbein and Ajzen theory of reasoned action, and interpersonal theory. Theories which have received limited empirical attention make it difficult for their implementation.

When employing theories to explain different dimensions of cohabitation, authors caution that they should not be considered apart from one another (Miller, Jennings, Alvarez-Rivera & Miller, 2008:263). Furthermore, it is suggested that theories can be compared, integrated, or combined to explain a single phenomenon. A classic example is a study that explains a complex link between genders with varying social contexts, and how people develop attitudes and perceptions on cohabitation. Such a study may call for the combination of different theories such as the social learning theory, self-determination theory, identity theory, life course theory and symbolic interactionist theory. For instance, family systems theory can provide the context in which learning takes place, whereas social learning theory can be applied to explain how gender socialisation is embedded in social structures that define how individuals should behave in accordance with their gender. Consequently, the life course and identity theories will explain how individuals develop different identities as they undergo different life course trajectories.

Theories were also found to provide contrasting views on certain aspects of cohabitation. For instance, social learning theory postulates that young adults are

often expected to rely on the experiences of their parents in making decisions regarding family formation as men and women. By contrast, the self-determination theory and the Fishbein and Ajzen theory of reasoned action contend that some individuals may be attracted to cohabitation by the fact that it encourages equal gender roles and that it is less guided by traditional family values, which may be biased towards marriage.

Despite being exposed to certain behaviours and immediate social contexts, individuals do not simply absorb what they learn or observe; they can still make their own autonomous decisions outside their familial values to fulfil their intrinsic needs (cf. self-determination theory).

2.15 Conclusion

This chapter explains cohabitation within varying contexts, and provides the background of the theories which have been used to present the findings of this study. The information in this chapter will enhance the social worker's understanding of various existing theories, utilised to comprehend cohabitation. The information will also encourage others to pursue research in this area guided by one or several theories. Social work intervention should be grounded in theory to guides service delivery.

CHAPTER 3
APPLICATION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter orientates the reader to the chosen research paradigm, and demonstrates that the entire study has coherence across the research purpose (Koch et al., 2014:133; Singh, 2015:133). Therefore, this chapter provides a detailed description and justification of the research methodology adopted to guide the study. Literature is used to provide a sound basis for the qualitative research methodology (Marshall & Rossman, 2016:7). The justification of the methodology flows from the research question, which links with the research goal including the research and task objectives.

3.2 Research methodology

Research methodology refers to the strategies, blueprint, set of decisions, and procedures that guide the choices researchers make in carrying out a study (Carter & Little, 2007:1317). It provides justification for the methods of a research project, and guides the research process to ensure that appropriate ways and means are followed. Research methodology is largely informed by the research question (Lapan et al., 2012:72).

In the next section, the researcher presents the qualitative research paradigm within which the study was conducted. A detailed justification and application of the research approach are included as well as a discussion on the application of the adopted research design, namely the phenomenological, explorative, descriptive, and contextual research. The presentation also addresses the research design with accompanying justification for selecting the sample, sampling methods, preparing participants for data collection, data-collection tools, pilot test, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the overall design.

3.2.1 Research approach

This study was conducted within a qualitative paradigm. Although qualitative research has a rich history in the social sciences, it has often been criticised by quantitative researchers for not being sufficiently scientific (Singh, 2015:267). It is therefore mandatory to justify its scientific credentials (Hood, 2016:160). Qualitative research has developed an identity of its own by adopting diverse approaches, which seek to explore and understand human experiences, perceptions, and behaviour (Richards, 2009:148; Holland & Rees, 2010:71).

Participants in study were engaged in a meaningful manner to gain a holistic picture of their life experiences since qualitative research acknowledges that there is no single truth (Moule & Goodman, 2014:173). Furthermore the researcher approached the cohabitees in their natural setting, thus enabling them to describe and explain their experiences of being in cohabiting relationships (Gibbs, 2007, x; McLaughlin, 2007:36).

In certain instances, a qualitative approach is adopted when the research question does not clearly indicate the data required to provide an answer (Richards, 2005:34). This approach was deemed appropriate for this study as it allowed the researcher an opportunity to examine changes over time, understand people's meanings, and adjusts to new issues and ideas as they emerged (McLaughlin, 2007:36). Participants were able to construct their social reality around their lived experiences in cohabiting relationships (Koch et al., 2014:132). A qualitative approach was further deemed appropriate for this study due to its ability to discover important aspects of cohabitation that would be easily overlooked and missed in a quantitative study (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:229).

Qualitative researchers are viewed as co-participants in discovering and understanding the realities of the phenomenon under study (Lavoie, MacDonald & Whitmore, 2005:299). As is the case in a traditional research approach, participants were considered subjects of the study who did not have any control over the research process. Nonetheless, the researcher involved them in data collection, and sought to build relationships and credibility with them. Throughout the interviews, the researcher

was mindful of the principle of respecting the participants as experts of their own experiences (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest & Namey, 2005:29).

The qualitative researcher reflected on his personal beliefs and cultural background throughout the inquiry, and was sensitive to his personal history and its impact on the study (cf. item 3.11 on reflexivity and bracketing) (Creswell, 2016:6).

Qualitative research enabled the researcher to report on the participants' accounts of their experiences in cohabiting relationships (Abrahamson, Hussain, Khan & Schofield, 2012:1497; Creswell, 2016:6). Through the direct quotations presented in chapters 4, 5, and 6 the researcher was able to capture the voices of the participants. The researcher was not only interested in how the participants described their experiences, but also how the context of their cohabiting relationships impacted their experiences. Hence, contextual research was also included in the study (cf. item 2.4.4 on contextual research design).

Qualitative methods are appropriate for exploratory research in the absence of sufficient knowledge about a phenomenon (Holland & Rees, 2010:71; Schmidt & Brown, 2015:230). This approach explores the phenomenon under study in the same way as an explorer does "in an uncharted territory" (Holland & Rees, 2010:71). Rhoades et al. (2009a:96) indicate that cohabitation has been historically studied mainly by researchers in sociology and demography, which are professions not typically geared towards intervention. Hence, there is insufficient empirical knowledge on intervention in cohabitation for practitioners offering couple therapy or couple education. Little is still known about the reasons for, and couples' experiences of, cohabitation (Sassler & Miller, 2011:165).

Qualitative research seeks to understand the participants' perspectives on their world (Holland & Rees, 2010:165; Sano, Manoogian & Ontai, 2012:947) since it allows individuals to communicate freely rather than respond to a pre-determined set of questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:73; Benjamin & Haze, 2011:795). Participants were able to share the personal meanings that they attach to their everyday experiences in cohabiting relationships. It has been noted that previous studies on cohabitation were largely quantitative, which did not allow for an in-depth

understanding of the stories behind the numbers, as the voices of the cohabitees are absent (Stanley, Rhoades & Markman, 2009b:233; Sassler & Miller, 2011:165). Qualitative research facilitated access to the participants' different opinions and feelings about cohabitation (Hatch, 2015:5). Some were also able to attach meaning to their cohabitation (Wu & Volker, 2009:2721).

Qualitative research was appropriate to understand the experience of a complex phenomenon such as cohabitation, since it allowed for the revelation of the breadth and depth of the participants' subjective experiences (Reczek, Elliott & Umberson, 2009; 740; Kefalas et al., 2011:857; Funk & Kobayashi, 2014:1104). It further allowed the researcher to address a topic as emotionally charged and stigmatised as cohabitation (Shapiro & Keyes, 2008:332; Sharp & Ganong, 2011:958). The researcher was able to converse directly with the participants in a relaxed and conversational manner (Creswell, 2014:8).

3.2.2 Research design

Every study has a design (Yin, 2011:75), which refers to the structure and plan for the enquiry (Tappen, 2011:54). A research design, "maps the terrain of an unknown territory" (Schostak & Schostak, 2008:9; Yin, 2011:75). In the process of deciding on the appropriate research design, the researcher focused on the aim and the research question that the study seeks to study (Moule & Goodman, 2014:171). The inclusion of a detailed account of the sampling strategy, the data-collection techniques, and clear data-analysis process in the presentation of a research design (Charlesworth & Foëx, 2016:148) will enable other researchers to replicate the process in their own settings. To ensure that the scientific community accepts their empirical findings, the researcher ensured that the research design is systematic, logical, and consistent (Yanow, 2012:16).

It should be borne in mind that it is customary in qualitative research not to have a fixed research design. Each qualitative study is likely to differ in design, and each study will allow the researchers to tailor the design as they see fit. In the current study, phenomenological, explorative, descriptive, and contextual research designs were employed to develop an in-depth understanding of cohabitation in the context of changing family patterns, and to proffer lessons for social work intervention.

3.2.2.1 Phenomenological research inquiry

Phenomenology is a branch of qualitative research that is grounded in psychology and philosophy (Randles, 2012:11; Moule & Goodman, 2014:176), and premised on the assumption that meaning and truth can be drawn from people's lived experiences (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007:173; Fochtman, 2008:186; Moule & Goodman, 2014:176). Phenomenological research "is concerned with how an individual views the world and how she or he lives from inside. Whilst many approaches to research look for commonalities of human experience …phenomenological research considers what it may be like to this person, living this life at this time" (Holland & Rees, 2010:75). This research design is also termed "the arena where people build their own reality" (Martignani, 2011:567) as the researcher was able to describe the lived experiences of participants with regard to how they expressed them, their feelings about and how they made sense of these experiences (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015:92; Marshall & Rossman, 2016:17). Phenomenological research design allowed the researcher to elicit as many details as possible on the place of cohabitation within the context of changing family patterns pertaining to its meaning and circumstances preceding its commencement, and the cohabitees lived experiences. This design conforms to the other three chosen designs, namely explorative, descriptive, and contextual research designs.

3.2.2.2 Exploratory research design

Exploratory research design is a recommended strategy for studies where the phenomena have not been sufficiently studied or are not well understood (Stetka & Ornebring, 2013:418; Koch et al., 2014:133; Hay & Chaudhury, 2015:678). The purpose of this research design is to examine a relatively new topic, notably cohabitation. Marshall and Rossman (2016:78) further describe the purpose of exploratory research design as a means to generate hypotheses for further and future empirical studies. Due to a dearth of qualitative-generated research on cohabitation (Rhoades et al., 2006:499; Murrow & Shi, 2010:37; Jampaklay & Haseen, 2011:137) and the researcher's quest to learn more about this phenomenon, the explorative research design was deemed appropriate for this study. In order to explore the topic in depth and in more detail, a small sample of 21 participants was used. The researcher relied on open-ended questions to explore the participants' lived experiences in cohabitation. Open-ended questions required more than a *yes* and *no*

response but afforded participants the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words rather than being forced to choose from predetermined responses (Mack et al., 2005:4).

Typical of an exploratory study, the findings did not provide conclusive answers to the research questions but only hinted at possible answers and explanations (Rubin & Babbie, 2013:50). The participants could not clearly articulate the meaning of cohabitation in relation to its place in the context of changing family patterns. However, the exploratory research design enabled the researcher to suggest other areas to be researched about cohabitation in the future.

3.2.2.3 Descriptive research design

Descriptive research design follows from exploratory research design with the main purpose of documenting "the participants' experiences, views, and meanings as richly as possible" (Hennik, Hutter & Bailey, 2011:289; Koch et al., 2014:134). It further seeks to describe situations and quantify an issue or phenomenon, for example, the magnitude of the phenomenon, its prevalence, and where the phenomenon exists (Babbie, 2010:93; Matthew & Ross, 2010:57). In other words, descriptive research design is a thicker examination of the phenomenon and its underlying meaning (Rubin & Babbie, 2013:51). The central questions to descriptive research are *who* and *why* (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:69), although there are no immediate intentions of understanding the "why" of their circumstances or the causes of their problems (Dudley, 2011:106).

Following the exploration of the participants' experiences in relation to their cohabiting relationships, the researcher provided a detailed description of what was explored during the interviews. Through qualitative descriptions, the researcher was able to communicate a sense of what it would be like to be in a cohabiting relationship – from the participants' perspectives (Rubin & Babbie, 2013:51).

3.2.2.4 Contextual research design

Contextual conditions, such as the social, institutional, and environmental conditions within people's lives, affect their behaviour (Yin, 2011:8). Hence, qualitative research strives to gain in-depth awareness and understanding of the context in which the

participants' experiences are constructed (Cannell, 2015:595). Qualitative researchers should therefore avoid imposing their own views of the phenomenon on the participants (Grossman, Tracy, Richer & Erkut, 2015:34). Contextual research means understanding experiences, actions, and processes within the participants' localised context (Noor, 2008:1603; Randles, 2012:11). There are four types of context that the researcher took into consideration when conducting qualitative research (Hennik et al., 2011:289; Ganong & Coleman, 2014:455), namely a description of the contexts of the research topic and a theoretical context to the study; a description of the broader socio-cultural context of the population, and the physical context of the area of study to provide a background for readers to understand the findings; convey the methodological context of the research, which describes the research process and the environment in which data was collected; and portray the findings and highlight recommendations from the study.

This study was conducted in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Gauteng is by far the smallest of South Africa's nine provinces but it has the largest population of all the provinces, with 11.2 million people, comprising 22.4% of South Africa's total populace. In spite of its small geographical size it has the highest population density by far – 658 people per square kilometre. Gauteng dominates the South African economy, particularly in the secondary and tertiary industries. The province's capital city, Johannesburg, is the largest in the country and indeed in Africa as a whole. The province blends cultures, colours, and first- and third-world traditions in a spirited mix, flavoured by a number of foreign influences. The South African 2011 Census also revealed that in Gauteng Province, 592 750 women lived in cohabitation as compared to 606 900 men across all five Gauteng regions, namely Sedibeng, West Rand, Ekurhuleni, City of Johannesburg, and City of Tshwane (National Census, 2011).

3.2.3 Population and sampling

The unit of analysis is the focus of the study, which the researcher aims to understand or to draw conclusions from (Jupp, 2006:265; Lapan et al., 2012:60). According to Jupp (2006:265), the population may consist of elements such as people, families, schools, cities, crimes, graduations, financial transactions, events, decisions, tasks, or any other similar elements. Within the qualitative realm, individuals who participate in a study are referred to as participants or key informants rather than subjects or

respondents (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:231). The study population is often chosen in accordance with the topic of the study, and in this study it comprised all individuals who were residing in Gauteng Province in 2014 and 2015 who were in cohabiting relationships. Several factors influenced the choice of province: the researcher resides and works in Gauteng Province, and the fact that the 2011 census reported that the highest number of individuals "living together like married people" resided in Gauteng. The census results are not surprising as this province is the economic hub of South Africa, and people from inside and outside the country migrate to Gauteng's metropolitan cities (Pretoria and Johannesburg) seeking employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

It was, of course, not possible to include the whole population in the study and therefore only a sample was drawn (Mack et al., 2005:4). A sample is a subset of individuals drawn from the entire population to form part of a study, regardless of whether it can be representative of the population (Nicholls, 2009:590). As qualitative research assumes that people are different, sampling a portion of the whole population does not necessarily mean that the findings will be generalised to the entire population. It is therefore concerned with searching for rich information from participants who can offer thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Nicholls, 2009:590).

In order to draw a sample from the larger population, two non-probability, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques were employed. With purposive sampling, prospective participants were considered on the basis of their experiences appropriate to the researcher's area of interest (Matthews & Ross, 2010:167). Furthermore, the researcher considered people who were willing and able to talk candidly about their experiences.

Generally, small samples are used in qualitative studies (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:231). Consequently, the researcher was not interested in the representation of the population but in a sample that would provide appropriate and rich insight into cohabitees' experiences in cohabiting relationships (Nicholls, 2009:639; Creswell, 2016:7). In short, sampling in qualitative research is "an exercise in exploring diversity, difference, variation and heterogeneity" (Morse, cited by Nicholls, 2009:639). Typical

of a qualitative study (Soulsby & Bennet, 2015:6) the sample was relatively small, with 21 individuals drawn from the population.

A sample size in a qualitative study is not determined at the onset of the study (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:243), but it is often guided by data saturation. Data saturation refers to a point when new data no longer brings additional insights to the research question (Mack et al., 2005:5), and repetition of information becomes evident (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:231). In order to determine saturation, the researcher had to evaluate any gaps in the data by continuously analysing the data and deducing themes and subthemes concurrent with the data-collection process (Lapan et al., 2012:61). There are different views on when data saturation may be reached. For instance, Newman and Hitchcock (2011:389) are of the view that data saturation is generally reached from the sixth to the 18th interview. On the other hand, Aurini, Heath, and Howells (2016:58) are of the view that data saturation in a qualitative study can be achieved with no more than 50 in-depth interviews. However, Meyrick (2006:805) did not stipulate the number but stated that the "researcher should gather enough data to allow the reader to confirm the generation of categories and conclusions and the regularity of the processes used." In the current study, data saturation was reached after the 18th interview and further confirmed by an independent coder (Addendum B). In order to ensure that data saturation has been reached beyond any doubt, the researcher conducted four more interviews.

The following criteria were employed for selecting a sample:

- **Cohabiting individuals between ages 25 and 35**

Generally speaking, cohabitation is prevalent among young adults aged 25 to 34 (Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012:47). According to Erik Erikson's Stages of Human Development, this age cohort falls within the intimacy versus isolation stage, and is characterised by a quest for intimacy and the establishment of a sexual relationship (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:304). This theory posits that human beings experience eight separate stages in life. During the intimacy versus isolation stage, most people make decisions about how they want to live their adult years such as whether to marry or stay single. Levinson (cited by Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:425) divided the stage of young adulthood into different age groups, namely from ages 17 to 22 – this stage is characterised by leaving the family home and becoming independent. From

ages 22 to 28, people enter into a transitional phase which involves entering the adult world. At age 30, people focus on making a decision on how to structure the remainder of their lives. A settling-down period then occurs from about ages 32 to 40. Young adults whose ages ranged from 22 to 35 participated in this study. It has been observed that South African young people usually complete their post-matric qualification at age 22, and then pursue a career of choice. Such a period is also regarded as the prime family formation years when young adults explore career choices and family formation (Sassler & Miller, 2011:166).

- **Individuals who have been cohabiting for a period of one to five years**

Cohabitation does not appear to be an event which occurs after a single date. It is often non-deliberative and an incremental process, since most couples transition from non-cohabitation to cohabitation before fully realising what is happening (Stanley et al., 2006:505). For instance, the participants in Carmichael and Whittaker's (2007:207) study on [*l*]*iving together in Australia: quantitative insights into complex phenomena* could also not identify with the suggestion that they had made a conscious decision to live together. They said that "there had been no decision".

However, for the purpose of this study, the duration of cohabitation had a bearing on the cohabitees' experiences and insights. Despite being published more than two decades ago, Marklin (cited by Bird, 1994:126) provides a useful description of cohabitation, which specifies a continuous, minimum amount of time that two people must spend together in order to qualify as cohabitees, distinguishing them from those who merely live together from time to time. Cohabitees are those who go to bed together for at least four nights each week for at least three consecutive months (Marklin, cited by Bird, 1994:126). It was largely based on the arguments presented above that the researcher made the decision to only consider as cohabitees people who are living together in the same residence, without any alternative residence where they can move into.

- **Individuals who were able to converse in English, Sepedi, Sesotho and Setswana**

It was important that the participants were able to express themselves in the language that they were comfortable with and that the researcher was able to understand. Qualitative studies are dependent on the participants' ability to describe their subjective understanding of a phenomenon through language (Hood, 2016:165). Furthermore, individuals tend to make sense of their world through language. However, Yin (2011:136) cautions that speaking the same language as the participant can also be a shortcoming if the researcher does not explore the meaning of the unfamiliar terms that the participant may use, and only presume to know their meaning.

Snowball and purposive sampling were used in combination as the former is also referred to as "chain referral sampling" and considered another type of purposive sampling (Mack et al., 2005:05). In this method, participants with whom contact has already been made, use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:795). In snowball sampling, participants are basically identified by word of mouth and referrals from other participants (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:231). Although this sampling method has largely been criticised for only including those within a connected network of individuals (Sadler, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2010:369), it turned out to be the most effective way to identify participants in the current study, considering that some cohabitees were discreet about divulging their living arrangements. Seventeen participants were identified through this method, and the remaining four through announcements on various radio stations. The main advantage of this method is that it helped the researcher reach potential participants who were difficult to identify and contact as some were underserved, vulnerable, or stigmatised (Gilbert, 2008:180). In many instances, cohabitees are still stigmatised and they are often subjected to exclusion from community activities (Shapiro & Keyes, 2008:332; Chinwuba, 2010:625; Mkhwanazi, 2010:107; Doyle & Molix, 2014:103; Doyle & Molix, 2015:1365).

3.2.4 Preparing participants for data collection

Data gathering requires researchers to think about the people from whom they wish to obtain information, and how to appeal to these individuals (Feldman, Bell & Berger, 2003:3). Data gathering can only commence once approval of the research proposal by the Departmental Ethics Research Committee has been obtained. This committee comprised a group of independent experts whose responsibility it is to ensure that the rights and wellbeing of participants in research are protected, and that the study is carried out in an ethical manner. The ethics committee cautions researchers against predictable pitfalls, which have to be addressed timeously.

It was a big challenge to the researcher to recruit individuals to participate in the study, for a number of reasons. The majority of the individuals who did not participate in the study cited their fear of being stigmatised as the main deterrent, despite the researcher's repeated assurance to the contrary. Recruiting potential participants who were willing to volunteer their time and stories with no expectation of any remuneration or immediate personal benefits posed a challenge (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:231). Moreover, two of the participants expressed their reservations regarding the use of an audio-recorder. After a detailed explanation for not compensating participants as well as the use of the audio-tape, some participants agreed to participate.

The researcher used various methods to reach potential participants. Fliers containing information about the study and the details of the researcher were posted at strategic places at institutions of higher learning, notably UNISA (cf. Addendum C). Permission to approach UNISA staff members was duly requested and subsequently granted (cf. Addendum D)

The researcher approached local welfare organisations that render services to cohabiting couples (cf. Addendum E). However, Feldman et al. (2003:3) caution that endorsement by the authorities can either encourage people within the organisation to open their doors, or it can close doors. Unfortunately, no individuals came forward to express an interest in the study.

The researcher also approached local and national radio stations: Mams FM, Tshwane FM, Radio 2000, and Radio 702 (cf. Addendum F) with the request to broadcast information about the forthcoming study in order to recruit potential participants. The

researcher was interviewed live on the breakfast shows of three radio stations to appeal directly to the listeners. It was a relief when three participants eventually came forward as a result of this initiative. The researcher further used social media such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook to reach potential participants. Although the online platforms created publicity around the study, no suitable potential participants responded. It was only by word of mouth that 18 participants were eventually contacted.

3.2.5 Method used for data collection

Qualitative data collection includes setting boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured and semi-structured interviews, observation, documents, focus group discussions, visual materials, and establishing protocol for recording information (Creswell, 2009:185). Semi-structured interviews with the aid of open-ended questions contained in an interview-guide were used to collect data. An interview guide is a list of questions or a memory aide used during an interview (Hennik et al., 2011:112). Semi-structured interviews are based on a predefined set of broad questions and themes (Nicholls, 2009:640). Asking questions in a flexible manner afforded the researcher an opportunity to make use of follow-up probes and prompts to explore the topics in more detail and to elicit thick descriptions of the participants' experiences (Gibson & Brown, 2009:86; Pfeffer, 2010:169; Hennik et al., 2011:116). The researcher asked all the participants the same questions in the same manner (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:43). Although semi-structured interviews in a qualitative study share qualities similar to those in clinical interviews such as rapport building, openness, and shared understanding, the sole intention of the semi-structured interview is to gather information and facts (Rosetto, 2014:483).

The interviews were conducted in the participants' natural settings, which enabled the researcher to develop rapport with these individuals in order to facilitate a shared connection to their actual experiences (Creswell, 2016:6). Generally, qualitative data collection does not involve manipulation of human lives but studies human experiences through personal narratives (Hayhow & Steward, 2006:476; Drisko, 2016:310). In the current study, the researcher personally conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with the participants. However, for practical reasons, three of the 21 interviews were conducted by a colleague on behalf of the researcher. The

person is equally competent in qualitative research interviews as she occupies a senior academic position in an institution of higher learning. The researcher also familiarised her with the interview guide before she conducted the interviews.

The interview guide consists of two sets of questions: to elicit the participants' biographical details; and their responses on their experiences in cohabitation (cf. Addendum A). All the interviews were audio-taped after permission was sought from the participants to do so and to take notes to capture nonverbal information. The researcher was cautious not to take too many notes and thereby disrupt the participants' storytelling (Yin, 2011:156). In preparation for the interviews, the researcher ensured that the recording equipment was in good working order, and he brought a back-up audio-recorder and batteries. The researcher also familiarised himself with the informed consent document in order to address any questions the participants may have, such as the content of the consent form, the terminology used, whom to contact for further information, and the purpose of the research (Mack et al., 2005:32).

During the initial contact with the potential participants, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and any possible value of the study, should they agree to participate. It was also important for the researcher to inform the potential participants how he got to know about them and the reason for considering them. Since all the interviews were audio-taped it was also important that they were informed about it and their consent to the recording obtained. Some of the issues which were discussed during the first meeting included the items that they would be expected to share their views on. The venue for each interview was negotiated with each participant.

The researcher's interviewing skills have an important influence on the richness of the information that the participants provide (Mack et al., 2005:38). During the interviews, the researcher encouraged participants to elaborate on their answers without expressing his approval, disapproval, judgement, or bias. He kept track of the questions yet allowed the conversations to develop naturally (Gibson & Brown, 2009:86). The researcher was careful not to express or show any verbal or nonverbal approval or disapproval of the views expressed by the participants (Whittaker, 2012:39).

The researcher employed the following interviewing skills:

Listening skills: According to Yin (2011:27), most of the qualitative data comes from good listening. Therefore, listening in qualitative research requires "intensive listening and systematic effort to really hear and understand what the participant is saying" (Yin, 2011:26). As such, listening goes beyond just the sense of hearing. Hence, during the interviews the researcher did not only listen to the words spoken by participants but also paid attention to their nonverbal behaviour such as body behaviour, facial expressions, and voice-related behaviour.

Types of qualitative interview questions: In addition to applying good listening skills, the researcher derived much of the research data from asking appropriate questions. Yin (2011:27) posits that if researchers do not ask good questions they are more likely to miss critical information. In the current study, the researcher applied a wide range of interview questions: introductory questions, follow-up questions, probing questions, specifying questions, and structuring questions (Whittaker, 2012:43). Introductory questions such as *please share with me the background of your relationship that led to cohabitation* encouraged participants to respond in an open manner, sharing rich descriptive accounts of their experiences. Follow-up questions prompted participants to expand on their narratives, whereas probing questions enabled the researcher to elicit further information without directing a participant's response. Semi-structured questions were useful in exhausting a particular topic before moving on to the next.

Key to keeping a conversation going is for the researcher to be conversant with and to have mastered the use of probes and follow-up questions such as *uh-huh, say more* (Yin, 2011:134). However, this kind of follow-up question does not imply that the researcher is a mere passive participant; *uh-huh* or *say more* prompt the participant to divulge more detailed information. The researcher was an active and supportive listener by probing and encouraging in-depth discussion until the topic was exhausted. During the interviews, the researcher asked open-ended questions; asked one question at a time; avoided asking leading questions; and, where necessary, asked follow-up questions to prompt participants to elucidate aspects not mentioned in their

responses to the original question. In accordance with the suggestion expressed by Gibson and Brown (2009:88), the researcher was able to direct the conversation around the topics included in the interview guide without necessarily disrupting the natural flow of the conversation. The researcher conducted 20 face-to-face, semi-structured interviews at venues convenient to the participants as well as one telephonic interview with each. All the interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes to an hour. At the beginning of each interview, the participants read through the first section pertaining to their biographical profile.

Maintaining rapport: The researcher deemed it important to establish rapport with the participants so that they could feel relaxed when sharing their experiences honestly (Elmir, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011:13). The researcher was sensitive to and mindful of the participants' emotional needs by allowing them adequate time to respond fully to the open-ended questions. The researcher also avoided *why* questions, which could put participants on the defensive or even offended them (Yin, 2011:138; Doody & Nooman, 2013:13).

The following aspects were included in the questions in order to compile the biographical data of each participant**:**

- Age
- Gender
- Cultural affiliation
- Employment status
- Duration of the relationship

The following questions were used to elicit more in-depth information from the participants on cohabitation in the context of changing family practices as well as the lessons for social work intervention:

- Please share with me the background of your relationship that led to cohabitation. (Prompts: planned, discussed, it just happened).
- Please share with me how you experience your relationship with your partner. OR: Tell me about your relationship with your partner since cohabitation. (Prompts: commitment, support, sharing of responsibilities, communication, benefits, challenges and how they resolve them).
- Please share with me your immediate family's view of your cohabitation.

- Please share with me your friends' and/or colleagues' views of your relationship.

- Please share with me your community's view of your relationship.

- Kindly share with me if you consulted with any social worker or family/couple therapist in relation to your relationship.

- Share with me the kind of professional assistance you require.

3.2.6 Pilot testing

Pilot testing refers to a mini-version of a full scale study to pre-test a particular research data-collection instrument such as an interview guide (Thabane, Ma, Chu, Cheng, Ismaila, Rios, Robson, Thabane, Giangregorio & Goldsmith, 2010:1; Kim, 2011:191; Gumbo, 2014:387; Hazzi & Maldon, 2015:53). Since it is often difficult for researchers to anticipate how the participants will interpret the questions included in the interview guide, it is important that it should be pilot tested (Hennik et al., 2011:120). Strydom (2005:205) cautions researchers against commencing with the main study unless they are confident that their chosen procedures are suitable, valid, reliable, and free from errors.

The purpose of a pilot test in this research was to assess various components of the interview guide, namely content validity (Matuska, 2011:222), effectiveness (Hennink-Kaminski, Willoughby & McMahan, 2014:37), relevance, and reliability (Walker, 2015:871), usability, applicability (Wallace, 2010:442), and adequacy (Nunes, Martins, Zhou, Alajamy & Al-Mamari, 2014:4). It gave an indication of the participants' responses to the research questions, and whether the questions were formulated at the participants' level of comprehension (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:152).

In line with the assertion that pilot testing should be carried out with individuals who share the same characteristics as those who have been targeted for the main study (Strydom, 2005:206; Turner, 2010:757; Thabane et al., 2010:5; Hennik et al., 2011:120), the researcher also pilot tested the interview guide with two participants who met the criteria (cf. item 1.6 of this chapter). The researcher disclosed the purpose of the pilot test beforehand (Thabane et al., 2010:6) (cf. Addendum G). During these interviews, the two participants were requested to share their impressions of the

questions in terms of their usability, format, content, duration, and perceived difficulties (Costa, Mullan, Kothe & Butow, 2010:1249: Hennik et al., 2011:120). The participants were also requested to share their experiences based on appropriateness, relevance, clarity of the questions, and the clarity of the wording to eliminate any ambiguity (Bing-Jonsson, Bjørk, Hofoss, Kirkevold & Foss, 2013:290).

After obtaining informed consent from the two individuals, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed (cf. Addendum G). Upon analysis of the data as well as the feedback provided by the participants, the researcher effected minor modifications to the items to be included in the interview guide (Stewart, Thrasher, Goldberg & Shea, 2012:1006).

Pilot testing assisted the researcher in detecting flaws or weaknesses within the interview design, and making the necessary adjustments and modifications in the main study (Turner, 2010:757; Kim, 2011:193). The researcher established that both participants needed clarity on the concept *acceptance*, which they felt was too suggestive. The word acceptance was replaced with the word *view*, which was deemed open to interpretation. One participant also shared some concerns with the tone of the questions by using the words *tell me* in the attempt to elicit information. The researcher therefore rephrased the question by requesting the participants to *share* instead of *telling*. Since the pilot test was not intended to produce results, the data gathered from the two interviews was not included in the data gathered in the main study (Kim, 2011:192).

The initial version of the interview guide was formulated as follows:

The following issues were included in the questions in order to compile the biographical data of the participants:

- Age
- Gender
- Racial classification
- Cultural affiliation
- Employment status
- Duration of the relationship

The following questions were used to elicit more in-depth information from the participants on cohabitation in the context of changing family practices as well as lessons for social work intervention:

- Tell me how it came about that you decided to cohabit? (Prompts: planned, discussed, it just happened).

- Share with me how you experience your relationship with your partner.
  OR: Tell me about your relationship with your partner. (Prompts: commitment, support, sharing of responsibilities, communication, benefits, challenges, involvement of professionals).

- Tell me about your cohabitation and your immediate family's acceptance thereof.

- Share with me how you would describe your relationship with your partner and that of friends and colleagues.

- Share with me the community's acceptance of your relationship with your partner.

- Share with me the kind of professional assistance you require. (Prompts: whether and how the cohabitees would like to be assisted).

Probing then provided the information on support systems required as well as lessons to be learned, which would assist social workers with regard to interventions to be conducted in working with cohabitees.

Following the feedback from the pilot test, it was decided that the biographical questions should remain unchanged. However, the wording of the topic-related questions was modified as follows:

- Please share me with me the background of your relationship that led to cohabitation. (Prompts: planned, discussed, it just happened).

- Share with me how you experience your relationship with your partner.
  OR: Tell me about your relationship with your partner since cohabitation.
  (Prompts: commitment, support, sharing of responsibilities, communication, benefits, challenges, and how they resolve them).

- Please share with me your immediate family's view of your cohabitation.

- Please share with me your friends and/or colleagues' views of your relationship.

- Please share with me your community's view of your relationship.

- Kindly share with me if you consulted with any social worker or family/couple therapist in relation to your relationship.

- Share with me the kind of professional assistance you require.
  (Prompts: whether and how the cohabitees would like to be assisted).

Probing then provided the information on the support systems required as well as lessons to be learned to assist social workers with regard to interventions to be conducted in working with cohabitees.

3.2.7 Method of data analysis

Data analysis in a qualitative study refers to the process of organising and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007:564). This process was not applied independently from the data-collection process since the researcher commenced with it as soon as he had conducted the first interview (Sano et al., 2012:950; Sniezek, 2013:5; Makusha & Richter, 2015:4). However, it was a complex, time-consuming, labour-intensive, and continuous back-and-forth process due to the sheer volume of information which the researcher had to make sense of (Charlesworth & Foëx, 2016:151).

There are multitudes of qualitative data-analysis strategies (Holland & Rees, 2010:93; Sassler & Miller, 2011:166). Certain researchers employ generic data-analysis techniques, whereas others resort to less structured and more creative approaches

(Moule & Goodman, 2014:137). In the current study, the researcher followed the eight steps of qualitative data analysis proposed by Tesch (cited by Creswell, 2009:186):

- The 21 audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. The researcher thereafter read through each transcript in its entirety to elicit a general impression of the interview. He read through the entire transcripts carefully, making notes of ideas as they came to mind. The process further familiarised the researcher with the data (Mathews & Ross, 2010:322) as the interviews were conducted over a period of 18 months. This process demanded of the researcher to make an accurate representation of the participants' voices since even a simple mistake during transcription can inadvertently alter the meaning of a phrase (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:231; Barnsley, 2016:113). Additionally, the researcher took note of the language, idioms, slang, and jargon used by the participants as much of cultural and personal meaning may be lost if careful consideration is not applied (Tappen, 2011:359). Therefore, the researcher remained true to the data and ensured that the transcripts reflected accurately what was expressed by the participants (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:231). This process was lengthy and complex with myriad back-and-forth movements, when listening to the audio-recordings. Subsequent to the transcriptions, the researcher reviewed each transcript to ensure accuracy between the transcript and the audio-recording. Transcribing did not entail simply writing down what the participants said, but it also involved making analytic judgments about what to include in the findings as well as the best way of representing the participants' experiences (Gibson & Brown, 2009:109).
- The researcher interrogated one transcribed interview randomly and asked himself, *what is the underlying meaning that it is conveying?* This process entails exploring the data for main ideas and themes by ascertaining the main idea behind the participants' narratives (Saldana, 2015:34)
- After going through several interviews, the researcher made a list of all the topics, and clustered similar topics together. He then divided these topics into columns that were arranged as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers. In line with open-coding principles, no prior themes were imposed on the data (Chaney, 2011:521; Lesch & Furphy, 2013:7; Sniezek, 2013:24). Instead, the

researcher carried out this process by organising data according to different themes, ideas, topics, and common patterns of behaviour (Sassler & Miller, 2011:166; Lapan et al., 2012:98). For example, the participants were requested to share the circumstances that led to the decision to cohabit. Several reasons were put forward, and the participants' responses were grouped into the following subthemes: the next step in the relationship; indication of commitment; plans to eventually get married; cohabitation as an alternative to marriage; cohabiting for convenience; sliding into cohabitation.

- Based on the list of topics, the researcher returned to the original data and abbreviated the topics in code form adjacent to the appropriate segments of the text.

- The researcher established the most descriptive wording for topics and applied them to themes, subthemes, and categories.

- The researcher made a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetised these codes.

- The researcher assembled the data material belonging to each theme or category in one place, and performed a preliminary analysis.

- The resercaher was satisfied with the themes, subthemes, categories and subcategories and thereafter proceeded with compiling the report.

- The researcher, where necessary, recoded the data.

3.2.8 Method of data verification

Any research undertaking should be subjected to rigorous scrutiny to ensure that the findings are reflected factually and truthfully (Bulpit & Martin, 2010:7). Scholars across social science disciplines always have to describe in explicit terms a good, valid, and trustworthy qualitative study (Rolfe, 2006:304). Traditionally, trustworthiness draws from the natural and experimental sciences for affirmation, and it is through this lens that the validity of a qualitative study is judged (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:39). Critics of qualitative research often question whether the findings are not just the researcher's own subjective opinions. Hence, quantitative articles which contain statistical findings are afforded more prominence (Charlesworth & Foëx, 2016:146). However, qualitative research confronts the conventional evaluation of research quality, generally referred to as validity in research terms by asserting that there is no universally accepted notion

of objective truth, but that truth is socially constructed (Tracy, 2010:838). Moreover, Rolfe (2006:304) asserts that qualitative analysis can be as reliable and valid as any analysis, provided there is a systematic, well-documented, careful, procedure. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is not concerned with comparing or generalising results (Hayhow & Stewart, 2006:479). Instead, the primary concern is the descriptive detailing and capturing of the differences in naturalistic settings.

Due to the diverse nature and purpose of quantitative and qualitative traditions, some authors argue that there should be a different language that is consistent with qualitative research (Agar, cited by Krefting, 1991:214; Chen, 2016:73). Lincon and Guba (1985) suggested alternative concepts to address these concerns (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:39). The Guba model (Krefting, 1991:215) for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative data was applied in this study. Although this module was conceptualised more than three decades ago, its relevance is still valid today in the context of this study (Holland & Rees, 2010:96). The model is based on four aspects of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

3.2.8.1 Credibility

Within the qualitative realm, the term *credibility* was suggested to replace *validity*, which is common in quantitate studies. Validity is the scientific concept which describes the "everyday notion of truth," and denotes the extent to which the findings of the study are true and accurate (Holland & Rees, 2010:96; Schmidt & Brown, 2015:236). Credibility allows others to recognise the experiences contained in the study through the interpretation of participants' experiences (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011:152). It attempts to answer the question, *how congruent are the findings with reality?* (Shenton, 2003:64).

To readers, these findings and the data presented must be a true representation of participants' views and experiences (Moule & Goodman, 2014:191). However, research can never claim truth to be indisputable, but validity in research is closely related to the truth (Gomm, 2008:12). The truth value evaluates how confident the researcher is with the validity of the findings based on the research design, participants, and the context in which the study was undertaken (Krefting, 1991:215). The researcher is confident that the findings of this study are a true reflection of the

experiences of the participants. However, it should be borne in mind that it was not the purpose of this research to seek objective truth, but to acknowledge various truths or multiple realities (Correa, 2010:209; Tracy, 2010:838).

The researcher applied the principle of triangulation by consulting with various sources such as individuals and organisations that are knowledgeable about cohabitation and theoretical frameworks (cf. Chapter 2) to ensure credibility. The researcher also achieved credibility by providing a thick and detailed description of the participants' experiences, which will hopefully enable readers to come to their own conclusions about cohabitation (Tracy, 2010:843). The researcher also employed the member-checking method to establish the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. Member checking refers to the method of, where applicable, reverting to the participants with the transcripts to ensure that the researcher had captured their views correctly (Holland & Rees, 2016:148; Charlesworth & Foëx, 2016:148). In the current study, the researcher had to revert to one participant in particular to seek clarity on some of the views he expressed in vernacular dialogue.

The findings were also validated though the use of an independent coder who carried out data analysis independently from the researcher. Thereafter, a joint discussion between the independent coder, and the researcher in consultation with the supervisor was conducted to compare and consolidate the themes, sub-themes and categories which emanated from the data. Three themes, 17 subthemes, and 11 categories emanated from the findings.

3.2.8.2 Transferability

Applicability seeks to determine the extent to which the findings of a particular study are applicable in other contexts and settings (Shenton, 2003:69). However, transferability is not seen as relevant since qualitative research is not concerned with comparing or generalising results (Hayhow & Stewart, 2006:479). Therefore, the element of transferability was not applicable in this study as the aim was to provide a representation and not a reproduction of reality and the multiple perspectives that exist.

3.2.8.3 Dependability

According to Lincon and Guba (cited by Tracy, 2010:838), a good qualitative research is dependable. Dependability is concerned with whether the same results would be obtained if the study is replicated in a different setting or context. In order to ensure that the findings presented were an accurate reflection of the participants' experiences, the researcher provided a rich and detailed description of the research methodology employed in the study. In addition, the researcher employed an independent coder to analyse the collected data independently.

3.2.8.4 Conformability

Conformability seeks to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the views and responses of participants, and are not influenced by the researcher's personal biases or prejudices (Shenton, 2003:72). The Guba model (cited in Krefting, 1991:215) proposed that neutrality can be achieved through conformability, which captures the traditional concept of objectivity. Qualitative research assumes that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study; conformability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. The researcher compared his findings to literature of a contradictory nature to strengthen his own view of conformability (Meyrick, 2006:805).

During data collection and analysis, the researcher kept a journal to record his own assumptions, ideas, and feelings which had the potential to influence the findings (cf. item 3.11 on reflexivity and bracketing). To ensure conformability, researchers should use self-reflection to explore personal feelings and experiences to minimise their personal biases (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:235). The researcher frequently consulted with his promoter, who is an expert in research methodology and family studies.

3.2.9 Reflexivity and bracketing

Researchers are influenced by their personal and professional experiences and identities in designing and implementing studies (Trainor & Graue, 2014:271). Hence, there is a need for "researchers to constantly locate and relocate themselves within their work and to remain in dialogue with research practice, participants and methodologies through the principle of reflexivity" (Bott, 2010:160). Within qualitative research, reflexivity is an important response to complexity, which emanates from the

presence of the researcher within and through the research (Daley, 2010:248; Berger, 2015:219). Reflexivity is generally the process of the researcher' personal and academic reflection on lived experiences, views, and biases which may compromise the interpretation of the participants' narratives (Hennik et al., 2011:20; Saldana, 2015:8). This process requires researchers to have an "internal dialogue" (Caetano, 2014:62), and continuously reflect on their own assumptions throughout the course of the research (Berger, 2015:219; Rae & Green, 2016:2).

The researcher also applied bracketing, which is closely related to reflexivity. Bracketing is an effort to achieve a state of neutrality by suspending the researcher's prior understanding or preconception of cohabitation (Koch et al., 2014:139). The researcher achieved this by constantly interacting with his supervisor to develop the capacity to be reflexive and to identify any stereotypical assumptions on his part (Nilson, 2016:1). For instance, with the assistance of his supervisor the researcher was able to acknowledge that he was inclined to become emotionally involved and stressed when analysing data articulated by participants who were pro-cohabitation. Through self-reflection and continuously asking himself the question, *who am I in this context* the researcher further explored his personal cultural and religious norms regarding family formation, with particular reference to cohabitation. The researcher's constant awareness of his personal views and perceptions regarding cohabitation helped him exercise restraint during the interviews.

3.2.10 Conclusion
A qualitative research approach was applied to develop an in-depth understanding of cohabitation in the context of changing family patterns, and the lessons to be learned and applied by social workers. A detailed explanation of the research methodology and techniques applied is presented. These descriptions reveal the empirical process followed, and the justification for the choices made to demonstrate the authenticity of the study. The qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate for the goal of this study due to its inherent ability to accentuate the participants' experiences in cohabiting relationships. The participants' accounts of their experiences are presented in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS ON CIRCUMSTANCES PRECEEDING COHABITATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

4.1 Introduction

Due to the volume of data, the presentation of the findings is delineated into three chapters. This chapter focuses on the profiles of the participants as well as theme 1 of the findings, namely participants' descriptions of their circumstances preceding cohabitation. Supporting excerpts from transcripts were subjected to a thorough literature control. The extracts are contrasted with existing literature to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2003:196). The other two themes are presented in chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

4.2 Biographical profiles of the participants

This section presents the biographical profiles of the participants who met the criteria of inclusion as set out in chapter 3. Twenty-one participants were interviewed. The biographical data (as presented in table 4.1) provides information of each participant's gender, age, and ethnic affiliation, duration of the relationship, employment status and race. In order to ensure anonymity, alphabets were assigned to participants.

Table 4.1: Biographical profile of the participants

Participant	Gender F=Female M=Male	Age	Racial and ethnic affiliation		Duration of the relationship	Employment
A	Fa[3]	35	African	Motswana	3 years	Unemployed
B	Fb	35	African	Motswana	3 years	General Assistant
C	F	34	African	Motswana	7 years	General Assistant
D	F	33	African	Motswana	3 years	General Assistant
E	Fa	32	African	Mopedi	5 years	Artisan

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[3] In order to avoid confusion regarding participants who share similar age and gender, such participants are allocated alphabets to differentiate them.

F	Fb	32	African	Motswana	6 years	Social Services
G	Ma	32	African	Motswana	2 years	Admin Clerk
H	Mb	32	African	Motswana	10 years	Lecturer
I	M	31	African	UmXhosa	9 years	Marketing
J	F	31	African	Motswana	1year, 3 months	Social Services
K	Fa	30	African	UmXhosa	4 years, 6 months	Lecturer
L	Fb	30	African	Motswana	5 years	Volunteer
M	Fa	29	African	Mopedi	7 years	Social Services
N	Fb	29	African	UmZulu	3 years	Social Services
O	Fa	28	White	English	7 years	Producer
P	Fb	28	African	Motswana	3 years	General Worker
Q	M	28	White	Afrikaans	4 years 9 months	Technician
R	Fa	27	White	English	5 years	Marketing
S	Fb	27	African	Motswana	4 years	Social Services
T	F	26	African	Motswana	4 years	General Assistant
U	F	25	African	Mopedi	4years	Auditor

4.2.1 Race and ethnicity of participants

Race and ethnicity are important social categories that structure individuals' identities, histories, and cultural roots (Landale, Schoen & Daniels, 2010:448). It has been observed that some authors tend to treat African communities as homogenous groups thus obfuscating the racial and ethnic dynamics within the Black population (Bosch, 2014:903). Africans in South Africa comprise nine officially recognised ethnic groups namely, amaSwati, amaZulu, Bapedi, Basotho, Batswana, Ndebele, Tsonga, Venda, and Xhosa. The diverse biographical composition of the participants in the study enhances the knowledge on experiences of cohabitees across different ethical and racial groups (Kenyon, Boulle, Badri & Asselman, 2010:40). Although four racial groups are officially recognised in South Africa, only Africans and Whites participated in the study. Despite the researcher's efforts to reach out to Indians and Coloured communities on radio and social media, no individuals from these two racial groups expressed interest in the study. Reasons for their non-participation are unknown.

The racial and ethnic profiles of the participants reflect that the majority of the participants are from the Tswana ethnic group. There is a view held by some authors that cohabitation is becoming more prevalent amongst Africans (Schoen et al., 2009:384; Moore & Govender, 2013: 624). For instance, cohabitation was highly stigmatised amongst the Zulus but there is currently evidence of attitudinal change in favour of cohabitation (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:292). Similarly, marriage was universal amongst the traditional Tswana community whilst cohabitation was rare (Mokomane, 2005:62). However, twelve of the twenty-one participants identified themselves as Tswanas. This number is attributed to the geographical location of the participants which is Hammanskraal, near Pretoria, which is predominately inhabited by the Tswana speaking people.

4.2.2 Gender distribution of the participants

Gender is a social institution on its own with recurring social patterns (Miller & Sassler, 2012:428) and its inclusion in the study is crucial. Cohabitation seems to be more prevalent among young women within the 25-35 age cohorts. Several reasons are advanced for women to cohabit. First, for some African women, marriage remains an unattainable dream due to the fact the payment of *magadi* by their partners has not occurred (Posel et al., 2011:104; Chaney & Fairfax, 2012:24). In cases where partners choose to enter into cohabitation, men have traditionally, men control the progression of cohabitation to marriage as they propose marriage to women who have to patiently wait for the proposal (Stavrova, Fetchenhauer & Schlösser, 2012:1063). For these women cohabitation, therefore, become a prolonged state of the relationship until their partners decide to propose marriage (Moore & Govender, 2013:625).

Second, women are more likely to enter into cohabitation as they often portray it as one way in which they can prioritise their career ambitions without being hampered by the traditional demands of being a wife (Miller & Sassler, 2012:427). A career may shift an individuals' preference towards work and leisure, rather than a commitment to family life (Thomson & Bernhardt, 2010:7). Third, women are more likely to enter into cohabitation as an economic survival strategy. This is attributed to the fact that women who have been socialised to be subservient to males may have lower levels of education and less access to financial means (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2006:565). These women depend on cohabiting men for accommodation and other necessities

such as money (Lailulo, Susuman & Blignaut, 2016:2). Last, young women are likely to opt for cohabitation due to social stigma and discrimination which emanate from the basic assumptions of the life course perspective that being single is more or less acceptable at certain stages in life (Sharp & Ganong, 2011:958).

Considering that women within the 20 to 45 age cohort are traditionally expected to be married (Posel et al., 2011:104), some may enter into cohabitation to advance their marital aspirations (Vespa, 2014:216). In some instances, such women are likely to remain in less satisfying cohabiting relationships due to their lower educational achievement (Shulman & Connolly, 2013:35). However, as women enter their late thirties (35 and above) they become content with their single status (Sharp & Ganong, 2011:958) and are more likely to dissolve their cohabiting relationships (Landale et al., 2010:466). On the other hand, men focus on their personal development and gratification; hence they prefer cohabitation until they have achieved their career ambitions and are less likely to marry their cohabiting partners as they may not be committed to that person (Chaney & Fairfax, 2012:24).

4.2.3 Age distribution of the participants

Age is an important predictor of cohabitation (Moore & Govender, 2013:633); hence, it is included in the biographical profiles of participants. Individuals between ages 25 and 35 were eligible to participate in the study. The biographical profile of the participants reveals that ten participants were between ages 25 and 30 at the time of the interviews and eleven were between ages 31 and 35. The age distribution of the participants is consistent with the assertion that cohabitation is a common family formation amongst younger cohorts between ages 25 and 35 (Prokos & Keene, 2010:944; James & Daly, 2012:396; Vespa, 2014:208). In South Africa, cohabitation is prevalent among those who are between 20 and 40 years (Moore & Govender, 2013:624). Although participants among older cohorts seem to constitute a smaller number of the sample, its prevalence is still notable (Smock, Casper & Wyse, 2008:16; Vespa, 2014:213). Only two participants who were 35 years old at the time of the interviews.

Twelve of the 21 participants were above the age of 30 years in this study; people from this age group fall within the youth category in the South African context. There

is however no policy consensus on what constitutes youth. According to White Paper on Social Welfare (1997), young person is defined as a woman or man aged between 16 to 30 years, whilst National Youth Act of 1996 describes youth as persons in the age group 14 to 34 years. Some organisations like African National Congress Youth league (ANCYL) defines youth as a person between the age of 14 and 35 years. The United Nations definition of youth includes people between 15 and 24 years of age (United Nations, 1992).

There is a notable shift of attitude towards family formation among young people. In developed countries such as Canada (Shulman & Connolly, 2013:27), young people delay marriage well into their 20s and early 30s (Kefalas et al., 2011:848; Willoughby et al., 2013:2; Shulman & Connolly, 2013:27). During this phase of life, called *emerging adulthood* (Jamison & Ganong, 2010:536; Kefalas et al., 2011:846; Yeung & Shu, 2013:149), young people are likely to face with economic and social uncertainties as they have to make decisions about their careers (Shulman & Connolly, 2013:31).

Emerging adulthood is a distinct phase in young people' lives to lay the foundation for their future (Carroll, Badger, Barry & Madsen, 2007:221). Therefore, cohabitation presents them with an opportunity to further explore love and commitment (Willoughby et al., 2011:398). It has been noted that long-term commitment is not common during emerging adulthood (Shulman & Connolly, 2013:27) as people in this phase do not consider themselves adults but instead believe that they are somewhere between adolescence and adulthood (Eliason et al., 2015:209). During this developmental phase young people are still experimenting with new behaviour and values (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2008:3). However, the researcher has noted that age is an important factor in determining the progression of cohabitation into marriage for African women who are older than 30 years. Some of them are often pressurised by their families and communities to get married. In turn, such pressure puts strain on their relationships. Some even attempt to influence their partners to marry them, a risky move which may spell an end to the relationship.

4.2.4 Duration of the participants' relationships

Part of the criteria for inclusion in the study was that cohabitees should have stayed together for a period of twelve months or more. Surprisingly, the participants were unable to say the exact commencement date of cohabitation since it is not an event easily marked by a single date (Manning & Smock, 2005:994). The participants in the recounted different defining moments or the exact date that on which their relationship began. Some participants recalled the month or year during which they started living with their partners.

The demographic profiles of the participants reveals that 15 of the 21 participants have been involved in cohabitation for a year to five years and for the remaining others the duration ranged between five and ten years. The findings are inconsistent with the widely-held view that cohabitation is commonly short-lived (Mukhopadhyay, 2008:112; Steuber & Paik, 2014:1155). Previous studies on the life span of cohabitation posit that the majority of cohabiting relationships are likely to end in marriage, or dissolution, within 10 years (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008:2; Copen, Daniels & Mosher, 2013:4). The short lifespan is largely ascribed to the relative unstable family formation (Qu, Weston & De Vaus, 2009:587; Mukhopadhyay, 2008:112). However, some authors have noted an increased lengthening of cohabitation across all population groups in the United States of America (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008:7). In South Africa, the inability of young men to raise money for *magadi* seems to be the main contributing factor towards prolonged cohabiting relationships (Madhavan, Richter & Morris, 2014:3).

4.2.5 Employment status of the participants

With the exception of one, all the participants were employed at the time of the interviews. The participants' employment status resonates with the trend that cohabitation is more common amongst individuals who are employed (Haldane, Mincy & Miller, 2010:1198). The majority of the participants in this study were women, thus giving credence to Gustafsson and Worku's (2006:13) argument that the advent of democracy in South Africa and the policies promoting the rights and protection of women have increased these women's access to education and the labour market. During the 2011 National Census, 424225 cohabitees reported that they were involved in paid employment compared to 88925 who were still actively seeking employment

(National Census, 2011). Women currently remain single or choose cohabitation (Chaney & Monroe, 2011:657) as they prioritise education and securing employment before considering marriage (Moore & Govender, 2013:628. Cohabitation offers women an opportunity to develop their careers and earn better salaries which will enable them to make a contribution towards rent and the upkeep of their homes. Unfortunately, women are not supposed to contribute towards *magadi* as such an act is regarded as taboo.

4.3 Discussion of findings and literature control

Cohabitation is multifaceted with several dimensions and its complexity requires greater in-depth assessment. Hence, it is important to understand why couples cohabit (Baxter et al., 2010:1511) as well as the language that the cohabitees use to make sense of their choices (Kefalas et al., 2011:857). The findings of this study will contribute towards knowledge and the discourse on cohabitation.

Table 4.2: Themes, subthemes and categories: circumstances preceding cohabitation

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Theme 1: Participants' descriptions of their circumstances preceding cohabitation	1.1: Description of reasons for moving in together	1.1.1: Indication of commitment
		1.1.2: Plans to eventually get married
		1.1.3: Cohabitation as an alternative to marriage
		1.1.4: Cohabiting for convenience
		1.1.5: Sliding into cohabitation
	1.2. Participants' accounts of how their families learned about their cohabiting relationships and their reactions	1.2.1: Participants' different descriptions of how they informed their parents
		1.2.2: Reactions of participants' families upon learning about their relationships

	1.3: Participants' accounts of how they informed their friends and colleagues and their reactions	
	1.4: Participants' accounts of how their communities learned about their cohabitation and their reactions	

4.3.1 Theme 1: Participants' descriptions of their circumstances preceding cohabitation

Individuals' decision to enter into a cohabitation seems to be unclear and complex. There is no single compelling reason for the cohabitees to enter into such relationships. Some participnats consider it as an alternative to marriage or as a precursor to marriage (Booth, Rustenbach & Mchale, 2008:3; Syltevik, 2010:447; Murrow & Shi, 2010:398; Willoughby et al., 2011:4; Posel & Rudwick, 2014:282). On the other hand some individuals use cohabitation as a move of convenience (Stanley, Rhoades & Witton, 2010:251), whereas others use it as a precursor to marriage or a permanent living arrangement equivalent to marriage (Village, Williams & Francis, 2010:400; Sassler & Miller, 2011:172; Willoughby et al., 2011:400).

4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Description of reasons for moving in together

The presentation below is based on the participants' motivation to cohabit which includes an indication of commitment, part of a plan to eventually get married, cohabitation as an alternative to marriage, cohabiting for convenience, and sliding into cohabitation.

4.3.1.1.1 Category 1.1.1: Indication of commitment

Commitment theories broadly categorise commitment into three types, namely, personal commitment (*want* to commit), structural commitment (*have* to commit) and moral commitment (*ought* to commit) (Tang & Curran, 2012:1599). However, within cohabiting relationships, commitment generally communicates the intention to be together (Stanley et al., 2010:245). Such commitment is largely based on inner commitment that does not require any formal affirmation (Vítečková & Chaloupková, 2014:146). Commitment dominated the participants' accounts for cohabiting.

We would not have moved in together if we were not committed to the relationship. It sends a little flag to everyone around us that we are getting more and more serious. (M, 28 years)

Moving together with my partner shows that I am committed to him. It is not just a fling or an affair. (Fa, 28 years)

We were just a boyfriend and girlfriend so when we move in together we committed ourselves to the relationship. (Fa, 32 years)

Some individuals in intimate relationships cohabit when they seek substantive stability in their lives (Drefahl, 2012:464) as cohabitation seems to provide a "stabilizing sense of security, belonging and direction" (Tavares & Aassve, 2013:1600). The findings are inconsistent with the view that cohabitees are generally less committed to each other than married couples (Forrest, 2014:540). Some authors suggest that cohabitees regard themselves as being as committed to their partners as married people (Duncan, Barlow & James, 2005:388). Commitment is therefore a symbol of seriousness about the relationship.

In certain instances where there is lack of communication, couples may enter into cohabitation with different motivations which are not necessarily aligned (Huang et al., 2011:898; Sassler & Miller, 2011:492). The decision or suggestion to cohabit may have more than one meaning to couples (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013:424). One partner may harbour marital aspirations whereas the other may just be content to enjoy the benefits of having a live-in partner without any formal obligations. One female participant interpreted her partner's suggestion to move in together as an expression of commitment whilst another was promised marriage.

For me cohabitation means that he was making a commitment when he said that I want to be with this lady and she is the person that I intend to stay with full time [silent for a while] *for me it meant that he wanted to settle down. My understanding is that there is a difference between people who are dating whilst staying separately and those who are staying together. Hence, I say he wanted to settle down. I just told myself that we will take it from there and see what happens moving forward. Personally I will be happy if we eventually get married.* (Fb, 30 years)

For me it was a sign of commitment. I mean for a man to even say I want to marry you he must have seen that okay, she does this and she can do that. She actually can'...and then he is going to ask me to marry him. (F, 25 years)

These responses confirm the widely held belief that cohabitation carries different implications for women and men, and cohabiting couples may not necessarily agree whether or not they are moving towards marriage (Willoughby et al., 2011:4). The first excerpt demonstrate that the participant equates cohabitation with commitment whilst the second shows a happy woman who has been promised marriage. The danger for such couples is cohabiting without clear communication about the meaning of the transition from separate residence to cohabiting (Rhoades et al., 2009a:101; Vennum et al., 2014:413). However, it should be noted that the marital aspirations are influenced by a number of contextual factors such as culture (Gala & Kapadia, 2014:118). In many African cultures, women are socialised to be marriage oriented and they are encouraged to pursue marriage as the ultimate respectable and "fulfilled" life (Stavrova et al., 2012:1076). Hence, authors posit that women are likely to perceive cohabitation as a long-term commitment and they expect to marry in the future (Kasearu, 2010:7; Huang et al., 2011:898). However, every culture has its definition of womanhood and these beliefs are not universal (Mothoagae, 2015:1).

Additionally, authors acknowledge that, notwithstanding the woman's preference of marriage, it is still the man's preference and prerogative to determine the relationship's progression and to propose (Kasearu, 2010:7; Huang et al., 2011:898). Thus, when men do not share the same marital goals with their partners, a woman's wish for marriage can remain a mere dream (Sassler & Miller, 2011:499). Lack of open talk among cohabitees regarding marital aspirations is likely to cause relational distress when men do not propose marriage as envisaged by women.

Pregnancy in cohabiting relationships may cause cohabitees to rethink their future together, leading either to marriage or dissolution of the relationship (Lichter, Sassler & Turner, 2014:135). In the case of one participant, pregnancy led to wishful thinking about marriage on her part.

> *It* [the partner's decision to cohabit] *showed me commitment on his part and that he was prepared to stay with me. I even fell pregnant at the time and that convinced me we are family. I think we should get married so that we can raise the child properly.* (Fb, 27 years)

The participant's wish following the pregnancy is well founded as it is evident that pregnancy during cohabitation may lead to marriage (Waller & McLanahan, 2005:64). Moreover, within cohabitation childbearing can be understood as a sign of willingness to invest in the relationship (Dush, 2011:588). However, the challenge with this extract is that the issue of having children was not discussed and agreed upon and that the participant seems to be the one who is eager to get married. Reed (2006:1117) cautions that pregnancy or having a child is not necessarily a good reason to tie the knot since people should get married out of love and not as a result of pregnancy.

Cohabitation is an indication of a serious relationship (Jackson, Kleiner, Geist & Cebulko, 2011:633). Couples enter into cohabitation with no immediate intention to marry but to communicate their seriousness about their relationship (Murrow & Shi, 2010:399; Willoughby & Carroll, 2012:1455). Seven of the participants, believe their decision to cohabit marks a significant event in their lives.

> *For me it sort of said things were getting serious. We had taken a step forward in the relationship. I won't say that it's a dream but it's something that we grew up been told even by our parents that we should get married, have kids and have your own house. Personally, I thought fine, we are taking it to another level. We will see what happens. If we get married we will and if we don't then we don't.* (Fa, 30 years)
> *For me it meant that we took the relationship to the next level and we were more serious by signing the rental lease together. It was something more serious.* (Fa, 27 years)
> *We moved in together because we want to go somewhere with this relationship. It shows that we are serious about this relationship. We are both happy with this relationship. Somehow it is sort of next step for us to take.* (M, 28 years)
> *If we are staying under the same roof it means that we are one. We are serious about each other and we are taking our relationship to the next step. At this stage I really can't tell you what the next step is…*[laughing]. (Fb, 35 years)

These responses corroborate those in Sniezek's (2013:8) study, in which participants described cohabitation as an indication of seriousness. Similarly, Syltevik (2010:452) asserts that couples' decision to enter into cohabitation is an indication that they are taking the relationship more seriously. This is often reflected in the duration of and the willingness of the couple to continue with the relationship. Moreover, some authors perceive cohabitation as a natural step couples take to formalising their relationship (Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007:532; Willoughby et al., 2011:4). From the responses it

can also be deduced that couples use cohabitation as a form of courtship to determine if they can justify the next step, engagement or marriage (Baker & Elizabeth, 2013:255). Of concern is that, except for one excerpt, some responses are based on the participants' assumptions that their partners wanted to take the relationship to the next level. Such false hope may lead to disappointment when the expectations are not realised.

4.3.1.1.2 Category 1.1.2: Plans to eventually get married

Some couples enter cohabitation with marital aspirations which should be taken into account when exploring the different outcomes of cohabitation (Qu et al., 2009:587). Nonetheless, whilst cohabitation has become common, literature suggest that it is far from replacing marriage (Hiekel & Castro-Mart´In, 2014:490) as marriage is still viewed by many as essential and desirable (Barlow, Duncan, James & Park, 2005:26). Marriage remains a very strong institution and most cohabitees are strongly oriented towards it (Baker & Elizabeth, 2013:254; Willoughby et al., 2013:2). However, marital aspirations are not universal amongst all cohabitees.

In certain instances, cohabitees take deliberate decisions regarding the timing and process of moving in together, with a clear aim of eventually getting married (Murrow & Shi, 2010:399; Shulman & Connolly, 2013:35). There is a general belief that female cohabitees often enter cohabitation with strong marital aspirations (Kasearu, 2010:7; Chinwuba, 2010:626), as illustrated below:

> It was a conscious decision. We made a conscious decision. It was a progression…a well communicated progression with objectives and the end-goal in mind. The backbone of our moving in together was due to the fact that we were going to get married. Part of the motivation to move in together was the genuine desire to want to live together. I wouldn't have been comfortable moving in with someone who was not going to marry me. We always knew the end…you know I am not saying it was smooth. Our decision was built upon the fact that my partner's intention has always been clear that one day we will get married. (F, 25 years)

This excerpt confirms that some couples enter cohabitation with an expectation to transition the relationship to marriage (Manning et al., 2011:117; Sniezek, 2013:2). The participant's response is similar to those of individuals who do not want to waste time on a relationship that has no future (Guzzo, 2009:183), and they often report that

they would not cohabit if they were not certain of marriage (Roberson, Norona, Fish, Olmstead & Fincham, 2016:3). Hence, the decision to cohabit is in relation to the intention to marry, as is evidenced by Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reason (Murrow & Shi, 2010:399). The Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reason is premised on the assumption that people generally behave in accordance with their intentions (Kasearu, 2010:5). Hence, it is generally believed that couples who enter into cohabitation with a clear intention of marriage in mind are more likely to accomplish their dream.

Cohabitation may also be initiated as a step towards marriage (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2004:1216) as some couples are wary of committing to marriage before taking the time to get to know each other (Reid & Golub, 2015:1241). Two participants regarded cohabitation as a preferred step towards marriage.

> *For me it was a big step in our relationship before we eventually get married. It provides us with the opportunity to know each other better. We agreed that if we stay together we will have time to know each better. In fact he is the one who suggested that we move in together.* (F, 31 years)

This extract portrays cohabitation as a trial marriage (Kasearu, 2010:4) and a legitimate way to marriage (Ogland & Hinojosa, 2012:2). Similarly, some authors contend that couples may choose cohabitation to assess compatibility with a partner (Phillips & Sweeney, 2005:297) or to find out if their partner may change for the worse or exhibit a different image than projected before cohabitation (Phillips & Sweeney, 2005:297; Reed, 2006:1126). However, Murrow and Shi (2010:399) are of the view that cohabiting as a trial marriage is rarely noted as a reason but may be a secondary motivation for moving in together. Couples may not necessarily agree on several aspects of their lives that are under scrutiny. Hence, cohabitation is not regarded as the kind of system that successfully prepares future partners for marriage. The absence of obligation in the cohabiting household can lead to the absence of obligation in marriage (Dolbik-Vorobei, 2005:42). This lack or absence of obligation may pave the way for cohabitees to dissolve their relationship more easily in the wake of the diminishing quality of their liaison.

Cohabitation can be considered an ideal alternative for some dating couples when marriage is not financially feasible (Murrow & Shi, 2010:389; Lauer & Yodanis,

2010:67; Tach & Edin, 2011:78). It is generally believed that marriage requires a certain level of financial stability (Prokos & Keene, 2010:93). Central to the process of marriage in South Africa is *magadi,* an age-old African custom that historically entailed a gift in the form of cattle from the bridegroom's family to the bride's family, symbolising the commitment of the two families to the marriage and sanctioning of the union (Kalule-Sabiti, et al., 2007:89). The practice of *magadi* renders cohabitation a socially unacceptable form of partnership unless and until the *magadi* negotiations or payments are initiated (Posel & Rudwick, 2013:283). The union is therefore not recognised by the couple's families and they may find minimal or no support in the event of relational distress. However, some participants postpone getting married until they have achieved a certain level of financial stability.

> *The only thing that prevented us from getting married before we moved in together was financial problems. We will eventually get married once my partner save enough money to pay magadi.* (Fb, 35 years)
> *My boyfriend didn't have a problem. He indicated that it was also his plan for us to get married. He explained that as soon as he finishes with his internship he will pay magadi. He is currently only getting a stipend.* (Fa, 29 years)
> *I would say at least his family came to introduce themselves although he was not in a good financial position to pay magadi. He promised to pay magadi around December this year.* (Fb, 29 years)

Some cohabiting couples believe that they need to accomplish their employment and financial goals before getting married (Baker & Elizabeth, 2014:395). Moreover, those who value marriage would not commit thereto until they have attained the financial stability that they associate with a successful marriage (Lee & Payne, 2010:541; King & South, 2011:100). However, in cohabitation, the financial prowess of the male partner is often positively linked to the transition to marriage (Dew, 2011:180; Huang et al., 2011:879) The cultural practice of *magadi* seems to perpetuate this assertion as it is traditionally forbidden for men to seek assistance with the payment of *magadi.* The most important symbol of manhood is a man's ability to pay *magadi.*

Although finances might have been a hindrance to getting married, it was interesting to learn from one participant who, despite sufficient financial resources at her partner's disposal, they nonetheless still delay getting married for reasons unknown to her.

> *We spoke about getting married and we even thought of tying the knot in August this year* [2015]*. He has money for magadi but keeps on postponing the date. I honestly cannot tell you why we keep on postponing the dates.* (F, 33 years)

The fact that reasons for the postponement of paying *magadi* to the participant's family are unknown to her, suggests that there was no mutual agreement on the matter. Reasons for postponement include uncertainty about the future of the relationship (Reed, 2006:1126; Murrow & Shi, 2010:399); concern that the relationship might dissolve (Phillips & Sweeney, 2005:297); or anticipation of negative changes that could influence the character of the relationship (Vítečková & Chaloupková, 2014:146). Uncertainties in a cohabiting relationship may be a blessing in that the relationship cannot continue without the cohabitees making the strong interpersonal commitment that marriage requires (Manning, Longmore & Giordano, 2007:560).

In some situations, cohabitation has been reported as an accidental or occasional event, which often occurs without clearly communicated intent to marry (Rhoades et al., 2009b:234; Guizzardi, 2011:496). Almost half participants entered into cohabitation without clarifying their desires or intentions but assumed that marriage is likely to follow.

> *The next step for us would be marriage. However, we haven't had that conversation where we sat down and said what the plan is going to be. It was almost like an assumed thing that now that we are living together this is what is going to happen.* (Fa, 27 years)
>
> *For now I am not going to say we spoke about getting married because we did. For now I like things the way they are but if we do get married we will and if we don't we don't. He would hint sometimes. Even when two of his friends got married recently he would say things like, what if it was me and you my baby. When are we getting married? When are we doing this? That's when I noticed that one day we will get married.* (F, 30 years)

These responses confirm the finding in Sniezek's (2013:7) study, in which one of the participants indicated that she never talked about marriage prior to cohabitation, but that there was an understanding that they eventually would get married. However, it is evident that couples who cohabit without a clear intent to marry are more likely to experience relationship distress (Willoughby & Carroll, 2012:1452). The assumptions articulated by the participants also support a widely held belief that cohabiting couples may not necessarily agree whether or not they should move towards marriage

(Willoughby et al., 2011:4). The cohabitees' failure to have open discussions about the future of their relationships is concerning as it is likely to deteriorate as a result of the strain emanating from *wishful thinking*.

Cohabitation may be regarded as a solution when couples do not entirely reject the notion of marriage (Vítečková & Chaloupková, 2014:146; Smock & Kroeger, 2015:118). Due to its flexibility, cohabitation offers a feasible combination of commitment and development in a personal domain such as a career (Huinink et al., 2011:82). One participant mentioned that cohabitation enabled her to explore possibilities of a career by delaying marriage.

> *We have made a decision to cohabit because I am not ready to get married now but I need to be at a stage where I should be ready to get married. I am currently focusing on other personal aspirations like my career and exploring the world. To be honest, I want to get married but I am not in a rush and I am very happy with the structure of our current arrangement .* (Fa, 27 years)

This response suggests that cohabitation does not always represent a permanent alternative to marriage. It is rather a postponement of marriage with the understanding that the cohabitees will eventually marry (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2004:1217). These cohabitees are mindful of what the institution of marriage entails but may not yet be ready to assume such a responsibility (Lauer & Yodanis, 2010:63; Lee & Payne, 2010:541). For instance, cohabiting couples may feel that they are not in a position to commit to marriage due to work commitments and other personal obligations that might prevent them from taking the final step.

4.3.1.1.3 Category 1.1.3: Cohabitation as an alternative to marriage

Although the fundamental ideology of marriage and family has been described as the unquestioned belief that marriage is central to family formation (Huang et al., 2011:957; Ellison et al., 2012:322; Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013:425), this assertion is flawed as it ignores the fact that there are individuals who do not believe in marriage. On the other hand, literature shows that marriage has lost much of its centrality in family formation, and is gradually being replaced by cohabitation (Lauer & Yodanis, 2010:60; Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013:422). Cohabitation seems to be taking over the role and functions of the institution of marriage (Hiekel & Castro-Mart´In, 2014:490). Hence, it is described as the

deinstitutionalisation of the family which is grounded in marriage (Martigani, 2011:566; Furstenberg, 2014:13; Vítečková & Chaloupková, 2014:139). The institution of marriage is no longer the only socially acceptable alternative available to couples (Kefalas et al., 2011:846) considering that the traditional functions of the family such as sexual intimacy, parenting, and companionship are no longer viewed as exclusive to married couples (Kefalas et al., 2011:846).

Cohabitation represents freedom to certain cohabitees who equate marriage with the loss of personal freedom (Gold, 2012:317). A male participant expressed his fear of losing his personal freedom should he get married, and therefore deems cohabitation ideal.

> *Let's talk about freedom. I won't have freedom if I have a paper* [marriage certificate]. *If I am married society sees you as a married man. So, there will be places that I am not supposed to go. At this point I am still partly free. I can go out with my friends and go to 4shisanyama* [braai place - barbeque] *or parties.* (M, 31 years)

The finding is consistent with the view that some cohabitees lament the loss of social activities they can no longer engage in, should they get married (Huang et al., 2011:887). Cohabiting men prefer to maintain a greater sense of independence without being hampered by expectations of how and when they should socialise (Soulsby & Bennett, 2015:9). Moreover, they are cautious about marriage due to fear that a spouse might be more demanding of their time (Reed, 2006:1124). Similarly, authors claim that some men avoid marriage and opt for cohabitation as they still want to enjoy sexual relations outside the relationship (Huang et al., 2011:892). They therefore reject standardised models of intimate relationships in favour of constructing their own profiles of love (Baker & Elizabeth, 2014:394). In seeking freedom, men opt for cohabitation whilst their partners are under the impression that this arrangement is in preparation for marriage. The lack of openness and honesty among cohabitees is concerning and may leave unsuspecting partners vulnerable and devastated should the relationship come to an end.

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4 *Shisanyama* refers to places that originated in townships and extend to more affluent places such as towns and cities, where mostly men spend their leisure time with friends, eating, and drinking alcoholic beverages.

Cohabitation appeals to cohabitees as it creates an independent relationship free of any marital expectations (Willoughby & Carroll, 2012:1452). For instance, one of the participants is clearly against marriage:

> *We don't want to get married. We believe that marriage is a social construct and it does not do anything to our relationship. We are committed to each other and that for me is important.* (Fa, 28 years)

The finding rejects the ideological of marriage as an institution (Roberson et al., 2016:18). The response resonates with a view expressed by a participant in Hatch's (2015:13) study *that marriage is meaningless and I* [the participant] *do not see the necessity of it.* Similarly, another participant in Lawrence's (2010:550) study said, *I don't really picture myself getting married as I don't see any benefit of it on our relationship.*

There is a belief that cohabitation is likely to be considered by people who consciously commit to remain in cohabitation without any plan to marry (Kasearu, 2010:9). It has also been noted that cohabitees reject marriage due to its perceived rigidity (Murrow & Shi, 2010:400) since cohabitation affords them the freedom of choice (Martignani, 2011:566). Autonomy and personal identity seem to be critical for cohabitees (Lauer & Yodanis, 2010:64) hence, cohabitation is ideal for those who establish their "own social spaces within which they could express their own identities, morality and new-found self-confidence for themselves within the social paradigm" (Bank, 2001:138).

Although marriage is still regarded as an event of major importance amongst many African people (Posel & Rudwick, 2014: 283), the symbolic expression of culture is not universal. One participant draws a parallel between the status of marriage in her native country, Germany and Africa.

> *I think in Africa there is a very narrow minded and conservative approach when it comes to cohabitation. There is a very big stigma and cliché and I think people underestimate the importance of living together in order to know the person and commit and spend the rest of their lives together. People here ask why we are not married and why we have been staying together for so long without getting married. I would normally tell them that we both don't believe in marriage and that we don't think we need to get married in order to live together. We don't want to get married. We don't see the need. We don't know what will change. I know that in Germany where I am originally from, people pay less tax when*

they get married. That at least makes some financial sense. To me it doesn't make any difference whether I get married or not in South Africa. (Fa, 28 years)

This excerpt suggests that people are not aware of cultural difference pertaining to the institution of marriage. However, the participant's generalisation of African people's perspectives of marriage is flawed as Africans are not a homogenous population and not all Africans support marriage as the only family formation. The desire to get married is not unique only among African people. Americans remain strongly committed to the ideal of marriage (Kefalas et al., 2011:846) and still desire marriage as a means to continued love and belonging (Finkel, Cheung, Emery, Carswell & Larson, 2015:239). However, Kasearu (2010:4) cautions that the "constant comparison of cohabitation and marriage in terms of geographical area limits the opportunity to explain whether the distinctions between individuals are based on their socio-demographical and psychological characteristics or originate from the experiences which are accumulated in specific type of living together".

4.3.1.1.4 Category 1.1.4: Cohabiting for convenience

In certain instances, the purpose of cohabitation is not necessarily a precursor to marriage (Murrow & Shi, 2010:400). Cohabitees who move in together often have pragmatic concerns, external to the relationship, such as convenience, practicality, financial necessity, or accommodation (Rhoades et al., 2009b:234; Huang et al., 2011:896; Sassler & Miller, 2011:169). A detailed discussion on the pragmatic benefits of cohabitation is presented in chapter 5 of this report.

It has been found that cohabitees often commute between their two places of abode (Manning & Smock, 2005:995) before eventually settling in one, as illustrated below.

> *For us, cohabitation is a convenience so it wouldn't mean me having my clothes and some of the personal belongings at two different places of abode. Now my stuff [clothes and some of the personal belongings] at our place of abode* (Fa, 27 years)
> *I no longer have my place and her place. We used to stay at her place two nights a week and she will stay at my place two nights the next week. Now we are staying in the same place of abode* (M, 28 years)
> *We were basically commuting between two homes. Before we moved in together, we had two separate places. He was either at my place or I would go*

spend some days at his flat. So moving in was a matter of convenience for us. (F, 25 years)

The participants' experiences are consistent with findings from previous studies in which participants indicated convenience as their main motivation for cohabiting (Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007:546; Rhoades et al., 2009b:234; Guizzardi, 2011:496). The inconvenience of commuting between two places of abode is the common motivation for cohabitation (Jago, 2011:207; Sassler & Miller, 2011:493). However, the pragmatic motivation for cohabitation does not necessarily indicate commitment to the relationship (Shulman & Connolly, 2013:30). This is important in the relationship for cohabitees to have the same understanding of staying together.

Transition to cohabitation is often uncertain and difficult to link with a particular inception date (Reid & Golub, 2015:1243). It should be noted that cohabitation is a gradual and fluid process (Sniezek, 2013:2) rather than a clear progression (Gold, 2012:316). The gradual progression of cohabitation is encapsulated by the excerpt below:

> *I had my own flat and he was living in his own flat. He would come over so I somehow saw ukuthi* [*that*] *he was coming to my flat three or four times a week and he sleeps over. So it was during that time that I suggested that he should bring a toothbrush, a towel, and more toiletries and that is when he started...and I was like, bring a change of clothing and then the change of clothing became a small bag, became a suitcase and then* [silent for a moment]…*Ja, then he moved in.* (Fa, 30 years)

This excerpt resonates with the finding from Manning and Smock's (2005:995), study in which participants indicated that their cohabitation was preceded by "one night a week, then two nights, until a point where the partner never left." It is common for a couple to slide into cohabitation by spending a night together and progress slowly towards living together on a full-time basis (Smock & Kroeger, 2015:119). The absence of any discussion pertaining to the living arrangements and its implications may jeopardise the relationship in the future.

The need to move out of the parental home can also motivate individuals to cohabit (Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007:546), as demonstrated below:

I was staying at home [with parents] *and I felt that I was old enough and I should get my own space. I suggested to my boyfriend that I should get my own place. He indicated that he also wanted his own space and his suggestion was that we should move in together.* (Fb, 29 years)

Cohabitation can serve as a means to transition out of the parental home (Huang et al., 2011:886). It has been noted that couples use cohabitation as a progression from the parental home to adult independence (Turney, 2011:1112). Evidently, the cohabitees' decision to leave the parental home and establish an independent place of abode is regarded as an important milestone which symbolises adulthood (Egondi, Kabiru, Beguy, Kanyiva & Jessor, 2013:298). However, it should be borne in mind that leaving the parental home to cohabit may expose the couple to social isolation since their union is not traditionally recognised by their families.

Cohabitation may be an ideal solution to individuals who are not yet ready to marry (Kasearu, 2010:5), but whose home circumstances, for example, are unfavourable for one reason or another.

His grandmother passed on and he was now spending more time at my parents' house. I thought that it would be better if we moved into my ₅RDP house. I have an RDP house which I was not staying in. (F, 33 years)

We ended up cohabiting because it was getting a bit overcrowded at home. We are five girls. When I got my first child I thought it would be better if I moved out to relieve my mother of the additional burden of taking care of me and my child. When I explained my family situation to my boyfriend he suggested that we should move in with him. I then spoke to my mom about my boyfriend's suggestion. She initially refused but I made her aware of the difficulty of raising us on her own because she is the breadwinner. She insisted that we are her children and she would do everything in her power to provide for us. I promised her that I will come home if the relationship does not work. She eventually accepted but she still insisted that I should come home if the relationship is not working. (Fb, 30 years)

₅ RDP is an acronym for the South African policy document called Reconstruction and Development Programme (Bradlow, Bolnick & Shearing, 2011:269). It was initiated by the first democratic government to redress the inequalities in society by providing housing to the previously marginalised communities (Moolla, Kotze & Block, 2011:138).

A couple's decision to enter into and remain in a cohabiting relationship may be a practical response to structural constraints imposed by the families' unfavourable socio-economic circumstances (Sano et al., 2012:951; Zito, 2015:300). Poverty in the family may compel individuals to cohabit with their partners rather than live on the street (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:287). The second excerpt seems to relate to family size, as overcrowding can also induce individuals to leave their parental homes and opt for cohabitation (Egondi et al., 2013:298). This is a cause for concern due to the high number of teenage pregnancy in South Africa. Some young mothers may be tempted to drop out of school and move in with their partners.

Moreover, cohabitation can also be triggered by the need to find new accommodation.

> *I was planning to relocate to Pretoria but finding accommodation was difficult. I then moved in with him whilst I was looking for my own place. He was also planning to relocate and find a bigger accommodation for both of us and our belongings.* (Fa, 32 years)
> *My boyfriend suggested that I should come and stay with him. I agreed. I just moved in with my three children from my previous relationship. He knew that I had children and he didn't have a problem with that. He just said that the kids can stay with us. For me it meant that he is my life partner and I will be staying with him full time.* (Fa, 35 years)

Housing needs are often advanced as a strong motivation for cohabitation (Sassler & Miller, 2011:168). The same sentiment was shared by a participant in Carmichael and Whittaker's (2007:210) study; her partner moved in with her after returning from overseas and had no nowhere to live. The rapid urbanisation in South Africa has increased the need for affordable housing. Cohabitation seems to be an ideal short-term solution when couples have an immediate need for accommodation.

Financial factors may play a role in influencing individuals to opt for cohabitation, which is a strategy to share expenses; this may occur with or without the expectation of marriage (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2006:565). Cohabitees therefore move in together to save money (Rhoades et al., 2009a:96) as pointed out below.

> *Part of it was financial so that I could assist with payment of rent. (*Fa, 27 years)
> *We both decided that we should save some money on accommodation and we stay in one room.* (Fa, 29 years)

It happened that he found me a job in Hammanskraal where he was working. He could not afford my daily travelling fare and that is when we thought that it would be better for us to stay together to save costs. (F, 34 years)

It was also becoming a financial strain for him to take care of us when we were still staying with my family. (Fb, 30 years)

We are both based in Johannesburg. We both had our own accommodation and were paying rent which was financially strenuous for us. (F, 25 years)

Cohabitation then becomes an underlying survival strategy for cohabitees to pool their financial resources and share expenses (Rabe, 2008:170; Huang et al., 2011:888; Turney, 2011:1113). Cohabitees thus justify their decision to move in together as making good economic sense (Sassler & Miller, 2011:170). Thus, cohabitation becomes an attractive option as the cost of maintaining two households, especially in the face of economic challenges, becomes less of an issue. However, some authors who dispute this assertion are of the opinion that due to the uncertainty of the relationship (Walsh, 2012:116) cohabitees do not necessarily perceive themselves as a unit, and are less likely to pool their resources due to the uncertain nature of cohabitation (Hamplova, Le Bourdais & Lapierre-Adamcyk, 2014:985).

Romantic jealousy often manifests in an emotional and behavioural response to the perceived or threatened loss of a partner (Kennedy-Lightsey & Booth-Butterfield, 2011:255; Fussel & Stollery, 2012:136). Individuals respond to uncertainty in different ways (Worley & Samp, 2014:373), as shown by the excerpt below. Insecurity and jealousy led to cohabitation in an attempt to allay the fears of a partner.

She was having insecurities. She was jealous because I was this new guy from De Aar [Northern Cape] *and still new in the area and so ladies were attracted to me. She was very insecure* [participant, 31 years and her partner, 39 years]*. I talked to her that we should stay together and share everything so that she can see that I am not really cheating on her. Since then we have been staying together waya-waya* [permanently]. *We dated for six month before she moved in with me.* (M, 31 years)

Before I moved in with him he previously suggested it and I didn't agree at the time. I had the belief that if I stay with him before we get married he will relax and not get married. I thought that when we live separately he would feel that he needs me and eventually marry me. However, he needed a female person in the house to help with household chores. He was eventually going to find someone else [to replace me] *if I was not there.* (F, 31 years)

These experiences resonate with the view that women are more inclined to voice their feelings of jealousy in romantic relationships (Schützwohl, Morjaria & Alvis, 2011:419). However, romantic jealousy is not always destructive and it is commonly experienced at some point in a romantic relationship (Attridge, 2013:1). In some instances, jealousy serves as a reminder of the value of a partner as well as the relationship itself, thus leading to increased relational satisfaction and commitment (Elphinston, Feeney, Noller, Connor & Fitzgerald, 2013:294). However, it can also lead to mistrust and constant suspicion if the couple does not communicate their concerns.

The transition from school to university constitutes a significant shift in the lives of many young people, and it is perceived by many as part of a broader transition from childhood to adulthood (Hopkins, 2006:245; Madey & Jilek, 2012:203). Hence, the exploration of romantic relationships typically begins during the post-secondary phase (Sniezek, 2013:8). Two participants became involved in romantic relationships at university and decided to live together after graduation.

> *Well we started dating in university in our final year of studying. We both had our own places of abode but most of the time we would commute between the two places. After completing our studies we moved to Cape Town together. Initially I was staying at my parents' house and he had his own place. However, I found myself spending more time at his place anyway so I technically moved in. Then last year we moved to Johannesburg and then I also moved all my belongings here and we moved in permanently.* (Fa, 27 years)
> *We studied together at the University of Johannesburg. We were doing our final year of Arts degree. We started dating in 2003 and in 2006 I won an art prize and was awarded a scholarship to Paris. I paid for her air ticket to come and stay with me for three months. When we came back we moved in together in Johannesburg because before our departure we were both living with our parents.* (Mb, 32 years)

Casual dating is prevalent on university and college campuses, which may lead to a serious relationship (Jackson et al., 2011:632; Snapp, Lento, Ryu & Rosen, 2014:468). The development of romantic relationships during this period may also provide young adults with a sense of accomplishment and a social identity (Whitton, Weitbrecht, Kuryluk & Bruner, 2013:177). However, in situations where, after completion of their studies, couples find employment in separate locations the relationship may not thrive and this may result in their meeting new people and drifting apart. However, social

media, for example, may enable couples to maintain constant contact and keep the relationship strong.

Respect for ancestors and a belief in the importance of protective traditional ceremonies are common among Africans and are practised across different ethnic groups such as Bapedi, Zulus and Xhosas (Brittian, Lewin & Norris, 2013: 645). One of the participants entered into cohabitation following her child's lack of sleep at her maternal grandparents' home.

> *It was* [moving in with partner] *because of our child who would usually get sick when we were living at my parents' house. We consulted medical doctors and traditional healers and there would still be no improvement. However, when we spend the night at my boyfriend's home the child would sleep peacefully. Our families met and discussed the issue and they decided that I should spend at least a month at my boyfriend's home and see if there is any improvement in the child's health. Since I moved in the child has been sleeping peacefully hence, I belief that the child wanted to connect with his father's ancestors.* (F, 26 years)

It is commonly believed that failure to introduce a child to his/her paternal ancestors may have a negative impact on the child's health (Makusha & Richter, 2015:35). In the Xhosa culture, a traditional ritual called *imbeleko* is performed on the father's side to introduce the child to his/her paternal ancestors so that the child can be spiritually protected against personal problems and misfortune (Nduna, 2014:31; Makofane, 2015:33). Thus, the introduction of a child to his or her ancestors can motivate couples to cohabit (Nduna, 2014:31).

4.3.1.1.5 Category 1.1.5: Sliding into cohabitation

It is generally believed that cohabitees often slide into cohabitation before making any mutual commitment, and the transition occurs before individuals fully comprehend the consequences of their decisions (Walsh, 2012:12; Hamplova et al., 2014:985). This notion is encapsulated by the following:

> *We didn't discuss it. It was just logical that we were going to stay together. It wasn't like a big decision where we sat down and discuss. It happened gradually. For example, she helped me buy a bed and some of stuff* [furniture and utensils] *in the house and she eventually ended up staying with me. So she has always been involved in choosing things for the house.* (Mb, 32 years)

We did not decide to move in together. It was not planned but it was an ideal situation. (Fa, 28 years)

I don't really know. I just found myself staying with him. I never really decided. I was staying at my parents' house. You know in my mind I still think that I am staying at home [parents'] *but when I look at what I am doing I can tell that I am staying with him full time. I never really decided.* (F, 31 years)

These excerpts suggest that the transition to cohabitation is often unplanned (Jamison & Ganong, 2010:538). Most cohabitees do not heed the commonly held suggestion that they need to make a conscious decision to live together (Carmichael & Whittaker, 2007:207; Rhoades et al., 2009b:234; Smith, 2014:6); they slide into cohabitation without making an informed decision to do so (Sano et al., 2012:943; Roberson et al., 2016:3). In some instances, couples tend to bring personal items to their partners' homes over time or simply *sleep over* for days or weeks at a time, which then leads to unintentional and unplanned cohabitation. Due to the ambiguity of the transition (Sano et al., 2012:943), some couples do not consider themselves cohabiting couples as they continue to maintain their separate residences (Manning et al., 2007:568; Nepomnyaschy & Teitler, 2013:1249).

Cohabitees seldom regard cohabitation as a significant event (Carmichael & Whittaker, 2007:204) since it may be a natural progression (Reid & Golub, 2015:1235), as explained below.

At first we rented a house for a year, and when the lease expired we officially moved into the house that we bought together. I don't think there was a point where we said, let us live together. (M, 28 years)

We both had our own accommodation but she would come and visit almost every day and we were spending most of the time together. She would spend the night and went to her place in the morning to change clothes and go to work. We didn't discuss or talk about moving in; it just happened automatically. (Ma, 32 years)

It was never a huge thing for me…[silence, then smiled]. *When we started cohabiting it was not a big thing really. I think that sometimes people make a big deal about moving in with their partners. With me it wasn't like that because we started dating at university* [smiling again]. *Although I thought it would have been nice if he had asked me to move in with him as you see in the movies* [smiling]. (Fa, 27 years)

Many cohabitees do not give the transition from dating to cohabiting much thought; instead, they report that the transition *just happened* (Rhoades et al., 2009b:234). Cohabitees who have been living together often struggle to remember the exact date of the actual transition (Carmichael & Whittaker, 2007:208; Bianchi, 2014:39), which often occurs over a period of weeks or months (Reid & Golub, 2015:1235). However, authors caution that couples who slide into cohabitation are more prone to end up in unstable and poor quality relationships (Sassler & Miller, 2011:165). Sliding into cohabitation is problematic as the couple may harbour unknown assumptions and expectations about the relationship and this may be a source of misunderstanding and conflict later on. An uninformed decision is a recipe for disaster in intimate relationships.

4.3.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Participants' accounts of how their families learned about their cohabiting relationships and their reactions

The family constitutes *the* most dominant personal network (Zhao, Dijst & Chai, 2015:3) and important socialisation environment (Manning et al., 2011:118). Therefore, cohabitees' attitudes towards family formation are often shaped by their family experiences, and they are more likely to discuss their relationships with, and seek the views of, people within their networks (Jackson et al., 2011:635). This subtheme captures the participants' experiences of how they approached their family members about living with a partner, and their families' reactions.

4.3.1.2.1 Category 1.2.1: Participants' descriptions of how they informed their parents

Parents play an important part in the child's transition to adulthood (De Valk & Liefbroer, 2007:488; Jennings, Axinn & Ghimire, 2012:927). The relationship between parents and children is the most enduring relationship in human life (Huinink et al., 2011:87). The transition to cohabitation is fraught with uncertainty for cohabitees, especially in young adulthood (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012:1179). The quality of the bond between parents and their children therefore become significant during this transition (Wolf, Sax & Harper, 2009:333).

Although different cultures may prescribe certain beliefs regarding marriage, individuals vary in their acceptance of these norms (Willoughby et al., 2013:5).

Similarly, children are often socialised to internalise their parents' attitudes and values towards family formation (Kasearu, 2010:8); however, some participants demonstrated behaviour contrary to their parents' preferences.

> *I wasn't there when my parents were dating. I probably would have moved in with him anyway. For me the primary thing was them knowing. When I told them I expected them to say that they trust me because I am staying with him anyway. I was not asking for their permission but I didn't get it. They basically refused to give me their blessings. I went ahead with it anyway.* (F, 25 years)
> *Nobody in my family has ever said anything in my presence. I do understand that his family will like for us to get married. They do not understand fully why we stay together when we are not married. We continuously communicate with them that it is our decision and nobody is going to force us to marry. My understanding is that they do not have to agree to our arrangement. Any way we were not asking for their permission.* (Fa, 28 years)

Parents naturally socialise their children to adopt certain beliefs and values regarding family formation (Manning et al., 2011:118; Johnson, 2011: 23). However, adult children in cohabiting relationships do not simply absorb their parents' beliefs about family formation (Funk & Kobayashi, 2014:1103). One sensible explanation for this deviation is that the ambition of the current generation of adult children lies in the ultimate pursuit of personal happiness and individual realisation (Bianchi, 2014:40; Qi, 2016:40), which weakens the influence of their parents (Vítečková & Chaloupková, 2014:145). Individualistic values should be understood as part of a developing relational maturity, in preparation for marriage and family life (Carroll, Badger, Willoughby, Nelson, Madsen & Barry, 2009:350). Cohabitees therefore assume the right to manage their own romantic relationships (Sassler & Miller, 2015:142). Parents should continually adjust their expectations of their children pertaining to marriage, and become more accepting of non-traditional family formations.

Children are more likely to disclose personal information to their parents if they feel that they will not try to control them (Urry, Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011:169). Three participants received support from their parents upon disclosure of their relationship status.

> *They did not have any problem with that. I think I was 21 years old at the time. I believe it was the right thing to do at the time and my parents trusted me with the decision. As soon as my parents were aware of the situation they eventually visited.* (Fa, 28 years)

> *My parents wanted to know if I was sure about my decision to move in with him. I told them that he was the right person for me because he* [my partner] *is supportive. Eventually, my family understood that I love him and they gave me their blessings.* (F, 25 years)
>
> *It was just something that we* [participant and partner] *told them* [the participant's parents] *during dinner. We didn't really have a formal meeting with the family to say this is what we are planning to do or we are* cohabiting. *I mean...I think it came from the fact that we were already living independently when we moved in together. We didn't have to tell our parents that I am moving out of the family home to move in with a girl.* (M, 28 years)

Some parents of cohabiting couples are happy to see their children enjoy their freedom and flexibility (Carmichael & Whittaker, 2007:212). Such parental attitudes tend to encourage their children to become responsible adults as they become autonomous in managing their own affairs (Carroll et al., 2009:350; Willoughby et al., 2015:671). Once they reach adulthood, young people tend to gradually accept responsibility for their own actions as independent decision makers.

Cohabitation has been found to decrease the frequency of cohabitees' participation in risk-taking behaviour, largely due to their maturity and readiness to take responsibility for their actions (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2008:02). Moreover, Gala and Kapadia (2014:131) claim that "when an individual enters into cohabitation certain maturity and commitment come on their own" (cf. detailed discussion in chapter 5). One participant shared his response on his parents' concerns as follows:

> *My parents were shocked* [participant, 31 years and partner, 39 years]. *I had to explain to them it was for me to have a more mature person in my life, the person who understands life. This person won't be selfish and she won't...* [thinking]. *What is the word? She won't be a gold-digger. I also reminded my parents that now we are living in HIV* [Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus] *world and if I am staying with somebody and committing myself to that person I will become more responsible and this person is going to cook and iron for me. It is becoming more of...I will responsibility in life. I won't go to a tavern midnight, buy my four beers and come home to this person and drink at home. She must know my friends. If I am not home and she wants to call me she can call anytime. If I am single I can be anywhere.* (M, 31 years)

Mothers are traditionally considered the emotional foundation of family life (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013:934), and generally exhibit more interest in providing emotional support to

family members than men since they are likely to dominate the domestic space (Zhao et al., 2015:4). In most African cultures, children share their needs and concerns with their mothers regarding anything that goes on in their lives, and mothers in turn will convey these messages to their husbands. However, some mothers filter what they tell their husbands and may conceal information about their children which they deem undesirable.

> *We spoke to our parents separately. I approached my mother because mothers are more understanding than fathers. I told her that I was thinking of moving out of the house but I didn't tell her that I was moving in with my boyfriend. I explained to her that I felt I was getting old and I needed to buy my own stuff such as furniture and other necessities. She asked if I was going to move in with my boyfriend and when I agreed she expressed her concerns. She told me that she would have preferred that I move in with my boyfriend after getting married but said that she respects my decision nonetheless.* (Fb, 29 years)
> *I did not tell my parents directly that I have moved in with my boyfriend* [silence]. *I don't know how to explain this...sometimes when I am with them I would throw some hints and talk about what I did with him and where we went or what we did in the morning. My mother eventually asked if I was staying with him because I kept on mentioning his name. I agreed and she was not upset, but her main concern was that we should stay together as long as we were not fighting. I just know that father is aware but I don't know how he got to know that I have moved in with my boyfriend.* (Fa, 29 years)
> *No, I don't think my dad knows. He would probably come uninvited or drag me out of there. You know what? He doesn't know. I would have known. It's only my mom who is aware.* (F, 25 years)
> *It is only my mom who is aware and she does not have a problem with our relationship. Me and my dad are not close and I only get to greet him and that's all. I can only assume that he knows because when he calls he would ask my child about my boyfriend and I would know that he is aware. When we visit my parents sometimes my boyfriend would come pick us up 10 pm and from that I can say they are aware that if we leave that time of the night it means that we are going to the same place.* (Fb, 27 years)

Generally, mothers have more knowledge of their children than fathers do (Urry et al., 2011:170). Within many African families most fathers tend to receive information about their children's activities from their spouses as it is commonly believed that fathering is limited to being a breadwinner and imposing discipline on the children (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010:4). In South Africa, particularly due to the migrant labour system, many fathers moved to cities to seek employment which contributed to the majority of them not residing with their children (Madhavan et al., 2008:648), caring for them, and

becoming close to them. The Pedi language is replete with idiomatic expressions which demonstrate the importance of women in families and society. For instance, there is a popular idiom which says, *mosadi o swara thipa ka bogaleng* – loosely interpreted: the woman is the pillar of the family. Conversely, in the Pedi community, it is commonly believed that *mokoko ga o sediše* – loosely translated: a rooster cannot raise chicks, meaning that men are not competent to take care of the children.

Parents' knowledge about their children is not entirely dependent on directly asking for information or exercising parental control, but on the children's willingness to share information with their parents (Siennick, 2014:3). Due to fear of disapproval (Huang et al., 2011:899), some cohabitees choose not to disclose the state of their relationship to their families.

> *His family is aware of our relationship but I doubt if they are aware that I have moved in with him. I think they think I am only visiting.* (Fa, 27 years)
> *They* [the participant's family] *don't approve the relationship. They are not even aware that we have moved in together. It is something that is only happening in Pretoria.* (Fa, 32 years)
> *My parents, to be honest, don't even know. I am afraid they will not approve.* (Fa, 30 years)

The hierarchical structure in conservative and rigid families may bring about fear and make it difficult for children to share or express their views to parents on intimate relationships. It is evident that children's willingness to express themselves within the family is promoted by a family environment that encourages expressiveness and responsiveness (Urry et al., 2011:158). For a beneficial relationship to exist and thrive between parent and child, a proper environment should be established to encourage children to confide in their parents and avoid certain pitfalls during emerging adulthood (Urry et al., 2011:170). Moreover, cohabitees who do not disclose their relationships to their parents are more likely not to consult them when they experience relational distress.

Religion plays a vital role in shaping family attitudes and values (Ellison et al., 2009:297). Religious practices form part of family socialisation and are transmitted from parent to child to ensure that children conduct themselves accordingly (Manning et al., 2011:121). Most religions do not approve of cohabitation.

I spoke to my mom first. I could not face my dad. My dad is old fashioned and religious. My mom is religious too but as a girl I am closer to my mom. She told me that my dad should never know about my request as he may have a heart failure and that she will never allow me to move in with my boyfriend. She basically told me to forget it. She said you can't do that. She also reminded me that it was against our religious beliefs because our family members are staunch Lutherans - a very traditional church. She then went on to give me examples of my aunt and how her ex-partner married another lady after cohabiting. She warned me that if I dare move in with my boyfriend behind her back, something bad might happen to me. (F, 25 years)

This response resonates with that of a participant in Castiglioni and Dalla-Zuanna's (2014:425) study who said that, "[m]y mother, being very Catholic, didn't agree with cohabitation: I always said that I would one day cohabit, that I would never marry and she said 'I won't come visit you anymore!'" Religion is an important foundation on which attitudes and values that may reject a move away from marriage to cohabitation are based (Village et al., 2010:470). Most religious denominations are associated with traditional family forms and behaviours that uphold the institution of marriage (Soons & Kalmijn, 2009:1143; Lee & Ono, 2012:954). Posel and Rudwick (2014:291) argue that the majority of South Africans identify with Christianity, and their faith contributes significantly to the unacceptable image of cohabitation.

Moreover, cohabitation is, in the context of religious belief, referred to as *living in sin* (Brown & Kawamura, 2010:5). A study conducted by Brownridge and Halli (2000) entitled, *Living in sin and sinful living: toward filling a gap in the explanation of violence against women* is conceivably relevant here. However, religious influence on family formation has waned significantly due to its detachment from the current broad social transformation (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin*,* 2013:424). The rapid emergence of the charismatic church which is liberal in its teachings seems to contribute to an increased acceptance of the non-traditional family formation (cf. influence of religion on cohabiting relationships in chapter 5).

In certain circumstances, when parents are uncertain of their role in the lives of their cohabiting adult children, they retreat (Eggeben, 2005:1108) or withdraw their emotional support (Brown & Kawamura, 2010:6; Manning et al., 2011:119). A participant's attempt at independence brought tension between her and her mother.

In my situation, my mom had a real big issue with me leaving home in the first place. When I left home to stay on my own I was around 26 years. It was more disagreements than explanations from my mom but I was adamant that I needed to achieve certain things on my own. Right now, I am not happy that my mom has never come to my apartment where I am staying with my partner. It is uncomfortable as I have realised that I have chosen a life that does not meet other people's expectations. It feels lonely and often I feel like I am a bit of an orphan. It's like the family has turned its back on what I think is best for everyone. But I am really good when coming to rescuing scenarios. For instance, my brother's baby passed away at seven months and I was the one who was called to come and contribute food for the funeral. Whenever there is a disaster I am there but it is like my life is separate from theirs. (Mb, 32 years)

It appears as though the mother in this instance is unhappy with her son's decision to move out of the family home as he was financially assisting the family. The family life course perspective dictates that the relationship between parents and children remains important throughout the life course of the family (Bucx, Van Wel, Knijn & Hagendoorn, 2008:177; Manning et al., 2011:127; Reczek, 2015:2). The lack of contact between the participant and his family is likely to compromise intergenerational solidarity and the strength of the parent-child relationship over time (Bucx et al., 2008:144).

Family support of, and their attitude towards, cohabitation has a bearing on the cohabitees' relationship stability and quality (Manning et al., 2011:120). Similarly, authors posit that the family's approval of cohabitation is positively linked to the cohabiting couples' love and satisfaction (Manning et al., 2011:118). Conversely, parental rejection of the relationship is likely to put strain on the cohabitees' relationship (Reczek, 2015:2), as is evident in the following extracts:

His mother does not really like me. I don't think we can stay together under the same roof. Since I started going out with her son she has been very nasty to me. She tells me very hurtful things. [Initial silence, then with a raised voice the participant continued]. *Let me tell you the story from the beginning. Our families used to be neighbours where we were staying before and somehow we know each other's weaknesses. I can't really say why she does not like me but I know she does not really like me.* (Fb, 28 years)

After the breakup of our relationship, his mother didn't want us to get back together because they thought I was after his money. They didn't know that I was also employed. They also had a problem that he left his son from a previous relationship whereas I have a girl child. They further indicated that he will never

marry me as they will never approve our marriage and that we are just wasting our time. Although he was never honest with me about his family's reasons I could deduce from our conversation that his mother disapproved of our relationship. (Fa, 32 years)

My main challenge currently is my parents. When I visit them I notice that they are not happy with our living arrangements. Although they never verbalise it when I visit them they look upset. I feel that it is stressful for me when I tell him that my parents insist on knowing when he is going to marry me. I feel I am putting pressure on him and he will end up doing things that he didn't plan to do. Currently, he does not have enough money and he might end up getting into debt. (F, 31 years)

Parental interference in their children's love relationships could affect the quality of these intimate relationships (Driscoll, Davis & Lipetz, cited by Reczek, 2015:3). Africans believe that moving out of the parental home does not imply total dissociation from parents as cohabitees still require parental support from time to time (Siennick, 2014:3). It is normal among Africans for parents to be concerned about their children's intimate relationships as they are accountable to other family members such as uncles and aunts who play a distinctive and significant role in, for example, negotiating *magadi* in marriage and performing certain rituals during such ceremonies. A cousin confronted one participant's partner about his intentions.

There was a function in my family and my partner was present. Apparently, one of my cousins made a comment about when he was going to marry me. He didn't tell me that he was offended by my cousin's comment at the time. However, during one of our fights the issue of marriage came up and he complained that my family is putting pressure on him to marry me. I asked him if it was my mother or my sister and he said no. He stated that it was my cousin. I asked him if he was offended by my cousin's comments and he agreed. I told him to take his time and make up his mind before he decides if he is going to marry me or not. He must be sure about his decision. (F, 34 years)

This response corroborates the African belief that marriage is not about an individual but that it is a family affair (De Valk & Liefbroer, 2007:489). It is therefore common among family members to coerce cohabitees to get married by consistently enquiring about their marital plans (Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007:543). Even though enquiries from relatives about the couples future plans may be construed as interference, African families still honour the role of the *malome* (maternal uncle) who is instrumental

in *magadi* negotiations (Kotzé, 2013:18) whilst cousins plan the wedding once the negotiations are completed.

In certain African cultures, once an unmarried girl is pregnant she is expected to disclose the name of the person who impregnated her (Posel et al., 2011:116). The elders in the woman's family are consulted by her parents, and a course of action is decided. In many instances one such action is to request *inhlawulo*[6] from the man through his family.

> *After falling pregnant, my boyfriend's family came to introduce themselves to my family. That is when my family became aware that I was staying with him.* (Fa, 29 years)
>
> *Both our families got to know about cohabitation when a representative of my family went to my boyfriend's family to report my pregnancy and to demand damages* [inhlawulo]. *However, I did not tell my family directly that I have moved in with him.* (Fb, 27 years)
>
> *I was not raised by my biological parents. I was raised by my* [maternal] *grandparents. Financially, we were not coping and I had to phone my boyfriend every time when the child gets sick. According to me that was not good for the reputation of my family because his family wanted to know why I would phone him every time there is a problem. I then sat my grandparents down and informed that it would be better that we* [participant and the child] *go to stay with my boyfriend's family and I promised to bring the child back when I have financial means. Both families met and discussed the matter. They further spoke about damages* [*inhlawulo* in isiZulu] *that my boyfriend's family was supposed to pay. His family paid the damages.* (F, 25 years)

The practice of paying *inhlawulo* holds serious cultural significance. The main reason for this cultural practice of paying damages to the family of the impregnated woman by the man is to offer an apology to her family for having disgraced them (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:283; Chili & Maharaj, 2015:34). Culturally, it is the genitor who should pay the *inhlawulo* so that he can learn the value of manhood such as looking after his family, being responsible, being diligent, and showing respect for his elders (Mkhwanazi, 2014:112). Although the payment of *inhlawulo* may grant the biological father certain rights regarding his children, it does not automatically sanction

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[6] *Inhlawulo* is a culturally sanctioned means of compensation for premarital pregnancies in many African communities from the genitor's family (Morrell, Epstein & Moletsane, 2012:621; Madhavan et al., 2013:618; Makusha & Richter, 2015:2).

cohabitation (Posel & Rudwick, 2013:283). Payment of m*agadi* is still regarded as the only legitimate cultural practice which permits a couple to stay together.

4.3.1.2.2 Category 1.2.2 : Reactions of participants' families upon learning about their relationships

Despite the social changes affecting family structure and functioning (Viguer, Rodrigo, & Sole, 2013: 944), the family remains an important social institution (Kim & Woo, 2011:1051). Family values and cultural background directly affect young adults' views about their future life course, including their expectations and desires about family formation (Plotnick, 2007:943). The participants' families reacted with mixed feelings to their decision to cohabit. Some families were shocked and angry whilst others approved of the relationship.

Traditions and values pertaining to romantic relationships vary greatly across racial and ethnic groups (Hattoric & Dodoo, 2007:1068). Participants' narratives revealed the contrasting cultural perceptions that influence families' views on cohabitation.

> *His family is a little difficult because they are extremely traditional. They are from Zimbabwe. They are extremely traditional and they don't know that we stay together. My family knows. When we moved in together in Cape Town, my parents knew and accepted it. They don't have a problem with it. It is something that his family does not know about. I have realised that...initially, I thought it had to do with me as a person. I then realised that actually it doesn't have anything to do with me. I did a lot of thinking about what I have done wrong. I then realised it's a culture thing. As much as he has accepted the way my parents have accepted the way we live together I have to do the same and accept his side. It has been a straining factor but it is something that we both learned to accept. We both acknowledged that there are differences and we acknowledge things might be tricky in the future. Nonetheless, it is something that we are committed to work through.* (Fa, 27 years)

Some parents afford their children unconditional support as they derive joy and satisfaction from seeing them happy (Hartnett, Furstenberg, Birditt & Fingerman, 2012:977), whilst others may be less accommodating of cohabiting relationships (Manning et al., 2011:119; Willoughby et al., 2011:18). The following extract sheds light on different parental reactions:

I am the last born...he is the favourite son in his family and his parents listen to him...they are comfortable with what he does but I am the last born at home and my parents are over-protective. He told his parents about his intentions and I am like 'let me consult my parents' and they said 'no'. When I told him that my parents say no, this caused friction. The questions he asked are: who is in a relationship? Are parents going to dictate? (F, 25 years)

A young woman's family finds it difficult to sanction cohabitation as it is unheard of for a woman to *chase after a man.* A woman is expected to wait for the man's family to approach her family and ask for her hand in marriage on behalf of their son. However, whilst some families uphold traditional family values, others are likely to have non-normative mind-sets about family life (Kim & Woo, 2011:1051; Baker & Elizabeth, 2014:402).

Although certain families do not necessarily reject cohabitation, they nonetheless express strong attachment to the ideal of marriage (Musick & Bumpass, 2011:1), as demonstrated by the following extracts:

They didn't really have a problem. They accepted it but they explained that we should get married soon. (Fa, 29 years)
Both my family and his family did not really have a problem with us living together. Their advice was that we should not get comfortable and stay together permanently without getting married. (Fb, 29 years)

Cohabiting couples are often expected to meet their families' expectations to get married (Willoughby et al., 2011:4), which is highly valued by most African parents (Jennings et al., 2012:924). However, cohabitation in some instances may be approved by the parents with the understanding that marriage would eventually happen.

In South Africa, cohabitation does not enjoy full legal recognition (Botha & Booysen, 2013:435). Some participants indicated that their families expressed concern as to the legal implications, and complications, inherent in cohabitation.

His mother told him that he should marry me because it is not right for us to stay together without getting married. Her main concern is that if I die my family will kick my boyfriend out of the house because we are currently staying in my house and we are not married. (F, 33 years)

> *My cousin is the one who was open about her concerns. She asked me what will happen if one of us dies and we are not married. I honestly feel that her concerns are genuine.* (Fa, 35 years)

In the event of the death of a partner the surviving cohabitee has no lawful claim on assets mutually acquired, in spite of the significant sacrifices made in the course of the relationship (Chinwuba, 2010:625; Drefahl, 2012:466). Certain legal rights that apply to married couples do not automatically apply to cohabitees (Mashau, 2011:6); for instance, cohabitation in South Africa has no legal bearing in terms of ownership of assets (Gustafsson & Worku, 2006:9). Cohabitees cannot inherit each other's fixed assets, such as a home, unless registered in the names of both partners; a surviving partner, who was neither the owner nor the lessee at the time of death of the other, technically has no claim on the home they both lived in (Botha & Booysen, 2013:435). Consequently, cohabitees tend to be cautious about pooling their resources due to the absence of legal protection against risk to their investments (Poortman & Mills, 2012:357). Alternatively, they may consider entering into a legal agreement concerning the distribution of their estates following the death of a partner.

Although the payment of *magadi* can assure a woman that her partner is committed to the relationship (Ndinda, Uzodike, Chimbwete & Mgeyane, 2011:4), it emerged from one participant's account that women are reluctant to openly express a desire for marriage (Sassler & Miller, 2010:14). Instead, they employ indirect approaches such as insinuations and veiled suggestions.

> *The main challenge for me is that I want us to take our relationship to the next step. It is not good to stay with someone when you are not married. I wish that he can marry me so that we can do things properly. He must pay magadi. However, I am not mentioning anything regarding the issue of magadi or whether he should marry me. As a person I think you should know if your partner is the one. I think maybe it will come to his mind or maybe it has already occurred to him that I am the one for him. I do stress about it openly once in a…whilst I would pass a hint and make him aware that he should marry me. I once told him and he was happy. He said that the issue of magadi was also on his mind.* (Fb, 32 years)

Women are family oriented and often harbour expectations of matrimony due to the traditional value ascribed to marriage (Kasearu, 2010:7). African women also support payment of *magadi a*s it represents commitment and love from a man (Posel et al.,

2011:106). Thus, women who embrace traditional values and norms regarding marriage may feel devalued when they cohabit (Huang et al., 2011:894).

Another participant's parents are eager for her partner to introduce himself to them and to state his marital intentions.

> *My parents expect my boyfriend to introduce himself to them and state his intentions. I tried to address that with my boyfriend and to clarify him that my parents do not necessarily expect him to marry me, but he should introduce himself officially and state his intentions. He repeated his earlier response that "motho yoo a hladilwego ha a na bosekelo" [meaning a divorced woman does not have any value. I was deeply hurt. It means I do not have any value to him.* (Fa, 35 years)

This excerpt highlights the plight of divorced women who face negative and demeaning reactions from partners when discussions on future plans for the relationship are suggested. This assertion is consistent with Miller and Sassler's (2010:14) finding where a female participant indicated that the topic of marriage was not openly discussed with her partner for fear of causing tension in the relationship. Another participant in Posel and Rudwick's (2014:291) study shared that men do not hold any value and respect for a divorced cohabiting partner, and they often abandon the relationship for another women when they intend to get married.

Despite cohabitees' desire to tie the knot, the excessive financial demands attached to the payment of *magadi* may prove to be a significant stumbling block.

> *My brother told me that he should pay a bigger amount* [for magadi] *because he found me owning a house. If he can at least save R20 000.00 it would be better. Currently, he has R12 000.00 which I feel it is too little. We* [participant's family] *discuss the issue of magadi some time.* (F, 33 years)

Historically, one of the functions of *magadi* is relationship building between two families, with little emphasis on the amount of money. However, due to the high rate of male unemployment, *magadi* is no longer affordable due its growing commercialisation as families treat this traditional practice as a financial transaction (Posel et al., 2011:106). Furthermore, information from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (2005) supports the view that current practices of *magadi* place a severe financial burden on couples (Posel et al., 2011:106). Although cohabitees

support and appreciate *magadi* as a traditional practice, the large amounts of money required are likely to decrease the likelihood of couples entering into marriage (Chaney & Fairfax, 2012:24).

A study entitled *Cohabitation and exchanges of support* by Eggebeen (2005:1098), explores the various forms of support that cohabitees receive from their families, and one of the major findings is that the quality of the relationship between children and their parents becomes important when young adults begin to establish their autonomy and navigate turbulent times.

> *Our families aren't too worried about that. I think they realized that there is more commitment than they initially assumed. I don't feel they treat us differently to how they did or how they would in any other case.* (M, 28 years)
> *I don't think they* [both families] *mind unless they are not saying anything about it. They even visit and we had fun with them. They are very supportive.* (Fa, 30 years)
> *My father was very supportive. His only advice was that I should not move from one relationship to another. He assured me that he doesn't have a problem with me moving in as long as I remain with the same partner.* (F, 29 years)
> *I think with her family it was not an issue because they have been very supportive of our relationship. So for example her mother paid for half or quarter of financial assistance I needed when we went to Paris together.* (Mb, 32 years)
> *Her family is very close to us and they come for day visits.* (M, 31 years)
> *Our relationship with my family is very good and we visit each other regularly. My family is staying locally so we are able to walk there and spend the day with them, like on Christmas day.* (Fb, 28 years)

Although many young adults no longer live with their parents they nonetheless have regular interactions with them and also seek assistance or counsel from them (Willoughby et.al, 2015:670). However, parental support depends on the quality of the parent–child relationship (Willoughby et al, 2011:4). For instance, female cohabitees are more likely to receive support from parents who are emotionally close to their daughter (Goodsell, James, Yorgason & Call, 2015:983). Women also seem to maintain more contact with their families than men do (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009:137). Cohabitees in more stable relationships are more likely to enjoy support from their parents. Nonetheless, some parents may be reluctant to invest time and support in their adult children's cohabiting relationships, considering the inherent instability of these unions (Eggebeen, 2005: 1100).

4.3.1.3 Subtheme 1.3: Participants' accounts of how they informed their friends and colleagues about their living arrangements and their reactions

Certain personal relationships are less dependent on marriage, blood ties, and family bonds (Baker & Elizabeth, 2014:352), and these cohabitees maintain a close association with their friends (Kasearu, 2010:8) and colleagues (Leverentz, 2011:239; Manning et al., 2011:118). Participants may take into account opinions of friends on issues such as the decision to cohabit. However, they ultimately make their own independent decisions about their relationships:

> *I have this one close friend of mine. We have been friends since 1999. I share everything with her. When I told her that I was moving in with my partner, she told me that she has some concerns but she would support me because I was doing it for the child. When I told her that my boyfriend was the right person for me, she warned me that I should not move in with a boy before he marries me because boys have a tendency to play with girls when they are not married. Recently, when I told her that I was thinking of moving out of the relationship she reminded me of what she told me before I moved in.* (F, 26 years)
> *I remember the first time when I was quite open to my friends and I was asked for their opinions because I was very shaky about the move* [to cohabit] *and they were like…*[in a soft female tone] *noo! You can't move in with a man. He is gonna get too comfortable. And this also came from like...older guys that I work with…*[mimicking them with a thick voice]. *Basically they did not approve my decision to move in with my boyfriend.* (F, 25 years)

These excerpts suggest that cohabitees rely on friends for support (Sano et al, 2012:956). Hence, friends have increasingly been shown to have significant influence during a key life stage of young adulthood (Wall & Gouveia, 2014:356). Cohabitation is perceived as an informal living arrangement detached from their parents, and cohabitees therefore rely more on friends for advice (Manning et al., 2011:122). Although cohabitees consult their friends for guidance on how to conduct their relationships, they do not necessarily take this advice blindly (Manning et al., 2011:141). The decision to cohabit still remains a personal choice.

Even in a society where cohabitation is socially accepted, marriage is still viewed by friends and colleagues as a preferred long-term union (Moors & Bernhardt, 2009:228). Friends therefore encourage cohabiting couples to get married.

They often suggest that I should marry her because I have been with her for some time now. (Ma, 32 years)

Some friends are judgemental and they keep on asking why we cohabit and not get married. They feel that we have been together for such a long time and we should just get married. (Fa, 29 years)

There is only one older colleague who told me that I should not stay with my boyfriend before we get married. (Fb, 29 years)

My friends are generally happy for me and my relationship but they also feel that we should get married. They feel it is wrong. (Fa, 29 years)

Many people who come over to our house ask if we are staying together. When I say yes, they are surprised even though they don't really know us [as] a couple and how long we have been together. Our friends know we live together. They know that this is their home and they don't have any problem with our arrangement. (Fa, 27 years)

Cohabitees may unintentionally be coerced by their peers into justifying their decisions. Participants report that friends frequently enquire about their relationship status (Sharp & Ganong, 2011:967). Similarly, Guizzardi (2011:496) asserts that cohabitees are frequently asked why they live together before getting married or why they do not choose to marry. This perceived moral judgement is ascribed to the belief systems of the participants' friends who view marriage as the only legitimate family formation.

Scholarly research in family dynamics tends to see a relationship where the woman is older than her partner as deviant, or even pathological (Pyke & Adams, 2010:753), since it is not consistent with the age structure normally found in a community (Jagger, 2005:91). One participant shared his challenges regarding his friends' perceptions of age and partnership.

Now my parents know her I have accepted it and I talk about it. During team building exercises I tell my colleagues that my girlfriend is eight years older than me. They will be like really! I will say why? What's wrong? Why is it that the man should always be older than the woman? This is the 21st century. (M, 31 years)

Within many patriarchal communities, it is morally or culturally acceptable for a man to be considerably older than his female partner (Pyke & Adams, 2010:4). Furthermore, this tradition encourages the cultural belief that the woman in a romantic relationship ought to be younger. Any moral violation of the age structure where the

female is older than the male often elicits morally stigmatising comments (Selterman & Koleva, 2014: 924). Similarly, authors claim that non-conformity to the social norm for age structure provokes disagreement, tension, and conflict (Pyke & Adams, 2010:4). However, with the increasing exposure to modern trends it has become common for the female to be older than her male partner. Moreover, cohabitation seems to challenge traditional norms, including the age difference between partners.

Cohabitation has become increasingly prevalent and socially acceptable among peers and colleagues (Baker & Elizabeth, 2014:403), as illustrated below.

> *Most of my friends know and I think they are okay with it because most of them are doing the same thing. Some are in the process of getting married.* (Fa, 30 years)
> *With most of them* [friends] *I would inform them when they invite me over after work that I am staying with him. They do understand. In my view they don't have a problem because I think they are doing the same as well and it is normal for them.* (Fa, 27 years)
> *My close colleagues...most know that I live with my girlfriend. My close colleagues have never said anything or make any sort of comments about it or anything like that.* (M, 28 years)
> *When my colleagues became aware that I had moved in with my boyfriend they firstly wanted to know how old I was. When I told them they said that hai* [anyway], *it is your decision what can we say. (*Fb, 30 years*)*

Cohabitees, whose friends and colleagues share their attitudes and values, develop similar mind-sets with regard to family formation (Kasearu, 2010:8). Authors posit that the liberal attitude among friends make it easier for individuals to enter into alternative family arrangements which do not conform to traditional dicutates such as cohabitation (Chaney, 2011:515; Sassler & Miller, 2015:142). It is expected that friends and colleagues will unreservedly support cohabiting relationships. Such social support from friends and colleagues is purported to be important for the quality and stability of the relationship (Hogerbrugge, Komter & Scheepers, 2012:321).

4.3.1.4 Subtheme 1.4: Participants' accounts of how their communities learned about their cohabitation and their reactions

The desires of young adults pertaining to marriage may reflect not only their family structure but also the larger cultural discourses to which they are exposed (Goldberg, 2014:159). Every individual's immediate family is intertwined with its community

(Pellander, 2014:1473) and traditions. People who belong to a particular social group often mirror the views that are common in their societies (Chaney, 2011:516). It was therefore important in this study to understand the societal perceptions of cohabitation within the larger context of participants' lives. Drawing from the social learning theory (Manning et al., 2011:116), this theme is about the connection between the social context and perceptions on cohabitation.

Although behaviour and attitudes are often a reflection of broad ideational domains (Jennings et al., 2012:924), it emerged that motivations for cohabiting are often based on individuals' personal considerations (Manning et al., 2011:117), as demonstrated in the extract below.

> *People are too uptight in this world. Frankly I don't care what they say. Most people will be very sad, disappointed. They may say we are immoral. That is the general thing that you get from the Black community where we were raised. But, I am not saying I justify cohabitation. You know, I have been very fortunate to be put through varsity. I graduated in record time. I worked hard. I got a job. I think I am justified to make certain decisions. (F, 25 years)*

Traditionally, individual decisions pertaining to family formation are largely guided by communal life (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:287); hence, the age-old African adage that *it takes a village to raise a child* is important in such communities. Moreover, within many African communities, moralities guide people in doing what is right and good for all as it is widely believed that *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* - loosely translated to mean *a person is a person only through other people* or *I am because we are* (Ntombana, 2011:634). However, cohabitation is typically justified by an individualistic perception of intimacy, adhering to no external standards such as societal expectations (Benjamin & Haze (2011:790). In communities which still uphold a strong traditional bias towards marriage, cohabitees risk facing social isolation and stigmatisation.

In a more traditional society characterised by a culture of familism, cohabitation remains less desirable (Baranowska-Rataj, 2014:1313; Jennings et al., 2012:925) and marriage is the most appropriate living arrangement (Hewitt & Baxter, 2011:44). Any perceived deviation from society's moral values could inadvertently lead to intensified hostility towards a particular group, which is seen as threatening or harmful to the

sanctity of society as a whole (Anitha & Gill, 2015:1126). Hence, some participants felt that their communities are intolerant of the lifestyle of their choice.

> *There is almost a misunderstanding of our lifestyle. Well not a misunderstanding but like intolerance because I am an artist and I live like an artist. It's like…*[thinking]. *What's it?* [silence, taking a deep breath]. *It is like...er...it is kind of stereotypical in that I live like a white person like I do* [in] *restaurants, I engage people from all walks of life and I am not strict in terms of the company that I keep. And I am always going overseas and they don't understand why. It's that kind of things. I have got this like lifestyle and that's why I am saying it is stereotypical. It is misunderstood. It seems like everyone expects you to get married and that's so unfair.* (Mb, 32 years)

This excerpt seems to confirm the view that cohabitees demonstrate independent thinking on matters that are personal and private, and that they reject any external influence on their relationships. However, such an ideology is often regarded as dissident among African communities and the individuals labelled coconuts - meaning a stranger masquerading as one of their own; it is sarcastically used to describe Black township residents who assume the cultural capital such as accent, dress, or slang associated with whiteness (Salo, Ribas, Lopes & Zamboni, 2010:303). Such individuals are perceived to be brown or black on the outside and white on the inside.

Geographical context plays a significant role in an individual's attitude towards cohabitation (Guetto, Luijkx & Scherer, 2015:168). It has been noted that cohabitation seems to be more prevalent in urban areas due to greater freedom in those settings (Posel & Rudwick. 2011:109). Conversely, negative social stigma seems to be strong in rural areas which are traditionally conservative (Gold, 2012:319). One participant who is originally from a rural area, initially experienced hostility from his family.

> *I am from a rural area* [village in the Northern Cape] *and I am working in a city so they had to understand because I am no longer in a rural area. In a rural place I won't be allowed to move in* [with] *my girlfriend before marriage I am now living in an urban area and my family and community back home need to understand that. However, I also need to explain the decision to cohabit to my family. You understand? I hope that they will eventually understand …*[silence]. *Even the time that I went with her home there was some tension but they got over it* [laughing]. (M, 31 years)

People from rural areas tend to adopt more traditional family values such as marriage compared to their peers from urban areas who prefer non-traditional values (Kasearu,

2010:8). As a result, cohabitation is relatively rare and stigmatised in rural areas as people who are traditional usually find it difficult to break away from traditional norms (Baker & Elizabeth, 2014:402). Moreover, parental influence on children tends to be more powerful in rural settings (Jennings et al., 2012:924). Cohabitees are therefore likely to live in urban areas or further away from their families (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009:136; Posel & Rudwick, 2014:286).

> *At the place where we are renting now people don't really know us and they don't even know that we are not married. They are treating us with respect. Even if perhaps they know that we are not married they are not showing it.* (Ma, 32 years)
> *Let me explain to you that the place where he stays is in town and there are big walls and we don't really get to interact with many people.* (Fb, 32 years)
> *We don't know the community members. Every-time when we come back from work we go straight to our flat. Our interaction with them is only limited to brief greetings.* (Fb, 29 years)

Couples in urban settings tend to be less concerned with deviating from cultural and social norms that may impact the formation of divergent types of relationships (Sassler & Miller, 2015:143). It is common for cohabitees in urban dwellings not to share strong communal values (Musick & Bumpass, 2007:4). However, it should be borne in mind that due to the high financial demands of urban life, couples are often forced to move in together to share costs.

The role of culture is central to understanding the context within which cohabitation is constructed within African communities. For instance, within certain communities, cohabitation is perceived as opposing ancestral beliefs.

> *The closest people that I can somehow regard as friends are my neighbours and some members of the community. When I told them I was moving in with my boyfriend they saw that as a sign of disrespect to my late mother.* (F, 33 years)

Amongst many Black African families, cohabitation is described as a deviation from [7]ancestral belief (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:287). Ancestral worship is premised on the belief that the dead live on and are capable of blessing or cursing those who remain

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[7] In South Africa different terminology is used to describe ancestors, for example *badimo* in Sesotho languages, *amadlozi* in isiZulu, whilst in isiXhosa they are known as *izinyanya* (Bogopa, 2010:1).

behind. This applies to traditional marriages, which includes the payment of *magadi* and introduction of the couple to their ancestors (cf. Addendum H). Hence, there is a belief that those who disregard ancestral beliefs are likely to experience misfortune in their lives.

Although traditionally cohabitees were subjected to fierce disapproval among African communities (Sano, et.al, 2012:957) it is evident that there has been an increased positive attitudinal change towards cohabitation (Brown & Kawaruma, 2010:5; Manning et al., 2011:117). This assertion is evident in the following extracts:

> *But from my closest community, my friends, my family they have not had a problem with it. It is also difficult to share how they really feel about it because they don't really know and they probably wouldn't approve. I can tell they wouldn't approve.* (Fa, 27 years)
>
> *I don't think the community members will ever understand. Yes sometimes they may understand but it will depend on whether one is still sticking to traditional values. There is still word in Xhosa I don't know it in Tswana ungalahli i'mbo yakho ngopho yana which means you must not abandon your roots. If you are still the same person that they knew prior to you leaving the area there won't be any difference...The first time I went home* [parental home in the Northern Cape Province] *was during my father's funeral. My father was a pastor and he passed away in 2012 and I met my partner in 2006. So once she went there they accepted her. They gave her their blessings. They appreciated the fact that she showed guts to come with their child* [referring to himself]. *My mother has since been calling my partner twice a week. It is like they knew each other before I even existed* [laughing]. (M, 31 years)
>
> *In the community back home they don't know. They just don't know. With him* [partner] *because I also visited his home in the Eastern Cape and what I saw when I am with them is that they are accepting and they are happy but you also get these cousins who would ask when are you guys getting married. But for now I think they are accepting me.* (F, 31 years)

In certain communities, cohabitation might be accepted largely as a result of the change in attitude in modern times, whilst others simply support the couple's choice without actually getting involved, appreciating that the couple is happy in their relationship (Castiglioni & Dalla-Zuanna, 2014:425). This positive attitude towards cohabitation was further illustrated by the following:

> *I have never encountered any problem with my fellow community members.* (Fa, 28 years)
>
> *Community members are generally happy with the relationship.* (Fa, 29 years)

> *Our neighbours understand the situation. They understand we are cohabiting. Nobody has ever made a comment. We have never picked up any sort of stigma or anything like that.* (M, 28 years)

The attitudinal change towards cohabitation indicates that although it is not explicitly approved in African society, cohabitation is becoming a common feature of urban society (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:285). Several explanations have been proffered to account for this more relaxed attitude towards cohabitation. Syltevik (2010:445), which suggest that this attitudinal change can be ascribed to the advent of a shift to completely new forms of democratic intimate relationships that do not rely on externally imposed codes. Certain authors suggest that the widespread occurrence of cohabitation could coincide with diminishing stigma, meaning that cohabiting relationships are likely to enjoy greater social support (Brown et. al., 2015:4). This is evident in the outcome of this study which was conducted in urban areas where people have adopted liberal attitudes towards non-traditional family unions.

In a traditional community where individuals are socialised to maintain traditional family values such as marriage, the decision to cohabit brings shame and embarrassment to the cohabitees, their families, and the community at large (Kasearu, 2010:8; Wiegers & Chunn, 2015:43). This is illustrated by the extracts below.

> *It is embarrassing because I consider myself to be a role model for the youth. I am always indoors and I attend church regularly. I always seek information for the unemployed youth about bursaries. I also give them advice about life issues in general. It is embarrassing that I have moved in with someone without getting married.* (F, 33 years)
> *I think for one reason our parents do not promote living with a partner before marriage. That is something that was instilled in me when we were growing up. So that is one of the disappointments for my parents. So if they find out which I doubt I will try to sit them down and sort the situation out but I am happy with them not knowing.* (F, 25 years)

Cultural socialisation imposes upon the young a duty to set aside their individual desires for the common good of others, and any deviation will bring shame and embarrassment upon their families (Church, 2014:796). Hence, individuals who may personally not regard cohabiting as particularly improper, nonetheless fear that their decision to cohabit will be regarded as highly disrespectful towards their families and communities (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:287). It is therefore common for these

cohabitees to decide not to disclose their cohabiting status to their communities for fear of being labelled *dissident members of culture* (Church, 2014:796).

Although people generally tend to form relationships with others who share the same characteristics such as race, authors posit that racial integration is generally becoming more common in cohabiting relationships (Högnäs & Thomas, 2014:31), Campbell & Martin, 2015:5). In countries such as South Africa the issue of race is associated with negative connotations such as supremacy and subordination. One participant demonstrates that the issue of race is still a thorny issue despite the advent of democracy which seeks to unite all the people, irrespective of their race.

> *Uhm...It depends on where we have been because in I found in Cape Town I get few more looks because we are a mixed race relationship. However, once I have moved here* [Gauteng] *it is lot more common to see mixed-race couples.* (Fa, 27 years)

According to Salo et al. (2010:298), cities such as Cape Town are still characterised by the historical racial and socio-economic divides that have marked the South Africa's urban landscape for centuries. Furthermore, race-based laws such as the Influx Control Act of 1945, the Group Areas Act of 1960, the Bantustans Act of 1970, permeated the physical space of all individuals with political and socio-economic inferences, which held significant social implications for the everyday lived experiences of both black and white citizens (Salo et al., 2010:298). It was interesting to note that the participant made reference to the intolerant attitudes in Cape Town. However, the relaxed attitudes in Gauteng demonstrates the fluid and shifting ways in which some people in the country are able to cohabit with people from different races.

4.4 Conclusion

The chapter emphasised the goals of this study which are threefold: firstly, to develop an in-depth understanding of the place of cohabitation; secondly, to gain insight into the participants' experiences in cohabiting relationships; and finally, to proffer lessons on social work practice.

The first part one of this chapter presented a detailed biographical profile of participants in terms of their age, race, gender, ethnic group, duration of the relationship and employment status. The biographical profile set the scene for data analysis.

Theme 1, the main focus of this chapter, discussed the findings based on the participants' descriptions of their circumstances preceding cohabitation. Extensive literature was utilised to support the excerpts elicited from the transcripts to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, validating the importance of the data collected. The theme has four subthemes, which unpacked the reasons for cohabitation, the perceptions and reactions of families about cohabitation, the reactions of family and friends about cohabitation, and the attitudes of the community towards cohabitation.

It was established that couples cohabit due to various reasons, which vary from one relationship to another, depending on the personal circumstances of the participants. The reasons range from a commitment to each other, a plan towards marriage which is perceived as the next step, an alternative to marriage due to various circumstances, and in some cases as a matter of convenience. It was also revealed that some couples just slide into cohabitation without deliberating the implications of the transition.

Cohabitees explained that informing their parents of their cohabiting relationships was relatively difficult. It is evident that the influence of cultural norms, societal expectations, and religious beliefs play a crucial role in parents accepting or rejecting the cohabiting relationships of their children. In some cases, families would not approve of cohabitation as they might view it as unlawful or not sanctioned by culture and tradition. However, it also emerged from the participants' narratives that some parents feel they need to provide unconditional support to their children and afford them the opportunity to be happy, regardless of the relationship status. According to participants, some parents are of the view that marriage will eventually be a natural progression from cohabitation, and encourage or advise their children to get married in the first instance. The findings also reveal that, because South African law does not recognise cohabitation as a legal entity, parents and family members are concerned about the welfare of a child in event of the death of a partner.

From the findings it emerged that the participants' friends and colleagues react to cohabitation in different ways. Some accept it without reservation, some are judgemental, whilst others try to justify the decision to cohabitate and eventually accept it. However, it is evident that cohabitation has become more prevalent and socially acceptable among peers and colleagues.

Cohabitees indicated that acceptance of cohabitation within a society or community remains undesirable as people regard marriage as the best and most acceptable option. This notion may differ from one geographical area to another, depending on the nature of the community or society. This chapter revealed that the participants' motivations for entering into cohabitation are complex and vary according to individual and personal circumstances.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS SINCE COHABITATION

5.1 Introduction

A person with lived experiences in a particular sphere of life is the only one qualified to tell his or her story. As a result, the participants were asked to share their experiences since cohabitation. Martignani (2011:566) points out that a researcher cannot comment on cohabitation from a remote standpoint. This chapter presents detailed accounts of their experiences in different aspects of their lives. The analysis of this theme yielded 11 subthemes which are discussed below.

5.2 Theme 2: Participants' reflections on their experiences of cohabiting relationships

Participants were requested to share their experiences since they started cohabiting. Positive accounts are discussed under the first two subthemes, followed by the participants' accounts of challenging experiences since cohabitation. Almost all the participants had to adjust their behaviour after moving in with their partners, and those experiences are discussed under this subtheme. Commitment is an important factor in any romantic relationship, and participants shared how they understand and express this loyalty in their relationships. Cohabitation is a moral and religious issue; hence, participants shared interesting narratives about their experiences of cultural and religious issues in their relationships. The participants were further requested to share their experiences of how ownership and power as well as infidelity manifest in cohabiting relationships. Other issues included how responsibilities are carried out in the relationships as well as experiences related to childbirth and raising children in cohabiting relationships.

Table 5.1 Themes and subthemes of the experiences of participants since cohabitation

Theme	Subtheme
2. Participants' reflections on their experiences of cohabiting relationships	2.1 The participants' positive experiences of their relationships since cohabitation
	2.2 Benefits of being in a cohabiting relationship
	2.3 The participants' accounts on challenges of their relationships since cohabitation
	2.4 Personal changes since cohabitation
	2.5 Participants' descriptions of how commitment is expressed in cohabiting relationships
	2.6 Experiences of cultural dilemmas
	2.7 The influence of religion on participants' relationships
	2.8 Ownership and power in cohabiting relationships
	2.9 Issues of infidelity in cohabiting relationships
	2.10 Descriptions of responsibilities in the relationships
	2.11 Participants' experiences and views of raising children in a cohabiting relationship

5.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: The participants' positive experiences of their relationships since cohabitation

The motivation for individuals to enter into cohabitation is said to be the need to get to know each other better (Sahib & Gu, 2013:150; Manning et. al., 2015:128). Seven female participants reported positive experiences of getting to know and to be known by their partners.

> *Moving in affords us the opportunity to know each other better. He must know what he is dealing with because we were staying separately before.* (Fa, 32 years)
> *It provides us with the opportunity to know each other better. We agreed that if we stay together we will have time to know each better. In fact he is the one who suggested it.* (F, 31 years)

The findings corroborate the view that cohabitation affords cohabitees an opportunity to see each other's "little quirks" (Jamison & Ganong, 2010:543). Female cohabitees

regard cohabitation as an ideal opportunity to determine if they have found a good match (Reinhold, 2010:721). Cohabitation also "serves as a sort of screening device or a sort of mutual study about partners' habits in their daily lives" (Martigani, 2011:566). Hence, some female cohabitees regard it as a "vetting process" (Reid & Golub, 2015:1235). In addition, participants view cohabitation as providing an opportunity to become familiar with the personalities and behaviour of their partners.

> *For me personally, the benefit of being in a cohabiting relationship is that it gives me the opportunity to know him better before we get married. You get to learn about the next person, for example if he is an abuser. I don't want to make a mistake of getting married before I get to know him better.* (Fb, 30 years)
> *I think that you also get to know the person very well. You learn how he behaves in his own space and if he is real. When you don't live together the person can decide which side they want to show you and which side they do not want to show you. When you live together you can only pretend for so long.* (Fa, 28 years)

The advantage of cohabitation is that couples learn about the qualities of each other more deeply than they would in a more casual relationship (Reinhold, 2010:720). It has been noted that individuals tend to behave differently when leading separate lives than they do in cohabitation (Shulman & Connolly, 2013:28). It is assumed that all their vagaries are bound to be exposed when partners are cohabiting (Manning et al., 2015:128).

Certain authors caution that individuals may avoid revealing their true personalities for fear of rejection or possible termination of the relationship (Niehuis, Reifman, Feng & Huston, 2014:20). More so, couples may be uncertain about aspects of their personalities that are under scrutiny or how they are being evaluated, and this may lead to tension in the relationship (Gold, 2012:318; Niehuis et al., 2014:20).

Female participants regard knowing their partners' characters as important in anticipation of marriage.

> *I would say that the main benefit of staying together with him is that should he decide to marry me, I will know what I am getting myself into. I managed to learn many things about him. For example, I have noticed that he is short-tempered and I have also noticed that he is a caring person.* (Fa, 29 years)
> *This relationship gives me the opportunity to see the type of person that he is. At the end I will decide if I want to marry him or not. One thing that I learned about him is that he prefers that I keep to my promises and that I should not*

change what we agreed upon. He also prefers that we should make our decisions together and not make them on our own. (Fb, 30 years)

I have also noticed that he is a quiet person. Perhaps when we were not staying together he wanted to make the best of the little time we had [by talking] *but, I have since noticed that he is a bit reserved.* (Fb, 27 years)

Cohabitation is considered by some as a necessary probationary period before marriage (Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007:537; Manning et al., 2015:132). However, cohabitation and marriage are two distinct institutions, and information acquired during cohabitation might not necessarily be helpful in marriage (Sahib & Gu, 2013:151). Moreover, it is apparent that in some instances, marriage which follows cohabitation is often fraught with instability, which may eventually end in divorce (Brown, Sanchez, Nock & Wright, 2006:455).

Couples who spend more time together have an opportunity to engage with one another more intimately and become closer (Ben-Ari, 2012:392; Lesch & Furphy, 2013:630).

It [cohabitation] *brought us closer because when we were still staying separately we were not seeing much of each other and it gave me an opportunity to know him better which would have been difficult if we were not staying together.* (Fb, 27 years)

Closeness in a relationship is a positive aspect linked to intimacy, love, empathy, and security. Closeness may also lead to an emotional bond between couples, which provides an opportunity to share feelings, thoughts, values, and personal space, thus deepening and intensifying the bond between them (Shulman et al., 2013:460; Schoebi & Randall, 2015:344).

During courtship, most couples regularly frequent restaurants. However, those who prefer home-cooked meals, especially men, regard cohabitation as a favourable living arrangement.

I have noticed that he doesn't like take-away food. We were meeting at restaurants before and we would eat out there but now I have noticed that he prefers a home-cooked meal. (Fb, 27 years)

This excerpt resonates with the view that although visiting restaurants is common during the dating phase (French, Story, Neumark-Sztainer, Fulkerson & Hannan, 2001:1823), cohabitees generally report that it is important to sit down at home and have a meal with their partners (Larson, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan & Story, 2007:1502). The symbolic meaning of eating a home-cooked meal is largely influenced by developmental and cultural norms (Videon & Manning, 2003:365). Nonetheless, it has been argued that eating at home is more than just stopping to eat what is normally referred to as *junk food*; instead, it demonstrates the important psychological development that is consistent with lifestyle change, notably the attitudes and self-concept that occur during cohabitation (Story, Neumark-Sztainer & French, 2002:42). Africans also attach different meanings to having a home-cooked meal, which are influenced by the socio-environmental contexts in which they exist (Story et al., 2002:42). Africans believe that it is the duty of a wife to prepare a meal for her husbands who in turn should eat at home as a sign of appreciation and respect. Equally, African women take pride in preparing food for their partners. Women are offended when their partners do not eat at home, and this has the potential to create tension in the relationship.

The quality of the cohabiting relationship has a bearing on the individuals' wellbeing (Whisman, 2013:163). A female participant who is content with her fuller figure shared the healthy quality of her relationship with her partner.

> *What should I say?* [laughing out loud]. *I really enjoy this relationship. I really do. I can honestly say I feel that I am enjoying myself now because of my previous relationship. I have even gained weight. I was so thin but I now I have gained weight* [laughing]. *In my previous relationship I never enjoyed myself and I was always crying. I don't remember myself shedding a tear in this relationship. As much as I say there are challenges in this relationship my boyfriend would immediately apologise if he feels that he is wrong. There is nothing as hurtful as being wrongfully accused of something that you did not do. My boyfriend is very quick to apologise when he is wrong.* (F, 34 years)

Romantic relationships are often linked to individuals' overall wellbeing and life satisfaction (Frost & Forrester, 2013:456; Denney, Gorman & Barrera, 2013:48; Barstad, 2014:973; Whitton, Rhoades & Whisman, 2014:858; Weiser et al, 2015:1). This narrative suggests that female cohabitees in particular feel content when they enjoy emotional and social support, which leads to increased psychological wellbeing

(Drefahl, 2012:463; Ganong et al., 2015:18). Females are likely to be negatively affected by a lack of commitment from their cohabiting partners (Stavrora, Fetchenhauer & Schlösser, 2012:1066). Generally, Africans appreciate a woman's fuller figure as a symbol of happiness, well-cared for by her partner, and general satisfaction.

Good communication skills are important as they enhance the quality of the relationship (Claxton, O'Rourke, Smith & DeLongis, 2011:377; Farbod, Ghamari & Majd, 2014:3).

> *My boyfriend has become more open. We have been dating for four years before we moved in together. He is now more open, which was not the case before. He used to be a closed book but, I guess he has realised that it is important to have more open communication.* (Fa, 27 years)

Openness and honesty are prerequisites for successful liaison between cohabiting partners (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:793; Knight, 2014:271). Within an intimate relationship, openness denotes an individual's willingness to engage with the other person with sincerity (Ben-Ari, 2012:394). Hence, a certain degree of openness in a romantic relationship is desirable as total lack of openness could lead to the dissolution of the romantic relationship (Thompson & Vangelisti, 2015:2). Couples in stable relationships feel free to express themselves without concealing their negative emotions (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:804).

Another fundamental trait of a healthy relationship associated with openness, is trust (Thompson & Vangelisti, 2015:2). Trust is an essential ingredient of a stable relationship (Kim, Weisberg, Simpson, Orina, Farrell & Johnson, 2015:521). Its existence in a relationship often leads to disclosure and sharing of private information (Thompson & Vangelisti, 2015:2), as illustrated below.

> *I think it* [cohabitation] *puts me at ease in terms of trust. Now that I am staying with him I know his whereabouts and he also reports when he leaves the house and when he is going to come home late.* (F, 31 years)
> *The main difference is that we discuss almost everything, for example she knows how much I earn and she is aware of all my financial dealings. There is more trust now that we are staying together.* (Ma, 32 years)

> *There is more trust. If a phone rings she can answer the phone and if there is an SMS coming in and I'm sleeping she can open and see who is sending the message.* (M, 31 years)

Individuals who trust each other are more likely to have relationships that are generally satisfying, and tend to approach relationships in a more constructive way (Kim et al., 2015:523). Thus, romantic relationships which are characterised by high levels of trust are more likely to thrive (Watkins & Boon, 2015:4; De Munck & Kronenfeld, 2016:4).

For two participants, the line between cohabitation and marriage seems unclear as they equate cohabitation with marriage.

> *I feel like we are married. I think the difference is that if we are married in-community of property we are going to be one. However, should we separate our assets are going to be shared equally. So those are some of the benefits of marriage.* (Fa, 32 years)
> *I kinda* [somehow] *consider her my wife…like we feel we are married because we share property, we share…uhm...she is my regte* [stable partner]. *She is the one.* (Ma, 32 years)

With regard to relationship quality, there is a view that cohabitation and marriage are similar in more ways than is generally perceived (Baker & Elizabeth, 2013:263; Brown et al., 2015:2). However, some authors maintain that cohabitation resembles marriage in relationship satisfaction only if the couple plans to marry (Jampaklay & Haseen, 2011:139; Siennick, Staff, Osgood, Schulenberg, Bachman & Eseltine, 2014:738). This notion is disputed by Willoughby and Carroll (2010:2), who purport that marriage is not necessarily a definite future outcome for all cohabitating couples. For instance, in New Zealand, cohabitees are given a legal marriage-like status after three years of cohabitation. This status comes into play for spousal support, taxation, and social benefits. Hence, many cohabitees do not find it necessary to marry (Manning et al., 2015:132). On the other hand, among some African communities, cohabitation does not enjoy any social recognition, irrespective of the quality of the relationship. Marriage still remains the most recognised family formation.

Historically, religion is associated with marriage (Lee & Ono, 2010:963; Botha & Booysen, 2013:439). One participant drew a religious parallel between cohabitation and marriage:

> *Me and my girlfriend are very happy in our relationship. To be honest, for me the only difference between a married couple and people who are cohabiting is that those who are married wear rings which are blessed by the pastor and their relationship blessed as well. They also have a marriage contract and exchanged vows.* (Ma, 32 years)

This response supports the view that even without religious endorsement, cohabitation can provide enough satisfaction for the cohabitees to maintain their relationship (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:792), thus disputing the notion that religious cohabitees are less committed to a relationship (Kalmijn, Loeve & Manting, 2007:162). There is also a widely held belief that ideologically, cohabitees tend to have no religious affiliation as religious people are more likely to marry than to cohabit (Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012:47).

Cohabitation may encourage more sexual engagement due to the closeness of the partners.

> *Do you see how wide my smile is? You know what? We had different places of abode but when we moved in together for me there was no difference. The only difference was that we are obviously having more sex* [burst in laughter]. *I am sorry I am bringing this other element. There was…if anything…to give you a background I grew up with this person. He is always like…we started dating at varsity* [university]*. During our high schools day his ex-girlfriend…I think I am the third woman to have a relationship with him…He is very conservative, down to earth, and humble, he does not drink* [alcohol]*, and he does not go out and does not attend social gatherings. So where was I getting at? Ya!! His girlfriend at high school…That's what I wanted to emphasise. She used to call me her sister-in-law. That is how close we were…we have always been close.* (F, 25 years)

Cohabitation enhances the value that partners place on sexual intimacy (Huang, Smock, Manning & Bergstrom-Lynch, 2011:878; Niehuis et al., 2014:1076; Amato, 2015:6) which may be an indication of a serious and committed relationship (Willoughby & Carroll, 2012:1455). Previous research findings suggest that female cohabitees also derive comfort and security from sexual intimacy in cohabiting relationships (Jamison & Ganong, 2010:542; Knight, 2014:633). However, it should be noted that cohabitation may erode sexual excitement over time, particularly among male cohabitees (Huang et al., 2011:888; Niehuis et al., 2014:3).

5.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Benefits of being in a cohabiting relationship

Establishing and maintaining intimate relationships elicit a wide range of psychological benefits for cohabitees (Braithwaite et al., 2010:2). This section presents the participants' accounts on the personal benefits that they derive from cohabiting relationships, namely companionship, alleviating loneliness, reducing household responsibilities, and a source of social and emotional support.

Within cohabiting relationships, couples enjoy companionship as the foundation of their relationship (Frye & Trinitapoli, 2015:498; Chow, Ruhl & Buhrmester, 2015:712). It has also been noted that women value partners who listen to them (Ganong et al., 2015:20). Two female participants expressed appreciation of having companions with whom they are able to share their life and work challenges and frustrations.

> *You have your best friend there with you all the time, like you have someone to go home to. When I am frustrated by my boss at work and when I get home I will go like, what was he thinking? And he* [partner] *will go like, "ya man and you told him". Or the person may go like, "did you think about?"…You know you will have someone to talk to. You have fewer reasons to update or check people on Facebook because you have a real…a genuine person you can share with…literally a genuine person.* (F, 25 years)
> *When you are living with someone and you have the bad day at the office and you get home and someone to talk to and listen to, someone to run to then that is person is there for you, there is more support and also knowing that when you get home, no matter how bad your day has been there is someone else you can talk to. You are not going to an empty space. I enjoy my space, I enjoy being alone, but I do enjoy knowing that when I get home there would be someone if I need to share or if I need to debate things or if I need to get something off my chest.* (M, 28 years)

The findings resonate with the view that intimate relationships are considered essential for companionship (Liu & Rook, 2013:817). Cohabitees rely on their partners for comfort during times of adversity (Collins & Ford, 2010:235). It is common within intimate relationships that partners regard each other as best friends (De Munck & Kronenfeld, 2016:5). These individuals can be deemed to subscribe to the soul-mate theory (Franiuk et al., 2012:822). However, critics of this theory maintain that the exaggerated, positive narratives of a partner have the potential to sugar-coat the reality within the relationship (Claxton et al., 2011:376).

A male participant's account focuses on the practical benefits of cohabitation.

> *Personally, I have less responsibility as a man because when I was still staying alone I had to wash my own clothes and iron them myself. I had to cook also. So I am not doing that anymore because we are staying together now. I won't have the pots to cook and wash or to do laundry and ironing. On her side I think that the main benefit is that she has someone who sleeps on her side every day.* (M, 31 years)

Despite the increasingly liberal gender-role attitude often associated with cohabiting relationships, some still subscribe to societal gender roles despite the fact that women who are employed in the open labour market also contribute financially to the upkeep of the family. Unfortunately, men still continue to perform fewer household chores and expect their employed partners to take care of the household (Lesch & Furphy, 2013:621; Naess, Blekesaune & Jakobsson, 2015:64). Interestingly, one female participant identified her partner's contribution by stating that …*my partner helps with things like broken cupboards you know…just the maintenance around the house* (cf. item on division of households' responsibilities).

One of the salient benefits of cohabitation is that it serves as a source of live-in companionship that alleviates emotional loneliness.

> *I think the companionship - so having someone around all the time. As I have mentioned earlier I do enjoy my own space but, I do I enjoy the fact that I am living with someone because it can be quite lonely if you are not.* (Fa, 27 years)

> *For me, I am happy. I get personal gratification from it. I don't feel lonely at home.* (Fb, 27 years)

> *Obviously not being lonely and having someone there to talk to, to share whatever happened during the day.* (Fa, 30 years)

The physical presence of an intimate partner fulfils the need for the couple to connect, and prevents loneliness (Chen & Feeley, 2014:142). Within the context of an intimate relationship, loneliness often emanates from the absence of an intimate partner who truly understands and cares about that individual (Moller, Deci & Elliot, 2010:754; Liu & Rook, 2013:814). Loneliness engenders a natural desire for close and intimate ties, without these bonds being restrictive in any way (Grippo, London, Goossens & Cacioppo, 2015:240). Stokes (2016:2) maintains that cohabiting partners are capable of providing emotional support and mutual assistance to each other.

Cohabitees also enjoy support that is more responsive to their individual needs (Kappes & Shrout, 2011:663). Cohabiting relationships therefore serve as an important source of emotional comfort and support.

> *We support each other a lot. When I go through difficult times he does comfort me and I do the same when he goes through difficult times as well.* (Fb, 28 years)
>
> *In my case, I appreciate the fact that he is able to help me financially with my studies. I am graduating next week and it was largely because of his support. I never used to have someone helping me with my studies.* (F, 33 years)

Cohabiting relationships, like any other intimate relationship, are fundamentally vital for emotional and financial support (Mastekaasa, 2006:150). It is common for cohabiting partners to provide practical and emotional support in situations of stress and anxiety (Drefal, 2012:463). One of the likely benefits of such support is improved psychological wellbeing. It has been observed that providing support in a cohabiting relationship may be a strong indication of a willingness to invest in the future of the relationship. However, there have been accounts of female cohabitees leaving the relationship once they receive financial assistance from their partners to fund their studies. Many parents therefore discourage their sons in non-marital relationships from financing their partners' studies.

Gender identity is a social construct that embodies an individual's subjective sense of being a man or woman (Thompson & Vangelisti, 2015:3). Traditionally, in addition to men being expected to be providers, they are also required to offer protection to their households.

> *I realised that he is very protective over me being the other person in the house. He always check if the doors are locked, almost security worry about another person.* (Fa, 27 years)

The general belief is that men should protect and take care of women (Sarlet et al., 2012:444; Robnett & Leaper, 2013:97). Hence, manhood in this context is expressed in a man showing care for this partner's physical wellbeing (Pfeffer, 2010:167; Lesch & Furphy, 2013:622). This assertion serves to confirm that cohabitees still adhere to socially prescribed gender roles. Within many African communities, it is generally believed that a man is the head of the family, and that women derive comfort from being taken care of by their male partners.

In cohabiting relationships, couples exchange a wide range of benefits such as relying on each other's strengths and compensating for their weaknesses.

> *I think it has been quite interesting. I think she has been really stable in terms of things that I wouldn't see if I was staying by myself. There are certain things that I wouldn't do without her. For example, we have now bought a house and that decision came from her to say that actually Sunday we need to go look for a house. So ja! It has sort of become an interesting symbiotic relationship like the things* [personal strengths and weaknesses] *that I don't have she has and things that she doesn't have I have and we compensate on those.* (Mb, 32 years)

Drawing from the interpersonal theory, Kilman (2012:132) asserts that reciprocal and complementary attributes between partners promote positive behaviour and strengthen relationship quality. Furthermore, key to this interpersonal theory is the concept of complementality, which refers to the extent to which each partner's actions elicit specific actions from the other. A relationship characterised by such a symbiotic character is likely to flourish.

5.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: The participants' accounts on challenges of their relationships since cohabitation

Although cohabitation can be a great source of satisfaction, it also emerged as a source of conflict, stress, and unhappiness (Weigel, Davis & Woodard, 2015:345). The participants shared some of the challenges they have encountered in their relationships related to the complacency of partners, childbearing, negative change in the partner's personality, partner's excessive alcohol intake and drug use, feelings of regret and disappointment, lack of deliberation prior to moving in, difficulty in creating a language to describe a partner, describing cohabitation within the family context, and lack of approval of cohabitation from the partner's family.

In certain instances, cohabitation contributes to complacency and reduces relationship quality (Willoughby et al., 2013:5; Funk & Kobayashi, 2014:1112). One participant described her partner's complacency as follows:

> *I feel that he is now too relaxed. When we were still dating he would go all out to impress me but now I feel that he is too relaxed and says that he cannot afford some of the things he used to buy for me.* (Fb, 32 years)

This excerpt supports the assertion that when a couple gets too comfortable in a relationship they tend to stop trying to make each other happy (Smith, 2014:13). Huang et al. (2011:893) have realised that cohabiting women are often wary of men who have become comfortable and complacent in cohabitation. This is contrary to another claim, that cohabiting couples work harder to maintain their relationship and not take one another for granted (Smith, 2014:13). Thus, cohabiting couples are said to be operating within an awareness of risks in their relationships. Hence, they tend to engage in behaviour that would elicit a favourable response from their partners (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:793; Niehuis et al., 2013:956). Moreover, it is commonly expected that men should impress and reward women with gifts (Jackson et al., 2011:632). Generally, men tend to attach importance to impressing a partner with gifts, and women are always appreciative of these favours (Knight, 2014:634).

The presence of a child in cohabitation may trigger tension, and reduce stability and the quality of the relationship.

> *Things were initially going fine until June last year* [2014] *when he started coming late from work. On some days he would not even come back home or would come back in the early hours of the next morning. I think our problems started since we had a child. Before us having a child, he was caring and providing for me. He is currently not contributing to the financial maintenance of the child. My partner's father buys grocery and his brother pays for the child's fees at a crèche. When we run out of the child's food he doesn't really care. The other thing is that the child does not eat normal food and we have to buy special diet. So, it* [is] *financially very strenuous for me with him not contributing.* (F, 26 years)

This excerpt suggests that not all men are ready to assume parenthood (Hunter, 2006:1). Some cohabiting fathers are untrustworthy and unwilling to take responsibility for their children (Chili & Maharaj, 2015:30). Makofane (2015) has aptly entitled her study: *Not all men are fathers: experiences of African women from families with absent fathers.* One possible explanation could be that sexual intimacy in cohabitation is largely associated with pleasure, and disconnected from reproduction (Turney, 2011:121). Therefore, men may view pregnancy as deprivation of their rights to choose parenthood, especially if the pregnancy was not discussed and agreed upon beforehand. They may also feel trapped in such a relationship.

The deterioration in relationship quality may not only contribute to poor relationship outcomes but may trigger uncertainties and doubt about the stability and future of the relationship (Whitton et al., 2014:859). A participant reflected on the disappointment and hurt brought about by a failing cohabiting relationship.

> *Initially he was very loving and I thought he was the perfect partner for me. We were very open with each other. We were friends and we would share advice. He would even advise me to go back to school. I was committed to this relationship. Now…now I don't know anymore. I was really committed to this relationship. I never thought he would hurt me by cheating and abusing me emotionally with insults. When I went to stay with him I thought he was Mr Right. I was so happy to move in. He would come home drunk and tell his parents that they should date me because they are the ones who love me.* (F, 26 years)

The concept of *Mr Right* is central to the soulmate theory. It reflects the extent to which individuals in intimate relationships believe that their partners are ideal (Franiuk et al., 2012:822). In this case, the undesirable behaviour of the partner is attributed to excessive alcohol consumption. The finding supports previous studies which show that alcohol use by one of the partners leads to the deterioration of the quality of the relationship (Cunningham, 2008:4; Tach & Edin, 2011:77; Berger & Bzostek, 2014:104; Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015:604). Excessive alcohol intake is also a major cause of conflict in most intimate relationships, including reduced feelings of love and intimacy, which may be detrimental to the interactions between partners (Levitt & Cooper, 2010:1706).

The devastating effects of *nyaope* on its users, their families, and communities have been reported extensively by the media in South Africa (Mokwena, 2016:138). One participant described the lack of trust in her partner as a result of his addiction to [8]*nyaope.*

> *Unfortunately, he started using nyaope* [highly addictive drug]. *He is not abusive but our main problem is that he is using drugs. Even when he comes back home*

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[8]According to the Department of Social Development (National Drug Master Plan 2006-2011), *nyaope* is a mixture of dagga and heroin used increasingly in the Tshwane metropolitan area. There are unconfirmed reports of a concoction of rat poison and anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) being included in the mixture. However, in all confirmed reports heroin and dagga seem to be the main ingredients (Mokwena, 2016:138)

in the afternoon without money, I don't trust that he didn't make money. I always suspect that he is spending money on drugs. (Fb, 28 years)

This extract shows the mistrust that exists between the couple which may lead to the deterioration and dissolution of the relationship. Although the well-known short- and long-term impact of illegal chemical substances on the user includes high-risk behaviour such as engaging in criminal behaviour, psychosis, and compromised health (Moodley, Matjila & Moosa, 2012:2), there is a dearth of empirical studies on the link between cohabitation and substance abuse (Lonardo et al., 2010:789). Previous findings on the link between cohabitation and substance abuse are inconclusive (Flemming, White & Catalano, 2010:15).

The decision to enter into cohabitation, which is not based on a romantic precept, can be one of the most common and heart-breaking disappointments in life (Joel, MacDonald & Plaks, 2013:461). Consequently, cohabitees may consider terminating the declining relationship (Dommermuth & Wiik, 2014:327). The extract below highlights feelings of regret, lost love and trust.

> *Honestly, I regret* [silent for a moment]…*I really regret the decision to move in with him because I don't think there is still love in this relationship. Everything between us has changed. There is no more love. There is no more trust. He knows very well that I love him; hence he repeats the same mistakes because I forgive him all the time. At the moment things are not going well. I feel like I am desperate to stay with him.* (F, 26 years)

Love and trust are the salient ingredients of any intimate relationship. Even though the definition of love is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is generally regarded as an overarching term that encompasses attraction, sex, attachment, intimacy, seduction, affection, and commitment (Lamy, 2015:1; De Munck & Kronenfeld, 2016:2). Among these ingredients love is deemed the most significant motivation for entering and maintaining any romantic relationship (Wiik, Bernhardt & Noack, 2010:274; Sprecher & Hatfield, 2015:3). Some level of trust is also necessary for the development and stability of the relationship (Kim et al., 2015:521), which, judging from the above extract, does not seem to be the case.

A higher level of trust emanates from the conviction that the partner's intentions in the relationship will be consistent and genuine (Watkins & Boon, 2015:4). In the absence

of love and trust, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness may creep in (Whitton et al., 2014:859). Despite the clear benefit of forgiveness (Schumann, 2012:998; Sarlet et al., 2012:444), continuous accommodative tolerance, particularly of the same transgression, may decrease relationship satisfaction over time (Baker, McNulty, Overall, Lambert & Fincham, 2012:283).

In certain instances, cohabitation is an incremental process which often occurs without careful deliberation on the future of the relationship (Steuber & Paik, 2014:1180), as shared by a male participant:

> *Maybe I will be rude...to stay with someone who has a history of being a whore* [prostitute]. *For example, she was staying somewhere and we met in this big building where we are working and then I started to like her. We went to stay in the North-West Province. One of my friends noticed this chick* [girl] *and she knows her past and said listen here, this person did A, B, C, and D. Remember, I am staying with this person now. This is the challenge to get this person out of my life or to go home knowing what this person was doing before. Remember, most people who stay together are still in a fresh relationship. It is not about you knowing each other for five or ten years. You like this girl and you say to yourself, let me get closer to her. Whatever happens will happen thereafter as long as she is next to me and I enjoy this beautiful girl who is cute and she has got curves. You never really get a chance to ask the person as to how many previous relationships she had and her experiences in those relationships because it will have a negative impact on our interaction.* (M, 31 years)

The finding in this study is consistent with that of Bernardi (2007:535) that, "the sooner an individual discovers the negative things about the partner, the better." Previous research findings revealed that dating couples transition to cohabitation without getting to know one another well enough (Vennum et al., 2014:413). It has been found that couples who cohabit without honest self-disclosure may experience relational distress and instability (Rhoades et al., 2009:107; Carlson, Daire, Munyon & Young, 2012:124).

Cohabitation has the potential to affect how couples perceive themselves after entering into this kind of relationship (Soulsby & Bennet, 2015:2). For example, married couples see themselves as husband and wife with reference to their union. However, this is not necessarily the case in cohabitation. Cohabitees are often

uncertain how to address or refer to each other (Jago, 2011:208); others create their own vernacular or language to describe their partners.

> *For me I regard the word partner as a title that refers to someone who shares your emotions and your life. If there was a specific word I could use I would use it. I take it that she started as my girlfriend and she is now my partner and she will ultimately be my wife when we get married.* (Ma, 32 years)

> *I feel that he is motho waka* [my person/man] *whether we are married or not.* (Fb, years)

These responses answer a question raised by a participant in Jago's (2011:204) study that: *What are we to each other?* In some situations, this may be an indication of conflict in the relationship and uncertainty as to what cohabitation means to the couple (Robnett & Leaper, 2013:97). Due to this complexity, some cohabitees resort to words such as *my girl*, *my dude*, *my Boo*, *my man*, or *my partner* to describe their partners (Jago, 2011:208). However, this complexity also presents cohabitees with an opportunity to construct their own identity (Soulsby & Bennett, 2015:3).

The specific meaning of a family and its role in society are challenged across different cultures and at different times (Nill & Schultz, 2010:375; Nuru & Wang, 2014:146). Although cohabitation may not necessarily be perceived by outsiders as a traditional family, the constructivist perspective is of the view that a couple can think of and perceive themselves as a family (Martigani, 2011:567). The traditional family was challenged as follows:

> *A family for me means we don't have to be related. Me, him and our child - we consider the three of us to be a family.* (Fb, 27 years)

The traditional Western description of an ideal family is epitomised by the nuclear family comprising two married heterosexual parents and their children (Perry, 2013:182). This ideal family has become the template against which any other notion of family is judged (Morgan, 2011:36; Parke, 2013:1). Similarly, Walsh (2012:4) contends that the most influential theories and empirical studies on the family construct were developed from a Euro-American cultural perspective. However, such perspectives are narrow as they do not accommodate extended families, which are prevalent in most African countries.

A family is an institution that is not static but evolves according to increasing challenges it is faced with along the way (McDonnell, 2011:134). The definition of a family, as well as the notion of a single ideal family, has become the subject of considerable disagreement (McCarthy & Edwards, 2011:1). For instance, cohabitation challenges the narrow definition of a family, which excludes diversity (Hodkinson, 2012:1072; Chen & Chen, 2014:1586). A family has become a lifestyle choice (Ochiai, 2014:211); cohabitation is therefore rapidly becoming a permanent and recognisable family structure (Gold, 2012:316). Conversely, Martigani (2011:570) acknowledges that cohabitation represents a lifestyle which is similar, but not equivalent, to a traditional family. This may be due to the fact that cohabitation is seldom viewed as a permanent or ideal relational structure due to its inherent transitory nature (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013:930).

Cohabitation is a personal choice; however, it does not occur in isolation from the broader social environment (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:804; Church, 2015:796). In view of the stigma associated with cohabitation, some families prefer to protect only the traditional notion of a family, notably marriage (Chinwuba, 2010:625).

> *My boyfriend is one person who does not confront issues. He has a problem with his family because they don't approve our relationship but he doesn't have the guts to confront them. By the time his family became aware of our relationship there was conflict between my family and his, and this is causing a strain on our relationship. Sometimes I feel that we are just helping each other out. He can have me whenever he wants me. I cook for him. I wash his clothes. He sleeps with me every night. That makes me feel like we are going nowhere.* (Fa, 32 years)

The finding supports the notion that parents are instrumental in the progress of their adult children's intimate relationships. However, it has been found that cohabitees often consider parental attitudes only when they have to make a decision about the progress of their relationship (Owen et al., 2011:120).

Generally, cohabitation still lacks formal recognition by the legal system, and cohabitees do not have immediate legal safeguards in the case of relational dissolution (Gold, 2012:319; Coulter & Hu, 2015:3; Gassen & Perelli-Harris, 2015:432). Concerns about the legal risk and vulnerability inherent in cohabitation were expressed.

I don't really think there is something wrong with the relationship but it should be known to both families officially. My concern is what will happen if one of us dies now. We do not have any kind of agreement. For instance, if it can happen that I die now any Jack and Jill from his family claim his belongings, they will be telling me that I was unemployed and everything belongs to their brother. I feel that we should sit down and talk about important things such as medical aid and life policies. The way I see it that might not happen.(Fa, 35 years)

In the absence of the payment or initiation of *magadi*, female cohabitees often run the risk of losing their assets following the death of a partner (Bulanda & Manning, 2008:597). Culturally, female cohabitees do not enjoy the social support that their married counterparts enjoy. Most often they are left with nothing when the relatives of their partners claim their child's assets (Vogler et al., 2008:553). It has been observed that some families pretend to sanction the relationship until one partner dies, and thereafter turn against the surviving partner (Chinwuba, 2010:627). The worst scenario is when surviving female cohabitees are excluded from the funeral arrangements of the deceased, and are thus denied the opportunity to pay their last respects (Madhavan, 2010:145). Nonetheless, cohabitees have an opportunity to regulate their relationship by entering into a legal contract stipulating how their resources are to be dealt with during and after termination of the relationship (Botha & Booysen, 2013:435).

Many participants shared the initial challenges they had in finding common ground to maintain their private identity and contribute to the quality of the relationship.

During the week we are always together. I come home and stay with her, watch TV and stay with her when she cooks. During the week I don't go out. That is not necessarily because I am staying with her. On Sundays we are free. For example, she goes to church and I am free to join my friends. (Ma, 32 years)

I am able to engage in my own activities and she can also do the same. When we come together for dinner in the evening, we are able to spend time with each other and do what we both enjoy such as watching soapies together. (M, 28 years)

When we first moved in together we did a lot of experimentation to say this is my area, this is your area this is my time this is your time. Now we are in a good space where we have our separate hobbies. (Mb, 32 years)

Maintaining independent friendships and enjoying leisure activities remains an important feature within cohabitation (Soulsby & Bennet, 2015:15). The participants acknowledged the need to maintain a sense of individuality whilst ensuring that they spend time together. This need is consistent with Erickson's (1968) human development theory, which highlights the phase of intimacy versus isolation characterised by individuals' expressed needs to develop intimate relationships without fear of compromising their identities (Shulman et al., 2013:460). Open discussion between couples is therefore required to clarify how they have been spending their time individually, prior to cohabitation.

Compared to any other intimate relationship, cohabitation involves sharing personal space (Sniezek, 2013:1). However, individuals differ in the way they would prefer to be open about their private lives in intimate relationships. Individuals in a romantic relationship are expected to constantly balance dependency on one another with the need for freedom (Finn, 2012:614). Unlimited liberty can be perceived as a threat to personal control and identity (Frost & Forrester, 2013:457) as pointed out below:

> [Silent and thinking] *not…not particularly, not much has changed now that we are now living together except the fact that if we do have an argument it is always difficult because you are there, you live there. You can't leave and spend the night somewhere. You are there and you are in each other's space all the time. There is conflict sometimes when one of us just wants to be left alone and the other person is* [in] *that space. Where are you gonna go? That is probably one of the other challenges.* (Fa, 27 years)
> *Look from my point of view. I was a little bit surprised by how little personal space you have. It is one thing for her to come visit you for an evening and it's another when she sees where your underwear is kept in your cupboard. For me, that was an adjustment but it was not a tough one. We were very open with each other from the beginning of the relationship - from the first and the second date. We were open with each other with our past and what we are doing now and that has just carried us through.* (M, 28 years)
> *[9]Eish! I am not sure if it is a challenge. If I had to advise…let's not say it's a challenge…if I have to advise someone. If someone was like, I am about to move in with my boyfriend what should I be aware of before moving in…I would say to the person, be aware of the fact that you…it's….you…you can't…you won't be independent as you like you know, you literally have to report to someone. Like today we have a function from 6 to 9pm. I had to tell him. I can't*

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[9]The term is commonly used in South Africa to express frustration, annoyance, pain or surprise.

randomly go to my colleague's place and sleep over. Let's say I'm too tired. Like there are just certain things….you…it's not about you…there is someone else in the picture. It's not a challenge. It's just something that you need to be aware of. Actually for me there are more advantages to staying with your partner if the intentions are right and you are able to openly communicate your concerns…[smiling]. I think there are more advantages. (F, 25 years)

These excerpts resonate with that of a participant in Funk and Kobayashi's (2014:1110) study entitled, [F]*rom motivations to accounts: an interpretive analysis of "living apart together" relationships in mid- to later-life couples,* explaining the main challenge of cohabitation, namely that if couples are constantly in each other's presence it may cause irritation and frustration. Cohabiting couples are often confronted with the paradoxes of intimate relationships such as the need to belong and maintain a close personal relationship, whilst simultaneously struggling with the need to maintain their freedom (Weigel et al., 2014:344). However, in cohabiting relationships, honesty and sincere behaviour are key to preventing conflict that may arise as a result of the desire for personal freedom (Robinson, Lopez, Ramos & Nartova-Bochaver, 2012:721). Two participants highlighted the importance of being considerate towards each other.

My experience of staying together with someone is that you need to make sacrifice…no, let me not call it sacrifice. You need to learn that there is a difference between living with someone or on your own. You therefore need to learn to become more considerate. It is also important that you should learn to respect the other person's space. You share a home and the last thing you want is not make the other person feel comfortable. You just have to know that you are sharing space with another person and need to respect each other's space. (Fa, 28 years)

So, for example, I would be working late because if I have a late meeting so I thought I would be home by 18h30 but by 17h30 I get a message saying "Hey when are coming home you are late?" It was a big adjustment. It really was! I was used to doing my own thing. If I wanted to go to the gym after work I will go. Maybe I will stay at work a little longer and have a cup of coffee with a colleague. So, now I have to think not only about myself but the other person as well. Obviously, I am sharing my life with this person every day, day in and day out. If I go to work in the morning I must kiss her if I leave her at home. If she comes from work she gets me at home she must kiss me, hi baby, howzit? [how are you?]. (M, 31 years)

Cohabitation creates expectations in couples regarding their behaviour within the relationship (Lauer & Yodanis, 2010:62). These excerpts suggest that in cohabitation, individuals are more likely to be considerate and accommodative in their interaction with each other as the relationship becomes more central to their lives (Slotter et al., 2010:148; Li & Fung, 2012:279; Frost & Forrester, 2013:456; Soulsby & Bennett, 2015:18). Couples who manage to advance towards their desire for personal freedom and sharing of their personal space often achieve a close, intimate, and loving relationship (Impett et al., 2012:707; Nicoleau et al., 2014:13). Similarly, Hurt (2012:875) posits that one of the important trademarks of a close intimate relationship is reflected by the extent to which individuals are willing to sacrifice their own interests and desires for the sake of a partner.

The loss of freedom in cohabitation affect men more (Huang et al., 2011:894). One male participant laments the fact that he cannot participate in some social activities following cohabitation.

> *You know, there is this part sometimes maybe if I should have just settled down and choose the right partner who is more on my age group. Right now we sometimes fight, especially when I want to go out with my friends. Remember, I'm only 31 and she is now 39. She is more settled. I would be like…I feel sometimes that maybe I have jumped gun. I should be enjoyed life more.* (M, 31 years)

The finding corroborates the assertion that cohabiting men often report levels of disillusionment about the relationship (Brown et al., 2015:16). Similarly, Del Giudice (2011:193) states that men are naturally more short-term oriented than their female counterparts, and they display higher commitment avoidance than women. The findings from Whitehead and Popenoe's study (cited in Turney, 2011:1114) on the exploration of the nature of men's fear of commitment, reveal that some of the most common reasons for this fear of commitment among men relate to the benefits of single life or cohabitation without the obligations of marriage, the availability of sex, enjoying the benefits of having a wife without marrying her, and avoiding divorce and its associated financial risks.

The lack of commonly held norms to guide individuals' behaviour in cohabitation often leads to a struggle in defining their own norms (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2009:144). Cohabitation can lead to internal conflict, which emanates from the uncertainty of the transition.

> *Like I said, if you used to cook for him Monday, Wednesday, and Friday but now you are staying together, you gonna have to cook every day. Do I maintain consistency or do I get better or do I now relax because now I have what I wanted?* (F, 25 years)
>
> *Well, getting used to coming home to somebody. We both struggled during the first couple of months of living together, obviously because we both lived by ourselves. So coming to live with somebody now and there is somebody in the house when you get home and sharing of time. Sorry, you might be used to coming home and having a cup of coffee and watching TV. Now you come back, she is there. Now do you want to talk about your day? Do you go for a walk together? Do you have a cup of coffee and watch TV? That was a big thing for us. How do you spend your time now?* [The participant was posing these questions to himself]. (M, 28 years)
>
> *For me it was difficult at the beginning when I moved in with him. When one is used to staying on her own having your own freedom as compared to staying with someone who would want to control you, it was very difficult at the beginning. We fought a lot. There was no mutual understanding between us. He would take my phone or he would fight me when I am not able to answer my phone. I told him that although we are committed to each other I would still prefer that there should be boundaries on personal matters* [silent for a moment]. *In the beginning there were endless fights.* (Fb, 30 years)

Without clear societal roles and expectations (Rhoades et al., 2012:348), cohabitees struggle to adjust due to a measure of doubt related to their readiness for such a transition (Santoro, 2012:123; Steuber & Paik, 2013:1159). Therefore, it is common for cohabitees to explore their options as they navigate the ambiguities of the transition (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013:934). Initially, many transitions are likely to create distress and uncertainty. Open communication on the meaning and implications of the transition is likely to mitigate the initial uncertainty that cohabitation may pose on partners.

5.2.4 Subtheme 2.4: Personal changes since cohabitation

The identity theory is primarily associated with how individuals' actions and interactions within intimate relationships influence self-perception. In accordance with the two distinct components of identity, namely collective and private (Berger &

Bzostek, 2014:98; Soulsby & Bennett, 2015:2), the participants shared how they view themselves within the context of their cohabiting relationships. Their narratives include a change in behaviour, attitude, lifestyle, and dress code.

Contrary to the widely held assumption that cohabitation appeals to liberal individuals with strong emphasis on equal gender roles (Kasearu, 2010:5), the traditional beliefs about male dominance and female submissiveness still prevail.

> *Funny enough...at the beginning I was more of the wild one. Basically, he has tamed me. So, there is no personal space. It is so funny. He moulded me. A woman needs to be tamed. It is necessary. Men can get away with things. If I am 34 or 35 and I'm an untamed woman, a man of the same age is not going to try tame me. He will try to tame a 21 year old girl. So he tamed me when I was 19 before I could even get out of control. It is the reality of things. This whole independent woman thing is bull crab. Women need to be tamed. Women are made for men. Men are made to conquer women. Certain things came natural. Sixty percent was natural and the other 40% he moulded me.* (F, 25 years)

This storyline contrasts with literature that depicts most cohabiting relationships as egalitarian as a subtle manifestation of patriarchy still prevails (Ganong & Chapman, 2015:5). One explanation of this encouragement and acceptance of women's submissiveness is that they have been socialised to accept it as normal in romantic relationships and that it should not be challenged (Coetzee, 2001:300). Unfortunately, this belief perpetuates and reinforces women's subordination, both in intimate relationships and society (Grabe, Grose & Dutt, 2014:2).

During cohabitation, partners' behaviours are not necessarily voluntary but display what is deemed requisite for the maintenance of the relationship (Johnson & Loscocco, 2014:155). It has been observed that women compromise their own personal interests in favour of what they deem beneficial to the relationship (Ganong et al., 2015:2). In an effort to make the relationship work, some female participants made personal sacrifices.

> The thing is...[heavy breath] *let me give you an example. The other day I walked into a shop and these shorts - hot pants - were on sale. I looked at them and I thought they were cute. But, I thought to myself where will I wear them as he will never let me go out of the house wearing them. He also doesn't like those long nose shoes* [paused]...*he bought me these shoes* [pointed at the ones she

was wearing]. *Funny if I have to go shopping for shoes now I am not going to look at those 10-inch heels. First, because they are very painful to walk in but second, my man doesn't find them sexy anyway. Like, you know...I suppose you don't have to please everybody at the end of the day. You just have to please your man.* (F, 25 years)

I have also changed my lifestyle. If I go out I must come back. Previously I could go and spend the night there. It is not like he oppresses me, because when I want to go have fun with friends he drives me there and later comes to fetch me. (Fa, 32 years)

With some of my friends I had...he didn't like some of them. So I had to compromise and take a step back and weigh ukuthi [that] *if I do that would it be for the greater good of the relationship or am I just setting myself up for failure?* (F, 31 years)

Women are often encouraged to be conscious of how they portray themselves to others, including how they speak, dress, and behave, both privately and in public (Chaney, 2011:517). It is therefore common for women in intimate relationships to alter their behaviour to impress their partners (Gordon & Chen, 2010:1439; Franiuk et al., 2012:822). Although women may consider changing their behaviour as an act of love and care, such an act may encourage exploitation by another person (McCarthy & Edwards, 2011:5). It is unfortunate that these significant efforts and self-sacrifices are not often appreciated by men due as they are regarded as "just a way a woman should behave anyway" (Johnson & Loscocco, 2014:155).

On the other hand, men also had to restructure their lives in order to accommodate their partners. For instance, some participants terminated friendships to spend more time with their partners.

I think I have changed a lot since I started staying with her. When I was staying on my own, my life was a mess. I used to spend most of my time with friends and I was not even eating healthy. If you spend most of your time with friends you end up sleeping at 12 midnight and still having to go to work on Monday morning, but now I know I should be home by at least 6pm. (Ma, 32 years)

I certainly have less female friends and that is one of the biggest changes, actually. Also in terms of movements, they have become quite patterned, almost like work-home and maybe go to a movie. It's like they have become more structured in a way, like I have become more family oriented I think more about family activities as opposed to going to a bar or something like that. (Mb, 32 years)

Individuals in casual relationships tend to engage in risky sexual behaviour, which may result in sexually transmitted diseases (Kerpelman et al., 2016:102). However, cohabitation seems to discourage cohabitees from engaging in such risky behaviour.

> *I have learned to be faithful so that my partner can trust me. Let's say I meet a guy and he charms me. Although, I may also feel the connection, when he approaches me, I now have guts to tell him that I have a boyfriend.* (Fa, 32 years)

> *I think this relationship saved me. Maybe I would have been murdered a long time ago, because as a youngster you go to taverns. Maybe I would have been dead following HIV-infection. Maybe I would have been killed. Maybe I would have bought myself a car already, drink and drive and cause accidents. Because I took responsibility* [by moving in with his partner] *at such an early age it taught me a lot in terms how to do things* [behave responsibly] *in life. For example, when I was still staying alone I used to receive those dodgy SMSs. Because now I am staying with somebody else I am more cautious in giving anyone my cell phone number because I know I have an auditor at home. It is not a marriage, but you are sharing responsibilities and you need to be accountable to her.* (M, 31 years)

Entering into cohabitation appears to be a significant turning point as it seems to instil stability in cohabitees' lives (Drefahl, 2012:464). Moreover, cohabitation gives couples a purpose in their lives by avoiding risky behaviour such as associating with multiple sexual partners (Hurt, 2012:874; Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman & Fraser, 2012:232; Frye & Trinitapoli, 2015:500). This change in behaviour is largely attributed to simply having less time to engage in potentially risky conduct, and spending more time with the partner (Willoughby & Carroll, 2010:2). For instance, in an effort to enhance relationship exclusivity in cohabiting relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2010:2; Sniezek, 2013:2), some participants have altered their moral values (Slotter, Gardner & Finkel, 2010:148) considering that cohabiting relationships often lead to increased sexual fidelity and promiscuity as opposed to relationships where individuals are merely dating and living in separate places of abode (Huang et al., 2011:894).

As in any other intimate relationship, couples are bound to disagree with one another from time to time. In cohabiting relationships, some cohabitees strive to avoid negative confrontations in an effort to improve the relationship (Li & Fung, 2012:279). Two female participants explained how they developed conflict-resolution skills since cohabitation.

I have learned not to let small things bother me because you need to pick your battles correctly. For example, I can't fight with someone because they forgot to pick [up] *their bath towel. There are more important things we are fighting about and I think that is what I have learned by living with someone else. I think you learn that even when you are not in a relationship but just living with someone else. I also think when you live together you need to accept each other's flaws more. If you are just dating and living separately, you can go to your own place. When you are living together you can't escape that. There is a bit of more tolerance that comes, acceptance and dealing with the other person.* (Fa, 27 years)

I am able to face challenges, for example when we argue. I now know how to handle those arguments I have become more mature. I am no longer confrontational as I used to be when [we] *were just dating.* (Fb, 28 years)

Cohabitation requires individuals to engage in relational maintenance behaviour such as making allowances for the imperfections and eccentricities of their partners (Young, Curran & Totenhagen, 2012:133; Ganong et al., 2015:17). However, cohabitees seem to ignore or avoid situations which could lead to arguments and tension in order to maintain and nurture harmony within the relationship (Smith, 2011:334; Li & Fung, 2012:275).

Tolerance of another person's imperfections may require that the individuals concerned limit some of their expectations as failure to do so may yield negative outcomes such as lower couple dissatisfaction (Matte & Lafontaine, 2012:113). One participant discovered that she was able to tolerate her partner's weaknesses.

It was good for me to learn that I can tolerate another person's weaknesses. (Fa, 29 years)

In certain circumstances, cohabitation may lead to "enhanced self-concept or development of a new personality trait" (McIntyre et al., 2015:859). It is therefore necessary for cohabiting couples to support each other and accept the other's imperfections (Ganong et al., 2015:17).

Historically and traditionally, motherhood bears significance to womanhood. Women have always been regarded as natural nurturers (Funk & Kobayashi, 2014:1116). The participants' responses show that cohabitation may also enhance motherhood.

I would say I have become a responsible mother because we used to go out and leave the child with my mother. Now I make sure that we take the child along everywhere we go. (Fb, 29 years)

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> *Since I moved in with him I have gained experience and I have become a better mother and I have become more independent. I am able to take care of the child without any outside help. My mother is not there to help. It is only me and my boyfriend and he is at work most of the time.* (Fb, 28 years)

These participants' experiences suggest that cohabiting mothers are able to adjust successfully to their new responsibilities. However, motherhood in cohabitation does not come without challenges. Becoming a mother in a cohabitating relationship bears social and financial implications as a result of the stigma surrounding childbearing outside marriage (Mkhwanazi, 2010:347). Furthermore, it has been observed that cohabiting mothers experience a number of adversities due to a lack of support from their families. Additionally, childrearing in cohabitation demands altering of attitudes and behaviours such as personal responsibilities, lifestyles, and gender roles (Chaney, 2011:516). Cohabiting mothers may have to make self-sacrifices such as reducing their leisure time (Trillingsgaard, Baucom, Heyman & Elklit, 2012:770; Salusky, 2013:607) as well as reassessing their priorities (McMichael, 2013:672).

5.2.5 Subtheme 2.5: Participants' descriptions of how commitment is expressed in cohabiting relationships

Commitment is regarded as the key component underlying the will of people to preserve, and live in romantic relationships. It further serves as a reliable predictor of relationship stability (Pope & Cashwell, 2013:5; Sniezek, 2013:1; Carter, 2015:2). Within cohabitation, commitment has often been expressed in basic terms, such as whether a couple has plans to marry (Rhoades et al., 2012:370), and the everyday behaviour that cohabitees engage in to maintain their relationship (Pope & Cashwell, 2013:5). This subtheme focuses on the participants' construct of commitment and how it is demonstrated and expressed in their respective relationships.

One of the participants is vehemently opposed to the widely held notion that marriage is necessary to demonstrate commitment to one another in an intimate relationship (Brown et al., 2006:457; Benjamin & Haze, 2011:802; Naess et al., 2015:64). He stated that:

> *We made a commitment to each other. It might not be a binding commitment. It may not be a commitment in the presence of everyone. But I mean does that really matter? I don't think so. I mean I can sign a piece of a paper* [*contract*]

saying we are married but it does not mean I am committed to you. Commitment for me is a personal thing. We [couple] *need to sit together with each other and assure each other to make this* [relationship] *work. We need to tell each other that it is going to be tough at some point. It is also going to be fun at the other point, but we are committed to make each other as happy as possible.* (M, 28 years)

The use of the phrase *just a piece of paper* reflects the attitude that serves to indicate the relative lack of importance cohabitees place on the institution of marriage as a sign of commitment (Smith, 2014:13). Authors argue that cohabitation is a fluid relationship which is continued only insofar as it is thought by both parties to deliver sufficient satisfaction to maintain the relationship (Thomson & Bernhardt, 2010:3; Martignani, 2011:569; Funk & Kobayashi, 2014:1103; Hughes, 2015:708). Commitment in cohabitation is therefore confirmed continuously (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:802) as it provides couples with more flexibility to define and construct commitment on their own terms (Musick & Bumpass, 2012:1103; Blatterer, 2016:62), with or without minimal structural commitment (Funk & Kobayashi, 2014:1103). The cohabitees should agree in advance that they will work towards and persevere with the relationship, and reject the easy way out when their relationship experiences difficulties (Brown et al., 2006:457).

In some instances, commitment is based on external obligations to keep the relationship intact. Some of the participants understand commitment as an obligation that they have towards their partners and families, including material possessions.

> *There is this person in your life that you…If I get to work first I must let her know that I arrived safely. There is this person that you need to be accountable to on a daily basis. I also think if I decide to pull out now I will be hurting more people. You should remember that now I know my partner's family. She knows my family. I will be hurting more people now.* (M, 31 years)
> *The biggest decision that we have made for a…whilst is that we should have a dog at the beginning of last year. This furthers commitment that we already have towards each other. Now you have this little animal that is dependent on you. Sometimes, I work late and she comes home and plays with the dog. Sometimes she works late or she leaves for work early and I spend some time with the dog or I take him for a walk or whatever the case maybe. So, the commitment to this relationship is not just about us anymore. There is a third little creature involved that needs to be looked after and it needs time from both*

of us. We are no longer making commitment to each other only but to the dog as well. (M, 28 years)

These excerpts postulate that certain cohabiting couples remain in the relationship as a result of certain constraints such as buying assets together (Rhoades et al., 2009b:235). Similarly, the symbolic interactionist theory asserts that symbols constitute an abstract representation of the level of seriousness in the relationship, or a partner's desire to continue, or deepen, the relationship (Willoughby et al., 2013:5). On the other hand, consideration for the cohabitees' families can also be regarded as a constraint which encourages the continuance of the relationship thus making it more difficult for the couple to separate (Jackson et al., 2011:630; Rhoades et al., 2012:371; Vennum et al., 2014:412). However, cohabiting couples may feel obliged to remain in a relationship despite the quality of the relationship.

According to the symbolic interactionist theory certain rituals may symbolise the level of seriousness in the relationship (Knight. 2014:630). Public expression of feelings demonstrates an individual's commitment to the relationship (Ackerman, Griskevicius & Li, 2011:1079; Santoro, 2012:121).

> *Even though he jokes about it he told the elders* [his family] *that he loves me and that I am his future wife - the girl he is going to marry, his partner, his girlfriend and his future queen.* (Fa, 30 years)

> *He was able to face his mother and tell her how much he loves me. He also left the mother of his child for me. I don't think he would do that if he does not love me but just wants to play with me.* (Fa, 32 years)

> *Every day I am asking myself all these questions that you are asking me today about the future of this relationship. For instance, I was deeply hurt when he didn't introduce me to his family and relatives during his step-father's funeral. I don't think he is committed to this relationship.* (Fa, 35 years)

Introducing a cohabiting partner to the family tends to be an indicator of a serious relationship (Jackson et al., 2011:635). Therefore, failure to introduce his partner to his family may be interpreted as a lack of commitment on his part to the relationship (Knight, 2014:630). Moreover, given the importance of intimate relationships in women's lives they are more likely than men to suffer from a perceived lack of commitment from their partners, which can negatively affect their general happiness (Ackerman et al., 2011:1080; Stavrova et al., 2012:1065; Posel & Rudwick, 2014:285).

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When an African man introduces his partner to his parents it means that she is the chosen one.

Personal sacrifice is another indicator or a demonstration of commitment (Li & Fung, 2012:279). One participant shared the sacrifices she made in the relationship in the following manner:

> *I don't know what to say. I can say in our situation I show commitment by cutting off some of my friends and partying and spend more time with him. I think that he can see that as well. I made all these sacrifices for him. Some of these sacrifices are the things that he asked me to do and he also told me the type of woman that he would prefer to live with. I made these sacrifices voluntarily. For example, we are from the same religion but I wasn't involved that much but I have stopped most of the things that I was doing and now focus on our religion just to show him that I was willing to become the woman that he would be happy to live with.* (F, 31 years)

Willingness to make sacrifices for the relationship is more likely to be perceived as a demonstration of commitment as it communicates the desire to continue to build a future together which in turn fosters trust. Therefore, individuals who are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of the relationship tend to be more satisfied with their relationships and are more likely to remain together over time (McIntyre et al., 2015:862). Individuals who are committed to each other are often willing to forego their personal interests for the benefit of the relationship. Such behaviour results in a sense of assurance which contributes significantly towards adjustment to and the stability of the relationship (Van der Drift & Agnew, 2012:231; Segal & Fraley, 2015:5). Cohabitation encourages positive behaviour (Hurt, 2012:874), as illustrated below.

> *My boyfriend has changed...he has changed a lot. He has grown. He was someone who liked going out partying. I didn't have to confront him about it. He just disciplined himself and knows that he is now staying with people.* (Fb, 29 years)

Cohabitation often results in a sense of maturity when individuals become focused on their relationship (Hira & Overall, 2010:629). This change of attitude is attributed to the belief that by cohabiting an individual's time socialising will be curtailed, and antisocial behaviour discouraged (Siennick et al., 2014:737). Women regard spending quality time with their partners as a demonstration of commitment and love whilst men may perceive it as an inhibition to their freedom. Spending quality time entails time spent

with partners, without interruptions (Nuru & Wang, 2014:150; Raffaetà, 2015:1197). However, couples may not always agree on what quality time entails. It is therefore important that partners communicate how they prefer spending their time.

Due to competing demands and time constraints, individuals in intimate relationships find it increasingly difficult to spend time together.

> *Geez! I have no idea of how commitment is demonstrated in our relationship. I never thought about it. I guess something as simple as just wanting to see the other person. To me that is a sign of being committed to another person. At 4pm I just want to leave work so I can go home and see my partner.* (M, 28 years)
>
> *In a relationship there are many things that you can identify such as when he has many friends and doesn't make time for you. He is making time for me.* (Fb, 32 years)

The exclamation in the first excerpt confirms the view that it is often a challenge to couples in cohabitation to describe how commitment is demonstrated as the term *commitment* is not straightforward and often difficult to verbalise (Pope & Cashwell, 2013:5; Carter, Duncan, Stoilova & Phillips, 2015:2). Nonetheless, these excerpts are consistent with the view that couples feel emotionally connected and significant when their partners are willing to devote time and give of themselves in a relationship (Hira & Overall, 2010:629; Nicoleau, Kang, Choau & Knudson-Martin, 2014:14).

Technology has become an integral part of intimate relationships (Cheng, Ma & Missari, 2014:325). The use of cell phones has revolutionised the dynamics of intimate relationships (Khunou, 2012:169; Clayton, 2014:425), and access to a partner's cell phone is described as one of the fundamental indications of transparency, trust, and commitment to the relationship.

> *I think we show it by fulfilling our responsibilities. If, for example, we have made commitment to do something and we experience some problem, we talk about it. He is also not a secretive person. You know, most of the guys will be secretive with their cell phone...charging it in the other room or hiding it inside their shoes when they go to bed. At the beginning he used to put his phone on silent mode. I confronted him about it and ever since, we never had a problem about it and he is open with his cell phone.* (Fb, 29)

This extract suggests that access to the partner's cell phone may indicate commitment to the relationship (Khunou, 2012:173; Miller-Ott, Kelly & Duran, 2014:315). It has been noted that some couples experience uncertainty when they cannot access their partners' cell phones (Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014:319). However, the management of privacy and personal space with regard to access to the partner's cell phone is not without complexity (Elphinston & Noller, 2011:631; Zhao, Sosik & Cosle, 2012:771). Some individuals perceive access to their partners' cell phones as an intrusion on his or her privacy (Clayton, 2014:425). Failure to reach consensus on personal preferences is likely to strain the relationship. Communication on the expectations and meaning of access to partners' cell phones may alleviate any potential conflict between the partners (Theiss, 2011:569; Roggensack & Sillars, 2014:180; Knight, 2014:27).

Africans regard marriage as the ultimate public symbol of commitment in intimate relationships (Reczek et al., 2009:739; Baker & Elizabeth, 2013:255). The participants shared their partners' promises as follows:

> *He is planning to pay magadi, and for me that show he is committed to the relationship.* (Fa, 29 years)

> *He said that he wants to make our relationship official and make me his wife. I don't foresee any problem with that because we know each other already.* (Fb, 30 year)

Payment of *magadi* is equivalent to marriage in African culture. This step serves as an assurance that the man is committed to his partner by publicly following tradition through payment of *magadi* (Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015:603). *Magadi* further assures women that they are not just *makwapheni* (concubines) as it signifies sexual fidelity and emotional faithfulness (Ndinda et al., 2011:04).

5.2.6 Subtheme 2.6: Experiences of cultural dilemmas

Culture is an important component of social interactions as it develops interpersonal skills and strengthens relationships (Monteiro & Balogun, 2015:4). Therefore, it is essential to understand the participants' experiences of the role of culture in cohabiting relationships. This subtheme attempts to provide such an understanding.

Social norms constitute rules of behaviour, which are enforced by social sanction (Cartwright, 2009:403). Hence, cohabitation can be characterised as individual oriented thus risking disapproval from other members of society (Manning et al., 2015:118). Despite the African cultural prescriptions of appropriate behaviour and expectations for intimate relationships, participants choose to cohabit with their partners.

> *I know that I am doing something that goes against my culture and my upbringing but I'm doing what makes me happy at this moment.* (Fa, 30 years)
> *You know we are people who grew up believing in culture and our belief is that you can only stay with partner fulltime if you are married; hence, I feel that our relationship is good but we should still do the right thing and get married. Although we are mindful of our culture but we are in a way forced to be together. It is a matter of love. I think it is the love we have for one another and we want to be together.* (Fa, 29 years)

Within many African cultures, marriage is viewed as an important and esteemed social institution which serves as the bedrock of healthy families and communities (Hull, Meier & Orty, 2010: 33; Hewitt & Baxter, 2011:44; Andersson, 2015:196). On the other hand, cohabitation is culturally viewed as a threat or challenge to the authority of marriage and family life (Owen et al., 2011:135; Smith, 2014:5). Many societies would only reluctantly accept cohabitation as they prefer to protect only traditional notions of the family sanctioned by marriage (Chinwuba, 2010:625). These societies defend the status of marriage as the only intimate relationship which is morally acceptable (Andersson, 2015:198). Despite these cultural prescripts, African participants' in this study opted for an individualistic choice which fits within the self-determination theory. The theory is premised on the assumption that individuals' actions are autonomous, freely chosen, and fully endorsed by the person rather than prescriptive social norms (Knee et al., 2013:307; Hughes, 2015:708; Manning et al., 2015:134).

Deviation from traditional social norms could trigger social disapproval and the rejection of the perpetrators (Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015:608).

> *I am planning to confront him about his real intentions. I was with his uncle the other day and I explained to him my family's concerns. I told him that my whole family is complaining that I am staying with my boyfriend and we are not even married. When I asked his uncle* [in the presence of my boyfriend] *about the possibility of his family going to my family to negotiate magadi, his uncle told me that they will do something about it. My boyfriend did not make any*

comment. That was a big concern for me. The worst thing is that I cannot participate in local activities because most women here are married and they won't allow me to take part because I am not married. (Fa, 35 years)

According to Posel and Rudwick (2014:289), cultural constraints on cohabitation are maintained in two ways. First, it refers to family and community values in discouraging cohabitation. This is often reflected in sayings such as *bazothini abantu?* (IsiZulu) or *batho batla reng* (Sepedi) – both literally meaning, what will people say? These sayings denote people's concerns as to how cohabitation is viewed by the larger community. It is assumed that the reluctance of married women to allow cohabitees to join their social networks is another way of adhering to cultural norms. This practice is regarded as moral gatekeeping where preference is accorded to those whose family formation complies with major values (Pellander, 2014:1477). In many instances, cohabitees are stigmatised and often excluded from engaging in broader social interactions (Shapiro & Keyes, 2008:332). Even though the discrimination against cohabiting women by the married women's club seems harsh, such an attitude appears to be motivated by the unfounded fear that cohabiting relationships are unstable. Second, marriage is still regarded as the highest status a woman can achieve and earn the respect of others. Such perceptions are misleading and are inadvertently pressurising women to opt for marriage at all costs.

Depending on how the individual has internalised social norms, cohabiting may be regarded as an immoral act which may affect the individual concerned, both psychologically and socially (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:290; Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015:608).

> *I can make my own decisions about my life but my culture does not allow me. If my decisions are not consistent with my culture, they would catch up with me in future. For instance, I even dread to think about death because that would be the worst thing ever. I feel that it is very wrong that I moved in with my partner before getting married.* (Fa, 35 years)
> *The whole experience makes me feel guilty for going against my culture.* (Fa, 29 years)

These attitudes towards cohabitation mirror the widely embraced ideological beliefs ingrained by society and culture (Eyre et al., 2012:233; Lesch & Furphy, 2013:622; Zito, 2015:305). The belief in *badimo* (ancestors) seems to contribute significantly to

the feeling of guilt associated with cohabitation. A study by Posel and Rudwick (2014:290) entitled, *Marriage and bridewealth (Ilobolo) in contemporary Zulu society,* found that marriage purportedly brings the ancestors of the couples together. Failure to obey traditional customs known as *amasiko* could result in retribution for those who are guilty and their families (Ntombana, 2011:634; Posel & Rudwick, 2014:290).

Colloquial terms with negative connotations such as *ukukipita* (literally translated as, to keep it, in isiZulu), *masihlalisane* (let us stay together, in isiZulu), *vat-en-sit* (a man takes a woman and lives with her, in Afrikaans), and *concubinage* are synonymous with cohabitation. These terms generally depict the illegitimacy and lack of endorsement of cohabitation, as opposed to marriage (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:287; McKinley, 2014:204). A participant explained that, [w]*e know that as Black people our culture does not allow it. For a couple to stay together they must be married; vat-en-sit* [cohabitation] *is not acceptable.* Individuals who are grappling with this situation are likely to feel guilty for deliberately acting against their culture.

Cohabitation is often portrayed as a sign that people are eschewing their African traditions (Mkhwanazi, 2014:107; Posel & Rudwick, 2014:289). Cultural views on cohabitation are complex (Landale et al., 2010:448) and it is therefore important to guard against treating Africans as a single homogenous group as they do not subscribe to a single set of norms (Madhavan, Harrison & Sennott, 2013:625; Moore & Govender, 2013:626). South Africa is rich in its diverse cultures which govern family formations. The African population has different ethnic groups of which nine are officially recognised, namely Bapedi, Basotho, Batswana, amaSwati, Venda, Tsonga, Ndebele, Xhosa, and amaZulu. The diverse cultural backgrounds will invariably have an impact on cohabitees' understanding of cohabitation.

> *I am Pedi and he is Venda. The Pedi culture doesn't condone cohabitation. According to this culture the man's family must introduce themselves officially to the woman's family and indicate their son's intention to marry. I think the Venda people are worse. There are so many Venda people who are in cohabiting relationship, although I would say it is their individual choice.* (Fa, 29 years)

The following excerpts demonstrate further the significance of the individuals' roots versus their preferences.

> *It is part of the Xhosa culture* [with a stern voice]. *I don't care where you come from. If you are Xhosa you don't cohabit. You just don't cohabit. Well, I'm going to talk about myself. I am also from a church family. Both my parents are lay preachers. I think that our* [Xhosa] *upbringing differs on how we were raised. It differs, but, I will say 90% of Xhosas don't do it…I talk to myself a lot about my situation but, I eventually tell myself that I know that I am doing something that goes against my culture and my upbringing but, I'm doing what makes me happy at the moment.* (Fa, 30 years)

> *My father is a Zulu man and according to his culture he should not be talking much with my boyfriend since we are not married. He just introduced himself and told him that he should treat his daughter well. Although our culture forbids cohabitation my father had to accept it because he didn't have much choice. He wants to see me happy as his daughter.* (Fb, 29 years)

These accounts confirm that attitudes and experiences of cohabitation reflect the importance of an individual's ethnic or cultural affiliation (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca & Ritchie, 2013:101). These varying ethnic groups exhibit different attitudes towards cohabitation. Mkhwanazi (2014:109) refers to the Xhosa-speaking, Pondo teachings of the principles of *ubuntu* (humanity) and *kuhlonipha* (respect) in relation to cohabitation. These principles prescribe that all young adults should refrain from cohabitation and adopt attitudes that are consistent with those of their parents and the wider community regarding marriage and family (Johnson, 2011:23; Eyre et al., 2012:233). Hence, the negative attitudes towards cohabitation within Zulu-speaking communities are deeply rooted in socio-cultural beliefs (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:290). Within the Zulu culture, *ukukipita* (cohabitation) is described as culturally improper, wrong, and disrespectful. Hence, parents who adhere to such traditional norms disapprove of cohabitation (Castiglioni & Dalla-Zuanna, 2014:425). However, some parents within the Zulu-speaking communities embrace cohabitation in spite of their cultural norms for the sake of their children's happiness.

Women are often subjected to considerable social pressure to remain in relationships. Therefore, most are likely to settle for a lower quality relationship in order to please a partner (Schmeer & Kroeger, 2011:1599). In certain African cultures, female cohabitees are not permitted to perform certain roles that are assigned to married women.

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> *His family is not treating me as their daughter-in-law but as their daughter. According to their custom a daughter-in-law should cook and clean but, since they have not paid magadi for me I am not allowed to do any of the house chores. They told me that I cannot cook for my boyfriend's father because they have not paid magadi for me. According to their tradition they should pay a certain amount that would allow me to cook for his father as well as doing the house chores. His mother is doing everything because she is the one who is traditionally married in the family. She is doing everything for me. I only bath my child and take care of him only. It is not nice just to be called when food is ready and you can't even clean the dishes. I feel like I am nothing in that house.* (F, 26 years)

The participant's account confirms that women's deviation from cultural expectations may expose them to informal sanctions such as social disapproval or rejection (Stavrova et al., 2012:1076; Dommermuth & Wiik, 2014:32). According to the Basotho culture, when a bride is accompanied to her matrimonial home she is given utensils such as a traditional broom, a basin, and spoons for her own use (Semenya, 2014:3). This practice is called *go phahlela* (the giving of utensils to the bride). The practice does not apply in cohabitation.

Cohabitation lacks the social legitimacy of marriage. Between the two family formations, namely cohabitation and marriage, the latter is still perceived as the legitimate and socially sanctioned of the two (Smock, 2011:899), as demonstrated below.

> *They* [the man's family] *have to come and introduce themselves officially to the woman's family. According to our own custom and tradition his family is not known to my family. My family is currently not happy about our situation. My grandfather was asking me the other day about my boyfriend's intention. I passively told him that his family will come but I was not honest about the state of our relationship.* (F, 26 years)

Among many Africans, it is believed that marriage strengthens the relationship between two families. Cultural practices such as initiating *umcelo* (expressing intentions to marry) or payment of *magadi* is one of the main steps to legitimising cohabitation (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:288). In most African cultures, cohabiting couples do not enjoy any social support from their families (Manning et al., 2015:118). In the event of relational distress, cohabitees cannot consult with their families. Hence,

the participant could not discuss the deteriorating state of the relationship with her grandfather.

Families may also play a role in cohabitation through either their support or disapproval (Owen et al., 2011:121; Shulman et al., 2013:461), as confirmed by the experiences below.

> *His family does not really know that we are staying together. It is something that we keep from them out of respect. I understand they would probably have a problem with it. In his culture* [Ndebele from Zimbabwe] *a couple does not live together until they get married. I used to ask him a lot why I can't be present when his parents come over. Why can't my stuff* [possessions] *be where we live, thinking it was me but he explained that it is his culture and this is how it is done. He explained if I accompany him to Zimbabwe for Christmas it would mean that he wants to marry me. He told me that it has nothing to do with me he told me. It upsets me! It upsets me because as I said I want to be open about it* [this relationship]*. As I said I have realised it has nothing to do with me. It upsets me that when his family comes to visit I will have to go and stay at a friend's house. It is not often. There has been two occasions that I had to go make a plan.* (Fa, 28 years)

These experiences suggest that relationships between individuals from different racial groups are guided by their customs. Interracial intimate relationships may experience challenges which may lead to misunderstanding and emotional distress (Jaynes, 2010:396: Knight, 2014:630). Introducing a partner to one's parents has a different meaning among interracial couples. Within African societies, the individuals' attitudes towards family formation are shaped by their culture, and they are even prepared to set aside their own wellbeing for the common good (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:804; Church, 2015:796). In this instance, the participant's partner was not willing to introduce her to his family, even though this could potentially cause tension in the relationship. The participant's experience further suggests that as a man, her partner's culture dominates the relationship, and females are expected to honour the traditions of a man. On the other hand, when a woman introduces her partner to her family, among the Zulus it means he is serious with the relationship. Hence, the practice is termed *ngiqomile* (meaning I am committed) (Madhavan et al., 2013:615).

5.2.7 Subtheme 2.7: The influence of religion on participants' relationships

Religion often tends to significantly influence individuals' decisions regarding family formation (Eggebeen & Dew, 2009:108; Botha & Booysen, 2013:439). This subtheme encompasses the participants' narratives on the role of and attitudes towards religion in their cohabiting relationships, and their introspection with regard to spirituality.

Traditionally, religion promotes marriage and denounces any alternative family formation such as cohabitation (Ellison et al., 2012:302). However, certain religious denominations have demonstrated a significant shift in perception and attitude towards cohabitation (Gold, 2012:316; Brown et al., 2015:3), as evinced by the following storylines:

> *In our church the congregation does not have any stigma towards cohabitation. Cohabitation is generally accepted. You* [addressing the researcher] *should remember that people are now going to church wearing trousers and this was not acceptable before. It is part of transformation. In our church, as long as I attend church and contribute financially* [tithe], *I am accepted. The pastors will usually advise members against taking alcohol if he realises that they are drinking too much. There is this weekend or day in the man's life where he has too much to drink and if the pastor hears about it he will then approach you and advise you to reduce your drinking. For example, with me the pastor reminds me that I have children and I should be a good role model. The pastor will not judge me in any way.* (M, 31 years)
>
> *Look, I am Jewish and it depends on who you ask, maybe people in the Jewish community might see it as a problem the fact that I am living with someone whilst we are not married. I think it might have been an issue a couple of decades ago.* (Fa, 27 years)

The findings reflect the broad social transformation and fundamental changes in values and lifestyles in churches and among certain religious communities (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013:425). These responses confirm that certain religions recognise and accept cohabitation (Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012:47) by downplaying some of the fundamental pro-marriage norms (Dew, 2009:110; Mashau, 2011:1). Moreover, modern pastoral advice and psychosocial support have placed emphasis on responsible behaviour such as providing congregants with family-related norms to guide their behaviour (Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008:1313; Berghammer, 2010:127). This religious shift contradicts the traditional

endorsement of marriage as sacred (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007:572; Lee & Ono, 2012:954; Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012:48).

The rapid emergence of charismatic churches in South Africa seems to influence the accommodating attitude towards non-traditional families such as cohabitation and same-sex marriage. These churches attract young adults and place less emphasis on traditional norms or biblical teachings about marriage. This is a strategy to prevent losing members who are sustaining these churches. One notable example is the traditional Catholic Church, which has relaxed its conservative dogma as it relates to family issues such as cohabitation and same-sex marriage rather than preaching marriage as the only sanctioned family formation (Stokes & Ellison, 2010:1282).

However, one participant is convinced and adamant that she is living in sin as cohabitation violates the religious teachings of no sex before marriage.

> *I belong to a church and it is a sin to live with a man before you get married. I feel that we are committing a big sin.* (Fa, 35 years)

This conviction reflects the doctrine of religious denominations that frown upon cohabitation as a public acknowledgement of premarital sex. Cohabitation is therefore considered a sin (Berghammer, 2010:130; Ellison, Burdette & Glenn, 2011:908; Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012:48). The individual who feels guilty about being involved in cohabitation against religious beliefs is probably feigning defiance, and this may be detrimental to the relationship in the long run.

Although some religious denominations do not necessarily reject cohabitation (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:287), there is evidence that they advise congregants to heed their conscience when making a personal choice with regard to family formation.

> *I never really heard any nasty remarks from the church members. In our church the pastor just advises us that it is not permissible to stay with a partner without getting married. Our pastor also stresses that it is up to the individual who is practising that to do self-introspection and make his or her own decision. Personally, I do feel guilty about it but, it is something that I am doing and it is up to me as an individual to make a decision. I do tell my boyfriend about what our pastor says about cohabiting relationships every time I come back from the church service. He told me that people in our church are correct in saying that.*

I am not sure if he is just saying it for the sake of pleasing me. I don't think the church's stance is putting us under any pressure to get married. (F, 34 years)
I am the only one who goes to church but I am not really committed to the church. Our church is against cohabitation. However, I never really thought of that because I don't want us to be affected by external factors such as religion. (Fb, 29 years)

The findings confirm that cohabitees are aware of their deviation from religious teachings (Funk & Kobayashi, 2014:1105), but nonetheless exercise their right to self-determination by opting to cohabit. Such a predicament may lead an individual to either leave the relationship, or join a religious denomination which is tolerant of cohabitation. Alternatively, cohabiting couples with a strong religious attachment may transition their cohabiting relationship to marriage in order to adhere to religious expectations.

A number of other challenges experienced by cohabitees are embodied in the following extract:

We cannot even consult the pastors because our relationship is not recognised by my church. Our relationship is not blessed by our pastor. (Fa, 35 years)

Failure to receive pastoral care may be detrimental to the cohabitees' spiritual wellbeing. Certain religious institutions which prefer marriage resort to overt disapproval of cohabitation (Berghammer, 2010:127; Ellison et al., 2011:909). Such situations render cohabitees less likely to benefit from pastoral care services and social networks associated with religious institutions (Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008:1312).

However, with the emergence of charismatic churches, which accept alternative family formations, conventional churches are more likely to reconsider their teachings or run the risk of becoming irrelevant and lose membership of young adults. This view is affirmed by the waning traditional power of the conservative Catholic Church on family-related issues in Spain (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013:425).

Religious discrimination and stigmatisation against cohabiting women exist in the church as elucidated below.

As the head of the family [partner]*, he wears church robes which are reserved for married men but I am unable to wear one for married women. I still wear the*

uniform for single ladies. It doesn't sit well with me because I should also be treated equally because we are in a relationship. But I am more determined to focus on our religion now. (F, 31 years)

This excerpt is indicative of the double standards that prevail within religious denominations as cohabiting women are often subjected to religious discrimination (Huang et al., 2011:894; Lee & Ono, 2012:954). Even though the church is obeying its constitution, this may inadvertently be in favour of men rather than women as most churches continue to endorse male domination.

Individuals who are religious are more likely to marry rather than cohabit (Stokes & Ellison, 2010:1282). On the other hand, those who are less religious, or not religious at all, do not grapple with challenges emanating from the church's stance on cohabitation. Such individuals do not feel guilty about cohabiting as they are not in contravention of any church rules.

> *Neither of us have strong religious backgrounds. We never had to worry what the pastor is going to think. What the families are going to think. Are mom and dad going to approve of us living together or not? So it has never been a problem for us. I have got a very religious Jewish friend of mine. He has probably dated about three girls but it had never gone anywhere serious because his idea of commitment and my idea of commitment are very different. He would never think of cohabiting with a girl. His idea of commitment is to get married to her and then find a house together. I think your background plays a big part in it.* (M, 28 years)

This extract confirms that cohabitation appears to be ideal for individuals who are less religious (De Valk & Liefbroer, 2007:501; Kalmijn et al., 2007:162; Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012:47). Furthermore, individuals with strong religious affiliations will most likely be exposed to compelling guidelines that prescribe how to behave when deciding on family formation. It is anticipated that they are more likely to marry in order to conform to religious prescripts.

5.2.8 Subtheme 2.8: Ownership and power in cohabiting relationships

According to Ashby and Burgoyne (2009:520), the ownership within cohabitation manifests in the meaning that the couple attaches to material possessions. Hence, issues around material ownership were explored.

In cohabitation, individuals who own the place of abode tend to enjoy greater dominance pertaining to decision making (Clark, Burton & Flippen, 2011:372; Lennon, Stewart & Ledermann, 2012:97). Two participants ensured that their places of abode are registered in both their names in an attempt to achieve equilibrium between power and ownership in their relationships.

> *It was a discussion that happened probably over the course of a year. We eventually agreed that instead of having two separate homes we would have one place that's ours together. We made a conscious decision when we decided to move in together not to move to any of our houses. It is not like she suddenly came to live with me or I suddenly decided to move in with her. We decided to move to a new place. Our main concern was that if she was to move in with me for example I was going to think it was my my place and she was going to feel like a visitor. Personally, I don't think it is the right way of thinking in a relationship. If you are going to do it properly and show serious commitment to the relationship we both need to have a sense of ownership. For me, I think it is how the brain thinks about it. We made a conscious decision that when we move in together it will be our house, our bed, our fridge, our stove - not your house with my bed and my fridge or your stove. We made a conscious decision and we were fortunate that we afford to buy the house together as well as the necessities in the house.* (M, 28 years)
>
> *He leased the apartment in his name but when you apply through an agency they wanted to know who else is going to stay there. I co-signed the lease or something like that. My details are there. His details are there too. But they are deducting monthly rent from his bank account.* (F, 25 years)

These excerpts refute the view that cohabiting couples are less likely to purchase or lease a place together (Smits & Mulder, 2008:919; Ben-Ari, 2012:393). Stability prevails in relationships where there is equal pooling of resources such as co-owning a house (Ben-Ari, 2012:393). It is assumed that major economic responsibilities such as paying for the place of abode often allows more power to the individual who is paying (Kpoor, 2013:1971). There is a notion that when there are equal levels of power such as co-ownership of the house by both partners, the couple is more likely to be equally committed to the relationship (Lennon et al., 2012:96). It is assumed that in such a situation, neither of the partners will feel inferior or superior because they co-own the property or because the lease is registered in both their names.

Housing cost is the single largest expense item in a household, and therefore its influence on power interplay within a relationship is important to the stability and quality of the relationship (Clark, Burton & Flippen, 2011:385). Cohabiting women who own houses enjoy increased power and status within the relationships.

> *I can't really say I am doing it* [tell the partner that the lease it is her name] *intentionally but we do get sometimes into those quarrels and I take a step back...after all it is my place. I think for him it dents his ego but for me I don't have a problem. For him I think he would like the lease to be in his name. Now it's like I'm the one controlling because the lease is in my name. It is my place and that sort of thing. But I think we have dealt with that. I also think he has come to terms with the fact that I don't do anything to show him ukuthi* [that] *this is my place, so tread carefully or else get out.* (Fa, 30 years)
> *When I informed some of my friends that I am cohabiting with my boyfriend some felt that I was better off because I have my own place and my boyfriend will be moving in my own place* [laughing out loud]. *It really made me feel proud. I honestly felt proud that I have my own place. I always tell him to leave my house when we fight.* (F, 33 years)

These excerpts suggest that ownership of the house represents social status and value (Smit & Mulder, 2008:917). Home ownership provides cohabiting women more bargaining power as well as a tool for either maintaining or terminating the relationship when conflict occurs (Clark et al., 2011:385; Grabe et al., 2014:8; Welsh & Burton, 2015:3). Hence, the power associated with ownership of a house has the potential to reformulate socio-structures of male power in an intimate relationship, thereby decreasing women's dependence on men (Grabe et al., 2014:8; Munsch, 2015:471).

Conversely, some women feel that a man should assume leadership in the relationship, regardless of who owns the house (Sassler & Miller, 2010:2). Such women will subtly accommodate men in decision making in an effort to uphold the ideology that "a man is the head of the house and the final decision maker" (Nicoleau et al., 2014:10).

> *I don't know how to say this and I just hope you can help me to clarify it. He moved into my house so the house is mine but he is the head of the family as the man. I don't know how to explain the question of who the house belongs to. I feel he should be in charge.* (Fb, 35 years)

This extract shows the confusion posed by socialisation and confirms that behaviour within cohabiting relationships is influenced by patriarchal values (Roopnarine &

Gielen, 2005:8). Traditionally, women were not permitted to own property (Tebbe, 2008:466) as they were accorded the legal status of minors (Isike & Uzodike, 2011:227). In an attempt to minimise the deviation from cultural expectations that associates men with being breadwinners, some women may resort to compromising on power (Clark et al., 2011:374).

The uncertainty often associated with cohabitation tends to illustrate that couples should adopt a more cautious approach when pooling resources (Hamplova, 2009:30; Martignani, 2011:571).

> *It started being our place when we started sharing the expenses. This place is still registered in my name. I think, to be honest, for me there is always that thing of having security first and foremost. We all want that happy-ever-after but should anything happen. Let's say it is his place and something happens, then what?* [shrugging her shoulders]. (Fa, 30 years)

Women are conscious of the risk of losing their homes should the relationship break down. Hence, they prefer to retain sole ownership of their residences (Clark et al., 2011:385; Musick & Bumpass, 2012:3). The risk in cohabitation emanates from the lack of legal protection (Hamplova, 2009:30; Martignani, 2011:571) as well as the perceived lack of commitment in cohabitation (Jago, 2011:207). Another possible explanation for this risk is that cohabitees may be ambivalent about wanting a future with their current partners. In such instances, partners may generally place the relationship with their partners at a lower level of priority and be less inclined to form an identity as a couple (Jago, 2011:207; Amato, 2015:6; Martignani, 2011:565). However, some authors consider this assertion flawed (Baker & Elizabeth, 2013:263; Martignani, 2011:569) considering that it is not the relationship itself, namely cohabitation, that determines commitment but the cohabitees themselves.

Uncertainty in cohabitation also influences how cohabitees manage their assets (Bradatan & Kulcsar, 2008:492). Previous findings have found that cohabitees are conscious of the risks of cohabitation (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:793). For instance, some couples do not automatically share ownership of each other's assets (Hamplova, 2009:34). Hence, it was not surprising that one of the participants alluded to a situation where purchases were made in duplicate in the event of a possible relationship breakdown.

Everything in that flat is double. My bed is standing against the wall, his fridge is off, mine is on, his couch is standing against the wall and we are using his couch, the television stand is in the dining room and the other one in the bedroom [laughing]. *For me it says that these people were not together when they bought the stuff and they had everything when they moved in together. In case I am chased out, I will be having a bed.* (Fa, 32 years)

Cohabitation inevitably requires couples to decide how they manage their assets (Steuber & Paik, 2014:1155). The finding corroborates the assertion that due to the fragile nature of cohabitation, couples do not operate as a collective unit (Barlow, Burgoyne, Clery & Smithson, 2008:37). Thus, cohabitees prefer what authors term a *mine-and-yours* arrangement (Ashby & Burgoyne, 2009:519). This sense of individual entitlement is more likely to cause relationship distress and unhappiness.

The financial status of female cohabitees poses a challenge to the traditional culture of patriarchy, which promotes male supremacy (Choi et al., 2014:1429). A female participant described her experiences and challenges of owning assets within cohabitation.

It doesn't affect me personally because my belief is that everything in the house belongs to both of us. However, I can see that he doesn't feel comfortable about it and he feels that some of the things belong to me and some of the things belong to him. He puts labels on material things in the house according to what we each bought. I constantly remind him that everything in the house belongs to both of us and we shouldn't consider who bought what. For example, he would claim that he won't watch the TV because I am the one who bought it. It seems like he feels that some things in the house belong[s] to him and he wouldn't allow me to use them. But it is only him who is behaving that way. Sometimes we would argue over a TV channel and he would say I should watch the one that I want because I bought the TV set. (Fb, 27 years)

This storyline confirms that men who uphold traditional attitudes towards gender roles are likely to perceive women's financial ability as an attack on their male psyche (Coetzee, 2001:300). Moreover, as breadwinners, men have traditionally possessed more financial power and control than women (Raijas, 2011:558). Although some men resort to violence to maintain their dominance (Choi et al., 2014:1429), in this case the man shows feelings of inadequacy which may threaten the relationship.

On the other hand, it is not always easy to discuss the management of assets within a cohabiting relationship (Raijass, 2011:557), and therefore this all-important discussion between cohabitees should not be neglected.

> *I guess that conversation has yet to happen. We don't have any evidence of whatever we have. We are not writing. In the event that there is a fight or separation we think we can agree to all be human beings* [mature] *and remember who bought what* [with a raised voice]. *Thinking of it now if it gets ugly then ja! I don't know. But still, even if people are married and everything is there together…they share everything 50/50 when they get divorced and still fight about who gets what. So I don't think there is a difference whether people are married or not. It really depends on whether you pre-empt that the relationship is going to end at some stage. I think it will be premature to...I don't know. I actually don't remember having this kind of conversation.* (Fa, 28 years)
> *I never got to stage where I had to think about leaving and taking my things with me. In the event we break up then that conversation will be held. Then what I imagine is that the things that I brought or those that belong to me or the couch that belonged to my grandfather I will take. Or we will have a discussion as we want and pay me half for it? That's what I anticipate will happen* [silent for few seconds]. *It's a difficult thing to talk about because I haven't thought about it but I can imagine if he had to die the stuff will belong to me. I don't think we would have anybody claiming things. I guess when the other person dies the other one will get the rest. To be honest, this is not an issue in our relationship. Material things don't have an impact on me.* (Fa, 27 years)

In the absence of binding commitments or enforceable contractual agreements (Ganong et al., 2015:4), cohabitees should legalise their relationship by entering into cohabitation contracts, which will set out what each partner owns (Mashau, 2010:3) and brings into the relationship. Cohabiting contracts serve to protect both partners in the event of termination of the relationship, either through death or separation (Botha & Booysen, 2013:435). There are known cases in South Africa of fierce disputes between cohabiting partners over assets post-termination of the relationship. In many instances, such disputes can become protracted and costly. In the case of McDonald v Young (292/10) [2011] ZASCA 31 (24 March 2011) (referred to as the McDonald case), the parties had cohabited for approximately seven years. Upon the dissolution of the relationship, a dispute ensued over the immovable property in which the couple resided. The man in this case was unemployed whereas the woman was able to acquire the property. The man claims that he is entitled to a half share of the property as he contributed his time and expertise to oversee the development of the property.

5.2.9 Subtheme 2.9: Issues of infidelity in cohabiting relationships

Although various definitions of infidelity have historically been restricted to marital relationships, it has been argued that infidelity also occurs in cohabitation where loyalty is taken for granted (Smith, 2011:334). Notwithstanding the rare instances where couples would agree not to be sexually exclusive, notably those who join swinger clubs with the purpose of meeting similar, open-minded couples who are willing to exchange partners for sex, individuals do not expect their spouses to be unfaithful (DeMaris, 2013:1476). This expectation may be expressed both explicitly and implicitly, and the sexual exclusiveness is enforced by norms that are almost as strong as fidelity in marital unions (Eyre et al., 2012:233; Sniezek, 2013:2; Watkins & Boon, 2015:2). One possible reason people frown upon infidelity, although it is not illegal, is that it is widely regarded as morally wrong and deceitful (Munsch, 2015:470).

Amongst the plethora of issues described in the detailed narrative below, is the emphasis on the connection between infidelity and commitment. One female participant perceived her partner's infidelity as a lack of commitment.

> *I remember an incident when his phone rang and he was in the other room. I thought it was a male calling because he saved the person's number with a male name. To my surprise it was a female on the other side when I answered the phone. The caller was very rude and asked me as to why I was answering the phone. When he walked into the room I was exchanging nasty words with the lady who had called. When I confronted him about it he told me that he doesn't know the person. I was very angry and we slept together without talking to each other. In the morning I was feeling sick and he even brought me food in bed. I couldn't even speak to him. He left and never came back until twelve midnight when I received a call from the same lady who called him the previous day. The lady told me to come and fetch him at her place because he was drunk and some people attempted to rob him. I went to inform his parents in the other room and they went to fetch him at the lady's place. When they came back he told me and his parents that the lady he was with is the one he loves and he was going to marry her. He told his parents to date me because they love me because he doesn't want me anymore. I took the child and my stuff to the other room. In the morning he came to apologise. I forgave him because I can't go back to my grandparents' house. The situation at home is bad because we are depending on my grandparents' old-age pension.* (F, 26 years)

The participant's experience lends credence to the belief that commitment tends to be lower in cohabiting relationships due to the absence of a legally binding agreement (e.g., marriage certificate) which would ensure an exclusive relationship with a partner (Watkins & Boon, 2015:1). Hence, infidelity is regarded as the major cause of dissolution of cohabiting relationships (Eyre et al., 2012:244), because social pressure to uphold fidelity in in these unions is applied to a lesser degree (McIntyre et al., 2015:858). The participant's experiences also point out the realities of many women who are desperate to escape unfavourable home circumstances, and are consequently willing to accept partners who are less than committed (Zito, 2015:303; Welsh & Burton, 2015:4).

The evolution of technology introduces new complexities into traditional infidelity as well.

> *The only problem is that he is now receiving endless phone calls. He also goes outside to receive those calls. I am able to tell when calls are from his male friends. When he answers suspicious ones he goes outside and when he returns I can see guilt on his face. I confronted him several times, including yesterday and he always says that it is his male friends who are calling him. The other day I went through his phone and there were a lot of cell numbers from ladies. Although he deletes some of the conversations I still get the sense that he has secret meetings with those ladies.* (F, 33 years)

Infidelity is not necessarily restricted to physical and sexual encounters but also leads to emotional bonds formed outside the primary relationship (Smith, 2011:334). Electronic devices such as cell phones are a convenient conduit to infidelity. Technology has therefore become an enticing opportunity to start an affair (Pizarro & Gaspay-Fernandez, 2015:3). In the absence of open and honest discussions regarding the use of a cell phone, couples in intimate relationships are likely to experience distrust and unhappiness.

In any relationship, trust is necessary for the development and stability of the relationship (Kim et al., 2015:521). A number of couples experience distrust due to their failure to communicate their concerns or suspicions.

> *I think there was lack of trust in our relationship. I would suspect him of something and conclude without talking with him. I once suspected that he was cheating on me with another lady, only to find that the person was an old friend*

from high school. It was a difficult moment in our relationship because I even moved out of the house and left him with the kids [sighing heavily]. *It was a very difficult moment.* (Fb, 30 years)

Our communication was broken due to lack of trust. I don't trust him anymore because he is cheating. I don't believe whatever he tells me. (F, 26 years)

Trust is an inherent belief that a partner will not succumb to any personal temptation that may jeopardise the relationship. It is also the belief that a partner will always have the best interest of the relationship at heart (Watkins & Boon, 2015:4). However, some cohabiting partners seemingly lose sight of this important ingredient of a healthy and stable relationship. The implications of the violation of trust include, but are not limited to, the diminished quality of the relationship and the altered perception the cohabitee consequently has of the offending partner (Smith, 2011:335; DeMaris, 2013:1479). Couples should therefore continuously assure each other of their loyalty to each other.

Financial strain seems to trigger insecurities in intimate relationships. The suspicion of infidelity, whether founded or unfounded, can be attributed to the erosion of trust in the relationship.

> *It is no longer nice in the relationship. There is no longer trust in this relationship. He feels very insecure because he feels that I might cheat on him because he is unemployed and he is not bringing any income to the house. I will never cheat on him.* (Fb, 28 years)

Men and women react differently to financial difficulties. Women who are the breadwinners in the relationships would remain faithful in order to neutralise this atypical gender role to keep a potentially strained relationship intact (Munsch, 2015:487). However, men who are financially disadvantaged are more likely to feel threatened. In traditional African societies, a man's responsibility is that of the breadwinner (Munsch, 2015:487), and men can perceive their inability to fulfil this responsibility as a failure, which may trigger insecurity and dissatisfaction.

Although infidelity is the strongest predictor of relationship dissolution (Munsch, 2015:470), it is evident that relationships do in fact persevere even after discovery of the transgression (Abrahamson et al., 2012:1494; Allen & Atkins, 2012:148). The participant's account below describes her experience with infidelity.

> *When I was still staying at my parents' house I had an affair and he found out about it. He does not trust me and he still suspects that I am cheating on him. That is not true because I have long stopped the affair.* (F, 31 years)

Certain authors assert that infidelity is gender sensitive and that it seemingly matters which gender is involved in infidelity (Abrahamson et al., 2012:1495; DeMaris, 2013:1489). A woman's infidelity is often received with a greater degree of societal contempt than her male partner due to the double-standard morality attached to sexuality (Pizarro & Gaspay-Fernandez, 2005:1). Consequently, the relationship is likely to collapse if the offending partner is a woman. Men are apparently less forgiving of their female counterparts due to the widely held belief that women are motivated by discontent with their primary partners when they decide to engage in infidelity (Pizarro & Gaspay-Fernandez, 2005:1). Hence, women's affairs are said to be more emotional than sexual (DeMaris, 2013:1478). Therefore, relationships that survive infidelity are left in a distressed state if the offender is female (Allen & Atkins, 2012:1481). This disparity may be related to how individuals are socialised by their families and wider society.

Unlike men, women are more likely to be committed to a cohabiting relationship (Sassler & Cunningham, 2008:1317), and very often forgive their partners' transgressions.

> *He took me to his friend's braai. When we were there I observed that he was chatting with one of the ladies there on WhatsApp. At one stage he went out and the lady followed him. I walked-in on them still exchanging money. I took the notes and cut them into pieces. I came home very upset. He asked for my forgiveness and I eventually forgave him.* (F, 26 years)

Due to societal pressure, women are expected to be restrained and put more effort into forgiving their partners' infidelity in order to keep the relationship intact (DeMaris, 2013:1481; Whitton et al., 2014:859; Pizarro & Gaspay-Fernandez, 2015:1). Gendered socialisation encourages women to be more committed to their intimate relationships. The woman's status in an intimate relationship is founded on the principle of loyalty, acknowledging that she has a good man, and trusting him implicitly (Sassler & Cunningham, 2008:1317; Eyre et al., 2012:233). From the woman's point of view, forgiveness enhances closeness and commitment in the relationship (Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2009:36).

5.2.10 Subtheme 2.10: Descriptions of responsibilities in the relationship

Cohabitation is a democratic institution as compared to other family formations such as marriage (Kasearu, 2010:5; Miller & Sassler, 2012:430; Lee & Ono, 2012:955). Substantial empirical attention has been devoted to the practice of dividing household chores (Davis & Wills, 2013:808), and the outcome can be grouped into three broad perspectives: (i) the availability of time perspective; (ii) the relative resources/bargaining perspective; and (iii) the gender ideology or socialisation perspective (Musick & Bumpass, 2012:2; Sano, Manoogian & Ontai, 2012:945; Meggiolaro, 2014:854, Davis & Wills, 2013:818).

In certain instances, cohabitees allocate household responsibilities according to the availability of time and the number of household tasks (Miller & Sassler, 2012:428; Meggiolaro, 2014:854; Davis & Wills, 2013:810), as demonstrated below.

> *We divide the house chores according to time in terms of who comes home first or who has more time available. On certain days it happens that my boyfriend is involved at work and my work schedule is more flexible and I end up doing most of the stuff at home. I think that in general we have figured out a routine and an understanding of our chores. (Fa, 28 years)*
> *There is no rule with regard to that. We just do anything according to our own means and at our own times. (F, 33 years)*
> *In the beginning it was a lot of, like delegation. You do laundry tonight and I will make dinner. We are more flexible because we both work quite hard. Sometimes we are home for dinner and sometime we are not. Sometime I am home for laundry night and she is not. Sometime she is home and I am not. So we are both taking it as it comes. So we try and split cooking evenly. It has not been like a recordkeeping thing. (M, 28 years)*
> *I am mostly responsible for the house chores because he is not home most of the day. He usually goes out to look for piece jobs* [casual] *and he washes taxis at the rank. (Fb, 28 years)*

Cohabitation affords couples equal division of responsibilities (Meggiolaro, 2014:856; Brown et al., 2015:3). Hence, they are flexible and able to negotiate the allocation of responsibilities on their own terms (Meggiolaro, 2014:856; Brown et al., 2015:3). The notion of gendered flexibility highlights the importance of mutual accommodation in the division of household tasks and mutual decision making (Kalmijn, 2011:272). In some cohabiting relationships, it seems logical that an individual who spends more

time at home will assume the larger proportion of the household responsibilities (Meggiolaro, 2014:854).

Behaviour relating to financial issues reflects the values and beliefs that are common in cohabitation (Dew, 2011:180). Cohabitees' allocation of financial responsibilities thus reflects the independent nature of cohabiting since partners tend to operate as two autonomous individuals (Hamplova et al., 2014:985). In the face of uncertainty, cohabitees prefer to keep their finances separate although they contribute equally to household expenses.

> *We agreed that we should go 50/50* [equal allocation] *on household expenses.* (Fb, 30 years)
> *He offered to pay rent. I think it was somehow...not compensating...but taking a lead since it is my place and he just felt it was right for him to pay. We never really talked about it. For instance, the other day I was going to pay the rent and he was offered to pay. The following month I thought maybe he was only going to pay for that month but still offered to pay. Since then he been paying the rent and I am responsible for the grocery.* (Fa, 30 years)
> *We spoke about things like finances, household chores and taking care of the child. We agreed that I would buy groceries and pay for the child's crèche only. He then pays the rent and clothing accounts.* (Fb, 29 years)

The findings confirm that cohabitation allows convenient allocation of financial responsibilities. It is a common belief that the merging of finances may enhance relationship quality and promote relationship commitment (Steuber & Paik, 2013:1155). Most importantly, when couples combine their finances it is perceived as an expression of trust (Gray & Evans, 2008:443). However, the allocation of finances within cohabitation is often cautious and offers an easy way out in the event of relationship breakdown (Reed, 2006:1126). It has also been observed that in some instances women enjoy the benefits of this financial arrangement, notably in cases where the couple's place of abode is registered in both their names or their partners pay the rent. These women can easily evict these men should the relationship breakdown (Dew, 2011:179). Nonetheless, having two earners in a relationship ensures more financial security and alleviates the financial burden on cohabitees.

Gender preferences in respect of habits and styles still determine the allocation of responsibilities in cohabitation (Funk & Kobayashi, 2014:1110), as illustrated below:

In my house at least there are no formal assigned roles. I do not have to make supper every single night. If I have to say, actually I had a bad day and I don't feel like...and do you mind preparing dinner, it is done. It is not like the roles are assigned and we stick to them. If he is not around I can take out the garbage. So the responsibilities are shared and they are fluid and not set in stone. (M, 28 years)

I clean because I am a woman but he occasionally assists me - I don't want to lie. When he sees that the house is dirty he cleans. Even when we do the major clean-up we help each other. Even when I am not home he cooks. The only good thing is that he is one of those guys who help with the house chores like cleaning and cooking. He doesn't wait for me to come back from work but he just cooks. (Fa, 32 years)

During weekends he takes care of the garden and washing of cars. I am responsible for cooking but during the week if I phone him and inform him that I would be late from work I find that he has already finished cooking and cleaning the house. (Fb, 29 years)

Female cohabitees often assume more household responsibilities (Meggiolaro, 2014:853) but they expect their partners to assist. It has been observed that women often feel cared for when their partners assume an active role in undertaking household chores (Galovan et al., 2013:1850). Furthermore, women are often impressed by men who carry out household chores since such action shows sensitivity and responsiveness to their partners' needs. Moreover, female cohabitees are able to focus more attention on their careers without being hampered by the demands of being traditional wives (Stavrova et al., 2012:1068, Miller & Sassler, 2012:427). Such a relationship is likely to flourish.

Contrary to the widely held assumption that cohabitation is ideal for individuals who are relatively liberal (Kalmijn et al., 2007:162; Kasearu, 2010:5; Miller & Sassler, 2012:430; Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012:47), female participants are still performing traditionally entrenched gender roles.

I am a woman in the house. I cook and clean the house and do laundry. We did not talk about this. As a woman I saw it as my responsibility that the house should be clean and that I should ensure that my partner's clothes are clean. We never really sat down and talked about this. He buys grocery and he is still treating me the same way he was doing when we were still dating, like providing money to do my hair. I have a car and he doesn't have a car but he provides me with money for petrol. Initially, I used to ask him money for petrol but now he takes my car and fills in the petrol for the whole week. He regularly checks

if I still have enough pocket money. I don't ask him for money anymore because I can see he is taking care of me. (F, 31 years)

I can say I have most of the responsibilities because I take care of the household. I am the one who cooks. I am the one who do the laundry. I am the one who wakes up during the night to take care of the child. Yes, he does help with the dishes sometimes but we are both responsible for buying grocery. Although I am mostly responsible for the household chores, financially he helps out a lot. He knows that there must be food in the house but he doesn't cook. I feel he does assist where he can. (Fb, 27 years)

These extracts depict females as homemakers. Most female participants continue to perform the majority of domestic tasks in cohabiting relationships (Miller & Sassler, 2012:428; Meggiolaro, 2014:854). This gendered delineation of household responsibilities is influenced by how girls are socialised in African culture. The assertion is further highlighted by Barstad (2014:974) who posits that gendered socialisation coordinates behaviour by defining how individuals are expected to behave in a particular situation. Hence, some female participants feel it is their duty to assume household tasks which are socially assigned to women. Despite the ability of some women to provide for themselves, many still believe that men remain the primary providers for their families (Miller & Sassler, 2012:428). This conservative gendered behaviour is influenced by family socialisation where parents prepare their daughters to take care of their future families (Noordhuizen, De Graaf & Sieben, 2011:1648; Vigilant, Trefethren & Anderson, 2013:205). Thus, many men still prefer to carry out periodic tasks such as maintenance work in and around the house, whereas routine tasks such as house cleaning, cooking, and laundering are traditionally carried out by females (Barstad, 2014:974; Miller & Sassler, 2012:436), as indicated in the extracts below.

Things like trash cans, taking out the garbage he does. The cleaning I do. The washing I'm not even going to lie, I am not a laundry person. We do both. But I do the ironing. (Fa, 30 years)

So we kinda [somehow] *work it out that way that she does all the stuff of cooking, shopping and making sure everybody eat, and I will be the cleaner and paying for the food, almost more like girl and boy construction.* (Mb, 32 years)

Gender is a social construct which is enacted daily by individuals in their interaction with one another (Miller & Sassler, 2012:428). Some cohabitees do not consider gender when carrying out responsibilities in their respective domiciles.

> *In our house we don't consider gender. We both enjoy cooking and I think that takes a lot of pressure off. For example, doing laundry we both understand why we have to do it. The only role that is separated by gender is the garden. She loves the garden and I don't. She gets stuck in the garden and grows her flowers and that sort of thing* [laughing]. *(M, 28 years)*
>
> *We do everything together. For example, we both clean and do laundry together. It just happened that when we started to stay together, after having a meal I would wash dishes and he would help rinse. He would do the same even when I am busy with laundry.* (Fb, 35 years)

Gender ideology is not a strong predictor of family-related attitudes and behaviours in cohabitation (Davis & Wills, 2013:818; Jaramillo-Sierra, Allen & Kaestle, 2015:1). Allocation of responsibilities in cohabitation is determined by gender (Nugent, 2010:499) less often as cohabitees develop new ways of functioning within their relationship (Sano et al., 2012:945).

Men's expectations that their partners should take care of the household can create conflict (Galovan et al., 2013:1847; Berger & Bzostek, 2014:99). Cohabitation has the potential to become a source of conflict and strain for female cohabitees (Weigel et al., 2014:344) as they still tidy up after their male partners.

> *When he came home and there is no food and I am tired from work he would ask haibo* [expression of shock] *where is the food? It was something that I felt first of all I don't have to cook for him and he must not ask that of me. I can cook because I want to cook but it is not something that I have to do. I think...maybe I have a twisted mind. I think when one is married and I am not saying you must be your husband's slave. But there are responsibilities and duties that you* [referring to herself] *must do when you are married. That is, you know, cleaning the house and cooking. I will only feel obliged to perform those duties when I married. I am not saying that I currently have problem to cook for him but I have a problem with his demands on me. I can do that because I want to do them but don't demand that of me* [with a raised and stern voice]. *He can't!! First he has not paid any magadi and we didn't sign any papers. So it does not give him the right to demand. That's why I am saying there are certain duties that nna* [personally] *see as a must for a wife.* (Fa, 30 years)
>
> *It was really stressful at the beginning. He would leave dirty dishes and his socks lying around. I had to study and take care of him as well. I am cleaning*

and cooking for him whilst he has not even married me. I am providing him with all the benefits of a wife and I am just a girlfriend I would have understood if I was his wife. (Fa, 29 years)

Cohabiting females are likely to express discontent (Berger & Bzostek, 2014:99; Brown et al., 2015:3), especially in communities where being a wife is more central to a woman's identity (Posel & Rudwick, 2014:283). Female cohabitees strongly feel that cohabitation does not grant their partners the authority to make demands on them (Reed, 2006:1124). Moreover, certain authors are of the view that a relationship should not be linked to any obligation; rather, it should be the desire of the partners to make each other happy (Ganong et al., 2015:19). The findings further highlight the challenges inherent in maintaining relationships when the couple does not openly discuss their expectations. This failure may lead to tension in the relationship (Hohmann-Marriott, 2006:1019; Jaramillo-Sierra et al., 2015:4).

5.2.11 Subtheme 2.11: Participants' experiences and views of raising children in a cohabiting relationship

Children are increasingly living with their cohabiting parents (Wu, Hou & Schimmele, 2008:1600). Concerns have been expressed about the effect of cohabiting relationships on the wellbeing of children (Brown & Manning, 2009:85; Valle & Tillman, 2014:98; Hall & Walls, 2015:2). In terms of the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005, the best interest of the child is of paramount importance in matters concerning care, protection, and wellbeing. Hence, the matter was explored with participants. Due to the complexity and diversity of the circumstances of cohabiting parents (Nixon, Greene & Hogan, 2015:1044; Hill, 2014:241), the discussion includes, but is not limited to, biological and non-biological parents who are cohabiting, and their plans regarding raising their children.

Children are more likely to benefit from the combined economic and emotional contributions of their biological parents who reside together (Nepomnyaschy & Teitler, 2013:435), particularly when they pool their resources (Thomson & Bernhardt, 2010:5). This participant shared the benefits of raising a child in a two-parent cohabiting relationship.

My child gets to be raised by both parents and my child gets to see him [the father] *all the time. I don't have to phone him to come where I live for the child to see him. Life becomes simpler when the two of us are staying together. We are able to help each other financially.* (Fa, 27 years)

This extract underscores the importance, and the convenience, of the father's presence in the child's life. Children with limited or no contact with their fathers are said to display behavioural problems (Nduna & Sikweyiya, 2015:536; Chili & Maharaj, 2015:30). However, previous research has found that children who grow up in two-biological-parent families are likely to fare better on a number of wellbeing indicators such as academic achievement and emotional stability (Valle & Tillman, 2014:98). However, Hunter (2006:v) cautions against confusing a father and fatherhood. The latter is a "human, social and cultural role" (Hunter, 2006:8). In other words, it is a man's responsibility to raise his child.

Raising children in cohabiting relationships also provides parents the joy and benefits of egalitarian relationships where both parents are actively involved in the child's life.

We are participating more in the child's wellbeing. We share responsibilities. When he was still working locally he left home after me in the morning. He assisted with the preparation of the child and dropping him at a crèche. He is someone who really takes interest in raising the child. If the child demands to play with him he would make time. He also prefers that we be honest and open with the child despite the fact the child is only 4 years old. For example, he always insists that we should tell him the truth appropriate for his age like not lying that we are going to a restaurant when we are taking him to a crèche. (Fa, 29 years)

This extract resonates with the view that the father's active involvement in raising his child is beneficial to the child's development (Waldfogel, Craigie & Brooks-Gunn, 2010:5. Sharing parenting responsibilities in cohabiting relationships demonstrates a move away from traditional practices that determine parental involvement according to gender (Makusha & Richter, 2015:6). Traditionally, childcare was central to a woman's socially constructed role (Makusha & Richter, 2015:6). The role of men, on the other hand, was limited to providing for the family's material needs (Makusha & Richter, 2015: 6). The absence of traditional practices in cohabitation affords men the opportunity to reside with their partners and raise their children together.

Cohabiting men devote more time and attention to their stepchildren (Hill, 2014:241), and female cohabitees appreciate the presence of a male figure in their children's lives.

> *It has been a nice experience because he is a good father to all children. There are three children. My sister's two children aged, 11 and 7. My child is nine years old.* (F, 33 years)
> *He found me with another child. At the time I had just broken up with my child's biological father. He is a very good person and he is taking good care of my child. We have two children of our own. He treats all children the same.* (F, 34 years)
> *My boyfriend has been a good father to all my kids. He was even a good father to my two kids before we had a child together. Compared to my ex-husband, I would say he has been a very good father to all the children.* (Fb, 35 years)

With the understanding that fathering is more than conceiving a child, these extracts resonate with the assertion that social fathering can play an equally important role in children' lives (McDougal & George, 2016:527). These findings oppose the belief that children living with cohabiting stepparents are more likely to be disadvantaged in one way or another (Higginbotham & Skogrand, 2010:134). This assertion emanates from the belief that stepfathers or social fathers are more likely to neglect or abuse the children with whom they live since they tend to be financially and emotionally less committed to their partners' children (Bulanda & Manning, 2008:596; Walsh, 2012:116; Hill, 2014:241). Moreover, authors hold the view that children living with cohabiting stepparents are more likely to be disadvantaged by the high level of instability, often inherent in cohabitation (Sun & Li, 2014:1445; Lee & McLanahan, 2015:1613; Markham, Hartenstein, Mitchell & Aljayyousi-Khalil, 2015:2). Other authors claim that the material benefits of cohabiting relationships will be greater only if the male is the biological father of the child, since cohabiting men tend to allocate resources to their own offspring (Nepomnyaschy & Teitler, 2013:1250). However, these assertions are not universal and there are many African men who accept and assume the responsibility of caring for their partner's children.

The nature of the cohabiting couple's relationship is likely to affect the children's wellbeing (Waldfogel et al., 2010:4; Clark, Young & Dow, 2013:306). For instance, some male cohabitees show respect to their partners and children by not exposing the children to their arguments.

He is one person who will never shout you in front of the kids. He says that he does not want our arguments to affect the kids at school. (F, 33 years)

The finding confirms the sincere consideration of the parents for the children's emotional wellbeing (Pizarro & Gaspay-Fernandez, 2015:8) by not arguing in their presence. It has been noted that witnessing parents confronting each other aggressively could be detrimental to the children's social and psychological wellbeing (Wu et al., 2008:1605). A man who is mindful of the child's wellbeing is likely to earn the respect of his partner, which will lead to the improvement of relationship quality.

Participants in cohabiting relationships seem to be doubtful of the stability in these relationships, and therefore resolve to wait before they introduce their children to the current partner (Tach & Edin, 2011:77; Thomson, 2014:246). One participant expressed reservations and scepticism about raising her children in a cohabiting relationship.

> *I have been lied to many times before* [in previous relationships]. *I don't like playing with my child's feelings and expose her to all my relationships because I cannot just trust someone easily. He tells me that it was only his children's mother who moved in with him before me but you can never know for sure. I will have to wait for a whilst longer before my child can move in with us.* (F, 31 years)

The participant's gender-based distrust, premised on the belief that men in general cannot be trusted (McLanahan & Beck, 2010:2; Hertog & Iwasawa, 2011:1689), influences her decision to allow her child from a previous relationship to move in with them. It is evident that previous negative relationship experiences may drive women to insist on maintaining a stable environment for raising their children (Guzzo, 2009:184; Doherty & Craft, 2011:67). Moreover, some authors posit that relationship instability as well as the belief that it is not possible for men to be committed to one woman, encourages the lack of trust in men among women (Copp, Giordano, Manning & Longmore, 2015:1). This attitude is not unfounded considering that many men pretend and lead women to believe that they are committed to the relationship, only to leave them emotionally hurt and broken.

One participant feels that she is justified in falling pregnant whilst cohabiting as she was able to achieve a university qualification.

> *Because honestly, if I was to fall pregnant we would be justified but having a child is a possibility. I was fortunate enough to be put through varsity by my parents. I graduated in record time. I've worked hard. I've got a job.* (F, 25 years)

This finding supports the view that some women delay childbearing until they have acquired a qualification (Sharp & Ganong, 2011:959; Shulman et al., 2013:460). It is also common for women to prioritise their careers before starting a family (Tanaka, 2012:232). For many women, education constitutes an escape from traditional prejudices. Education in fact presents women with control over the timing of bearing children. Nonetheless, having children in cohabiting relationships remains the decision and responsibility of both cohabitees

> *We have spoken about having kids but, we felt that at the moment we are not stable enough. We agreed that as soon as we are stable and things fall into place, having kids is a definite possibility. It is basically financial stability because at the moment we don't feel that we are stable.* (Fa, 28 years)

Financial stability in a relationship is a determining factor for childbearing (Martignani, 2011:571; Smith, 2014:5). However, drawing from the Financial Expectations and Family Formation theory, Gibson-Davis (2009:146) rejects the view that raising children is dependent on financial circumstances since cohabiting couples do not necessarily postpone childbearing before achieving financial stability.

Childbearing in a cohabiting relationship is increasingly becoming widely accepted (Brown & Kawamura, 2010:5), as illustrated below.

> *I was surprised by my father. I think when you reach a certain age and you are a female, parents get worried sometimes that ukuthi* [that] *why is she not producing* [having children]. *Ok fine, you are not married but we would love to have grandkids. So I think they kinda* [somehow] *accepted me having a kid better than cohabiting. To tell the truth, two years back, it was even my father, my strict father gave a hint that make me realise that he was actually asking me to go and have a child because he would talk to me ukuthi* [that] *considering my age and the fact that I am working, it wouldn't be a problem if I can be fall pregnant since I am not saying anything about marriage. So it was like you are being told we want grandkids and fine, we see that you are not getting married. I think they have accepted it more. There is just that big taboo about cohabiting.* (Fa, 30 years)

The finding supports the notion that there is a shift in social norms that are traditionally opposed to childbearing outside marriage (Sassler & Cunningham, 2008:13; Hertog & Iwasawa, 2011:1675; Brown et al., 2015:4). It has also been noted that the stigma often associated with childbearing outside marriage has become eroded because of the greater support from the cohabitees' families (Sassler & Cunningham, 2008:13; Hertog & Iwasawa, 2011:1675; Brown et al., 2015:4). Within certain cultures, childbearing is an important symbol which is perceived as a successful demonstration of womanhood (Mkhwanazi, 2010:348). In Sepedi, a woman who conceives is called *mosadi-sadi* (literally meaning, a true woman). Equally, men believe that impregnating a woman symbolises sexual prowess (Chilli & Maharaj, 2015:30).

Conversely, many cohabitees opt to delay childbearing to adhere to the traditional norms which prescribe that marriage is a necessary prerequisite to having children (Thomson & Bernhardt, 2010:5; Chaney & Fairfax, 2012:23). Adherence to cultural norms and values is still practised in certain communities.

> *We spoke about having kids. We have been open about getting married and having kids. The decision has so far been, no marriage no kids. It is more from a cultural point of view. It's still quite a stigma among our community to have kids without being married. If we were to decide to have kids in the next couple of years it would probably be, get married and have kids.* (M, 28 years)

This extract confirms that cohabitation does not always lead to childbearing, despite their exposure to the risk of an unplanned pregnancy (Sassler & Cunningham, 2008:17) because childbirth outside marriage is still condemned in many communities. It is not only a pregnant woman's name that is tarnished but that of her entire family. It is believed that the cohabitees behaviour is an indication of how he or she had been raised (McMichael, 2013:668).

Childbearing engenders significant responsibilities in any relationship. The ambivalence and uncertainty about having children in cohabitation are encapsulated below.

> *There has been a discussion about having kids but, again we haven't sat down and spoken about it. The topic is brought up in passing and it is something we both want. We are both from different religions and cultures. That conversation*

will have to take place about how we will raise our children. It is not something that we spoke about in detail but it is definitely something that I anticipate will happen. It would not just be the two of us anymore. (Fa, 27 years)

The finding confirms that childbirth in any relationship, regardless of its status, calls for the couple to engage in "kid talk" (Sassler & Cunningham, 2008:18). Therefore, the cohabitees' discussion regarding children may serve as an indicator of the quality of the relationship, and can also predict the future of the relationship (Hardie, Geist & Lucas, 2014:731; Ganong et al., 2015:5). It should be borne in mind that childbearing represents a heightened sense of commitment as couples with children stand to lose more when the relationship breaks down. However, some authors assert that most cohabiting fathers do not abandon their parental responsibilities at the news of pregnancy, but remain involved and support the mothers in raising their children (Tach & Edin, 2011:77).

Certain authors maintain that childbearing in cohabiting relationships is seldom planned (Bouchard, 2009:141; Tach & Edin, 2011:77; Cross-Barnet & Cherlin, 2011:635), as illustrated below.

My first child is from my previous relationship and we only share one child together. We didn't really plan to have a child. We thought we will wait until we get married. There is no problem in raising them, though. (Fa, 29 years)

This extract confirms that unplanned pregnancy in cohabitation does not necessarily imply that the pregnancy is unwanted. Despite their pregnancies having been unplanned, some women have shared positive accounts of how rewarding these pregnancies turned out to be (McMichael, 2013:669).

However, unplanned pregnancy is not without challenges; for instance, it is common for a woman to experience feelings of anxiety and regret upon discovering her pregnancy (Salusky, 2013:601). Moreover, the social and economic difficulties of caring for the child are more likely to weigh heavily on the couple, especially the expectant mother (Herd, Higgins, Sicinski & Merkurieva, 2016:423). Some women even contemplate abortion due to the stigma of pregnancy outside marriage (Chilli & Maharaj, 2015:30). Furthermore, an unplanned pregnancy may lead to a strained relationship. Nonetheless, pregnancy in cohabitation, whether planned or not, should

not be pathologised or stigmatised as cohabiting couples are equally capable of taking care of their children.

Complications brought about by the children from previous relationships were revealed in the following excerpt:

> *Our problem currently is that the child* [of cohabitating partner] *is staying with my boyfriend's parents. The child's mother visits my boyfriend's parents anytime she wants. I feel that is creating problems because his parents will never accept that he has broken up with the child's mother because they see her often. A possible solution is that she should take her child but my boyfriend's family is not going to agree to that.* (Fa, 32 years)

This excerpt suggests a complex situation which may put strain on the cohabitees' relationship. Although children are more likely to reside with their mother rather than their father after dissolution of the parents' relationship (Popenoe, 2009:434), it is not uncommon for a woman to maintain a relationship with her ex-partner's family for the benefit of the children (Madhavan, 2010:148). In certain African cultures, it is strongly believed that *madi a bona ga a lahlwe* (meaning, that the paternal lineage with the child) should be maintained, and they will therefore make every effort to be meaningfully involved in the upbringing of the child.

Children born out of wedlock assume their mother's surname, which poses a challenge to most families who are concerned with their identity. Some families therefore pressurise their sons to get married to the child's mother. The practice of assuming the father's surname is important to this participant.

> *The only tricky part is with the surname that the children should use. The other day I was with my girlfriend's brother and he asked my eldest daughter, hey, little girl, who are you? The child mentioned her name. When asked for the surname she mentions her mother's. The child could not explain she was not using my surname because I am her father. The experience made me feel bad. My children should use my surname. It is important in our culture.* (M, 31 years)

The practice of children carrying their father's surname within African culture is consistent with the belief that paternal recognition confers social and cultural identity upon the children (Madhavan, 2010:141; Smith, Khunou & Nathane-Taulela, 2014:433). According to Smith et al. (2014:433), in a patriarchal society it is widely

believed that fathers contribute to the children's ethnic identity. Children born outside marriage adopt their mother's surname and only take their father's surname upon payment of *magadior*. This practice is common among many Africans, even though some people regard this practice as inadvertently perpetuating the stigmatisation of out-of-wedlock childbearing as children are then labelled illegitimate (Nugent, 2010:501; Tanaka, 2012:23). However, most African families accept a child who is fathered by their male relative as one of their own, irrespective of his/her parents' relationship status.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on participants' shared diverse, often positive, and complex lived experiences since cohabitation. For the majority of participants, cohabitation is an opportunity for the couple to come to know each other more intimately and also to screen their partners to determine their suitability for marriage. Others regard cohabitation as a means to being close and spending quality time together, thus enhancing closeness in the relationship. They believe that cohabitation enhances open and constructive communication skills that will improve the quality of the relationship. Cohabitees regard cohabitation as beneficial in that it helps establish and maintain intimacy and companionship, prerequisites for psychological wellbeing. Others find emotional and financial support vital in cohabitation.

Some participants believe that commitment enriches cohabitation, much the same as in marriage. Interestingly, commitment to the relationship is understood differently by men and women. Female participants perceive marriage as a symbol of commitment whilst one male participant is vehemently opposed to this perception. The majority of the female participants had to change their behaviours and appearances to impress their partners. This is often done in anticipation of marriage.

These are also challenges that were identified by participants with their relationships since cohabitation. Uppermost is the experiences based on gender which places women in a disadvantage position when it relates to household chores and progression of the relationship. Contrary to a common belief that cohabitees share

household responsibilities equally, the findings indicate that women are still responsible for most of the household duties. Whilst cohabitation is a positive experience for some participants, others are of the view that partners become complacent and do not make an effort to show their affection. Some cohabitees experience infidelity in their relationships, which is evidently caused by the lack of trust between the partners as well as personal temptation, thus negatively affecting the quality of the relationship. All the participants wish for open communication in their relationships in order to avoid many of these challenges.

It was revealed that some participants realise that cohabitation is contrary to their social, religious, and cultural norms, and that they would rather be lawfully married. They therefore experience guilt and disappointment. Although cohabitation may be beneficial to the children for economic and emotional reasons as they have the benefit of being raised by two parents, it might not necessarily be an ideal situation. Some of the children are unplanned and this poses a challenge to the relationship. This chapter highlights the participants' diverse and often complex lived experiences, which can be beneficial albeit challenging.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS ON COHABITEES' CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION

6.1 Introduction

Conflicts and tensions in romantic relationship are inevitable (Espvall & Dellgran, 2010:85). Couples will disagree on a number of issues at any stage of their relationship, hurt one another's feelings and experience distress (Espvall & Dellgran, 2010:85; Dillow, Afifi & Matsunaga, 2012:29). Due to the uncertainty in cohabitation, conflict tends to have a more damaging impact on the relationship (Theiss, Knobloch, Checton & Magsamen-Conrad, 2009:593). However, not all cohabiting relationships dissolve after experiencing conflict. Some couples still make an effort to mend the relationship.

This chapter presents the participants' accounts of how they experience and manage challenges in their relationships, and their suggestions for social work intervention.

Table 6.1: Theme, subtheme and categories on cohabitees' conflict management strategies, and suggestions for social work intervention

Themes	Subthemes	Categories
3. Cohabitees' conflict management strategies and suggestions for social work intervention	3.1 The participants' accounts of how they resolve challenges	3.1.1: The use of professional support
		3.1.2: The use of informal social networks
		3.1.3: Open communication
		3.1.4: Withdrawing from the situation, and avoidance
		3.1.5: Withdrawing from the situation, and avoidance
		3.1.6: Terminating the cohabiting relationship

	3.2 Participants' viewpoints on professional support by social workers as well as aspects to be addressed by social workers	

6.1.1 Subtheme 3.1: The participants' accounts of how they resolve challenges

During happier times a romantic relationship can provide the joy of sharing life's journey and be a source of great support to manage life's stresses. When the romantic relationship is distressed and conflicted, it can be a source of great loneliness and anguish (Snyder & Halford, 2012:230). However, it should be borne in mind that it is how conflict is addressed that characterises a healthy relationship, and not necessarily the absence thereof (Wetzler, Frame & Litzinger, 2011:232). However, relational transgressions are inherently neither beneficial nor detrimental to a relationship (Frisby & Westerman, 2010:97). It is how these transgressions are handled that determines the relationship's survival since conflict responses have important relational implications (Dillow et al., 2012:29). In the current study it emerged that two participants sought professional support from psychologists and informal social networks such as family members, friends, and colleagues when they experienced relational distress. Three participants discussed and resolved their challenges without seeking assistance from outsiders. In an effort to ensure serenity within the relationship, almost half of the participants chose to withdraw from any situation which could cause conflict, or avoid the situation altogether. During the interviews, two female participants indicated that they were seriously considering moving out of the domicile shared with a partner, without necessarily terminating the relationship.

Five subthemes emerged from this theme. In the first subtheme, narratives of participants who made use of professional support when they were experiencing challenges in their relationship are discussed; those who consulted parents, grandparents, and friends are discussed in the second subtheme. Issues pertaining to communication and experimentation in resolving challenges are discussed in the third subtheme. Participants who opted to withdraw from a conflict situation and avoid

discussing challenges are presented in the fourth subtheme. Last, the discussion includes accounts of participants who are considering moving out of the shared residence.

6.1.1.1 Category 3.1.1: The use of professional support

Relationship problems are common among most couples in romantic unions. For couple therapists to assist partners to enhance their relationships, they first need to understand their problems in order to plan an appropriate intervention strategy (Boisvert et al., 2011:362; Cardona, Breseke, Nelson, Johns & Mack, 2013:217). Working with cohabiting couples requires specialised skills and knowledge to guide the couple through the difficulties in their relationship, since cohabitation seems to lack clear guidelines on how partners should relate to each other (Awosan et al., 2011:316).

Cohabiting relationships, which are not yet fully institutionalised (Gold, 2012:316; Brown et. al., 2015:3), lack clear guidelines how to make the relationship enjoyable and beneficial to the couple (Awosan et al., 2011:316). Therefore, it is important for couple therapists who wish to assist cohabiting couples to take cognisance of the couple' s difficulties to define how to grow their relationships and address the inherent uncertainties which are often associated with cohabitation (Del Rio & Mieling, 2010:170). For instance, cohabiting couples may seek assistance from social workers with challenges pertaining to communicating their desires regarding the future of their relationships, considering that most dating couples slide into cohabitation without discussing the implications and meaning of the transition (cf. category 1.1.5).

Relational distress has been found to affect individuals' emotional health negatively (Vanderbleek, Robinson, Casado-Kehoe & Young, 2011:132). For instance, a participant described the circumstances leading to his partner being admitted to hospital, to seek professional help due to a strained relationship.

> *There was a time we argued and I said very bad things to my partner and she was eventually admitted to hospital. She consulted the psychologist at the hospital and I was called in. We attended few sessions. I got the feeling that she* [psychologist] *understood our situation and she helped us a lot. The first question that she asked was whether there is a future in our relationship.* (Ma, 32 years)

This experience corroborates the assertion that women are more likely to seek couple therapy when they experience problems in intimate relationships (Boisvert et al., 2011:362). However, therapy will not be helpful if the causal factors of the underlying problems are not addressed (Roberts, Booth & Beach, 2016:250). Hence, during therapy couples are advised to talk frankly about the future of their relationship and possible constraints that they may be experiencing in cohabitation (Stanley et al., 2009a:504).

Introspection during cohabitation can often result in doubts and uncertainties if it is not consistent with how an individual perceives himself or herself (Poon & Knight, 2013:498). The threat of social disapproval of cohabitation can trigger inner conflict in cohabitees (Gold, 2012:139; Doyle & Molix, 2014:107). One participant was particularly concerned about the reaction of his family to his decision to cohabit.

> *There was that point in my life where I had to sit down based of what was happening in the relationship. I asked myself if I am really doing the right thing* [cohabiting]. *Again I asked myself if I am out of line. What will my family and people back home* [village] *say about this? Then I called organisations like Love-Life to get their professional opinion. I really learned a lot from their advice.* (M, 31 years)

The finding confirms that individuals are more likely to explore the psychological impact of major life transitions such as cohabitation, since entering into such a relationship requires a reconstruction of identity (Soulsby & Bennet, 2015:2). Cohabitees are also constantly evaluating whether their decision to cohabit is consistent with their identity (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:794), both privately and collectively (Soulsby & Bennet, 2015:2). The concept of private identity generally seeks to answer the question, "[w]ho am I?" that is, the individual's sense of self that includes personal beliefs and values (Soulsby & Bennet, 2015:2). The private identity fits the underlying assumptions of the identity theory that seeks to understand what it means to an individual to be in cohabitation (Kerpelman et al., 2016:103). On the other hand, collective identity denotes the individuals' views about themselves in relation to how they are perceived as members of a particular social group (Soulsby & Bennett, 2015:2). Moreover, cohabitees often rely on normative societal values to gain general approval, considering that private identity informs and is informed by collective perceptions (Manning et al., 2011:119; Sica, Sestito & Ragozini, 2014:159).

Therefore, identity confusion in cohabitation develops when cohabitees are not able to integrate their new identities as cohabitees into the perception of themselves (Sica et al., 2014:159). Within the context of cohabitation in a conventional community where marriage is preferred and cohabitation is denounced, this internal turmoil can be addressed by either compromising the private identity (personal desire) and conform to the collective identity (community expectations) by either getting married or terminating the relationship. Conversely, in instances where an individual's private identity is dominant, individuals may choose to remain in cohabitation to satisfy their personal needs.

Although two participants consulted psychologists, it is still concerning that none of the participants consulted social workers. People tend to have reservations about consulting social workers since they believe that social workers base their decisions on impulses and biased conceptions of family union rather than professional norms Kagan (2015:4). In Israel, for instance, people prefer approaching psychologists, psychiatrists, and professional counsellors since social work is perceived as a less prestigious helping profession (Khvorostianov & Elias, 2015:1). In South Africa, attitudes towards social workers have a racial dimension because Black people have historically experienced difficulties in attending therapy that was rooted in Eurocentric notions and power which regards African practices as inferior and pathological (Awosan et al., 2011:154).

6.1.1.2 Category 3.1.2: The use of informal social networks

Human beings have an [10]inherent desire to belong and maintain interpersonal relationships for their own social functioning (Blok, 2012:39). Some authors even contend that individuals who are able to attain this need tend to be mentally and physically healthier than people who lack meaningful social support (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006:697). Cohabitees also rely on support from their families and friends.

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[10] Maslow differentiates between five types of human needs in ascending, namely the need for safety; the need for belonging; need for love; esteem needs; and the need for self-actualization (Blok, 2012:39).

The course of a romantic relationship is shaped by many factors and contexts as people tend to depend on the views held within their social networks (Noordhuizen et al., 2011:1653). A family has consistently proved to be an established network which emphasises interdependent relationships that are characterised by warmth, closeness, support, and priority of the relationship before the self (Forsberg & Lindgren, 2015:375). Individuals spend most of their time within family contexts and family members are often regarded as reliable confidants in personal matters (Campos, Perez & Guardino, 2016:82). Contrary to the assertion that cohabitees do not enjoy any family support (Fagan, 2012:463), it has been noted that they have more access to informal social networks such as friends and family (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2012:957).

Similarly, some cohabitees still maintain contact with their parents to seek assistance or advice (Bucx et al., 2008:144), as illustrated by the following extract:

> *I once shared my concern with my mother because I suspected that my boyfriend was cheating. I even thought of leaving him at the time. My mother sat me down and made me realise that I should confront my boyfriend about my suspicions. She said that it would still be my decision to make if I suspect that he was not being honest with me. She advised me against making a decision before getting all the facts.* (Fb, 30 years)

This finding confirms that although cohabitees may not reside with their parents they do not entirely terminate their relationship with them (Willoughby, Hersh, Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2015:670). This gives credence to the assertion that parents are an important source of support for their children in times of need and to maintain family closeness. Mothers still play a significant role in their daughters' lives. Hence, those who subscribe to the family life course perspective claim that the parent-child relationship remains salient throughout the child's life course (Goodsell et al., 2013:980).

When individuals enter into any romantic relationship their family networks expand to accommodate their partners' families (Bucx et al., 2008:145). Therefore, the couples' families became a source of support.

> *I often phone his mother to seek advice. The other day we had a fight and I phoned her. She told me that my partner has always been a moody child and*

her advice was that when he is angry I must just give him space and he will eventually come around. (Fb, 27 years)

I usually talk to his brother's wife because he [partner] *is scared of her. When his brother's wife confronts him he would show remorse and express his love for me.* (F, 26 years)

The findings seem to refute the notion that cohabitees do not have any social connection with their partners' families (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009:135). Instead, cohabitation increases the size of the partners' social capital since they have an expanded social network on both sides (Bucx et al., 2008:145). Therefore, the cohabitee's lack of contact with his or her partner's family should not be generalised and applied to all cohabitees. From the excerpts it also became apparent that cohabitees share their challenges with a family member from their partners' side with whom they are comfortable and who seem to command some authority over their partners. However, the support is not universal to all the participants as some of the family members were not supportive.

I spoke to his mother about my partner's drug problem and she was not very helpful. She just said that my partner is an adult and he should be responsible for his actions. At some stage I even thought of leaving him but my main concern is that he might even think of committing suicide if all of us abandon him. (Fb, 28 years)

We are staying with his parents and when I tell them our relationship problems they don't sit both of us down to resolve the problems. Instead they talk to us separately. Obviously he is their child and there is nothing much that they can do. (F, 26 years)

These excerpts confirm the assertion that families are less supportive of cohabitees during turbulent times, especially in the absence of *magadi as* the couple's respective families are culturally restricted in their intervention (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009:135). Within many African cultures, parental support for the couple is only permissible in the event of marriage. As a result, female cohabitees who move into their partners' parental homes are more likely to feel discriminated against when they experience relational distress.

However, the discriminatory attitude is not common in all communities since some cohabitees still enjoy strong familial support even after entering into cohabitation. The support is consistent with one of the core assumptions of the family systems theory

namely, that a family is a dynamic system which encourages members to make autonomous decisions pertaining to family formation (Seiffge-Krenke, 2010:497; Yoshida & Busby, 2012: 2014; Xu & Chi, 2016:2). One male participant explained that his partner relies on her maternal family for support when they experience relational distress.

> *I have realised that she is very close to her mother and her grandmother. She has got a very strong maternal background and whenever things get uncomfortable she speaks to her mom and her mom would call her grandmother and that kind of thing. Her family is very supportive.* (Ma, 32 years)

This extract confirms that the mother-daughter relationship is one of the family relationships that will remain stronger even when major life changes happen in the daughter's life, such as when she moves out of the family home (Bojczyk, Lehan, McWey, Melson & Kaufman, 2011:453). The intergenerational solidarity between children and their parents as well as their grandparents is an important cultural value which determines how members across different generations support each other (Fingerman, Cheng, Kim, Fung, Han, Lang, Lee & Wagner, 2014:1386). It is common for grandmothers across all races to assume an active parenting role in their grandchildren's lives by providing emotional and financial support (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012:1171; Xu & Chi, 2016:6). However, some authors have observed that the influence of intergenerational support may also depend on the quality of the relationships between family members and the child's gender (Poon & Knight, 2013:499) considering that female children enjoy more assistance from their parents who are emotionally attached to them (Goodsell et al., 2013:982). Similarly, Monserud (2016:393) asserts that women are socialised to maintain close family ties, more so than men. Cohabitees who receive strong familial support are more likely to enjoy healthy intimate relationships.

Informal social networks, such as friends, are important sources of support to cohabitees who believe that friends will not judge them for being in cohabitation (Niven, Holman & Totterdell, 2012:780; Mentinis, 2015:66; Blatterer, 2016:62). It has also been noted that female cohabitees are more likely to confide more in their friends during difficult times since they have greater closeness and intimacy with their friends (Vanderbleek et al., 2011:133; Sebanc, Guimond & Lutgen, 2016:113)

When I have problems in our relationship I confide in my friends and they always advise me to move out. I honestly don't think that they are ill-advising me. Anyway, I have also been thinking that perhaps I should move out. My friends are aware of the problem I have with my boyfriend's mother because I informed them. They asked why I am still in the relationship if the problem with his mother is unresolved and there is no progress. It's not like they are lying to me because it has been a year now. (Fa, 32 years)

I consult my friends when I have problems. When we have problems I tell my friends my side of the story and they tell me what they think and it ends there. I don't know who he consults. (F, 33 years)

These findings confirm that cohabitees seem to depend on the views of their friends when they experience relational distress (Noordhuizen et al., 2011:1653). This dependency is fostered by less social acceptance of cohabitation from families (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2012:956; Blatterer, 2016:62). Therefore, friends create the social opportunities within which romantic relationships flourish since positive attitudes are likely to boost positive relationship outcomes, whilst social disapproval may lead to termination of a relationship (Li, Connolly, Jiang, Pepler & Craig, 2010:114; Blair & Pukall, 2015:257). It is only in few cases that disapproval of cohabitation by friends strengthens rather than weakens or leads to the termination of the relationship (Sinclair et al., 2015:78).

6.1.1.3 Category 3.1.3: Open communication

Communication and healthy conflict resolution skills can ensure stability in romantic relationships. Couples who possess these skills tend to maintain satisfying relationships as they are able to express their honest feelings and thoughts (Wetzler et al., 2011:323; Kanji & Schober, 2014:43). Falconier (2015:238) asserts that partners can support each other as long as they are able to communicate the source of their distress.

Individuals are more likely to experience adjustment challenges during the transition from casual dating to cohabitation (Theiss & Nagy, 2012:547); hence, it is important that cohabitees strive to clarify the guidelines governing their relationship, and adjust their expectations to mitigate potential conflict (Ganong et al., 2015:18), as demonstrated below:

We will talk about the issue and when we realise that we cannot resolve it at that time we just stop talking about it until we do so at a later stage. In most cases he would leave in the morning to go to work and when he comes back in the evening we will sit down and resolve our differences. We will both say what we didn't like and eventually forgive each other. (F, 34 years)

But the nice thing is we talk about how we will tackle arguments and problems when we are happy. When we are happy we always tell each other that we should never let the problem drag on until the next morning (F, 25 years)

We always try to ensure that we resolve whatever issue we have before we go to bed. Unlike when we were still staying separately he would ignore my calls when he was angry but now that we are staying together, he is here and we can resolve whatever problem we encounter. (Fb, 27 years)

It was a new experience for both of us. We anticipated some problems since we would be staying together unlike when we were seeing each by chance. We had to speak about and discuss how we expect things to be since we will be staying together. Fortunately, we somehow have similar personalities in that we both prefer to talk about things that bother us immediately. We prefer to sort our issues before we go to bed. (Fb, 29 years)

The findings show how open communication among cohabitees improves the quality of romantic relationships (Theiss, 2011:566; Finn, 2012:614). Openness is an important standard for expressing emotions, addressing issues of concern, and avoiding prolonged tension (Myers, 2011:51; Baker et al., 2012:282; Thompson & Vangelisti, 2015:2). Within intimate relationships, openness is demonstrated by the partners' honesty when expressing their personal thoughts and feelings (Impett, Le, Asyabi-Eshghi, Day & Kogan, 2013:650). However, due to its relational uncertainty, cohabitation often compromises the partners' ability to communicate effectively and appropriately (Theiss, 2011:568). Cohabiting partners are cautioned to continuously negotiate expectations for how each person should act in a given situation (Roggensack & Sillars, 2014: 179).

One participant was open about her shortcoming that she would like her partner to acknowledge.

We came into an agreement that ukuthi [that] *we clarify each other that I am not good in doing certain things like cooking and it would be nice if you don't ask me to do it again so that we don't have to argue again.* (Fa, 30 years)

This excerpt confirms that in certain relationships partners resist the temptation to be defensive when they are hurting or have disappointed each other. Instead, they replace negative responses with constructive responses (Gordon & Chen, 2010:1440). Some negative interactions may reveal problems in the relationship and may lead partners to better understand each other's needs (Li & Fung, 2012:275). In such instances negative interactions turn out to be valuable experiences for partners. Although it is commonly believed that cohabitating couples talk openly about any issue in their relationship (Myers, 2011:51), it emerged that some of the participants did not have a conversation about the future of the relationship.

> *In our relationship we are comfortable to talk about everything now. Even though this conversation about the future of our relationship did not happen because we are not comfortable talking about it. It just never came up and we never felt a need to talk about. I will not have a problem asking him now but I don't see any reason to have such a conversation.* (Fa, 28 years)
> *We are both very open because we don't hold grudges and we also ensure that we talk about whatever challenges we have. So it is a very open communication I should say. It is just in our nature. With regard to the future of the relationship that conversation is to happen. I think it will happen eventually. (*Fa, 29 years)

Conversations on the expectations and the future of cohabiting relationship are not usually part of the discussions between couples (Stanley et al., 2009:316). A lack of communication can result in misleading expectations and false hope, and they become obsessed with continuously trying to read the partner's behaviour; this may bring about tension and strain in the relationship.

A lack of openness creates tension in relationships. One of the participants perceives her partner as not being as open as expected.

> *I think the main problem is the lack of open communication in the relationship. It is also difficult when your boyfriend does not open up to you. I am one person who prefers to talk about things and it becomes difficult when I have a boyfriend who is not open to me. There is always tension in our relationship.* (F, 34 years)

This extract confirms that cohabiting couples seems to struggle with maintaining openness in a relationship (Afifi et al., 2012:104). Similarly, when cohabiting couples feel that their partners are not "open enough" (Frost & Forrester, 2013:457), they may become disillusioned with the relationship (Thompson & Vangelisti, 2015:2). However, Afifi et al. (2012:105) indicate that in determining that lack of openness, couples

consider and re-evaluate the importance of the troublesome issue. Avoidance can be beneficial when the topic is trivial, however. It is occasionally advisable to downplay minor issues to maintain relational harmony (Worley & Samp, 2014:2).

Cohabiting couples also exercise flexibility in their daily interactions to minimise or manage conflict. Flexibility is described as the extent to which a couple is willing to change their behaviour (Nicoleau et al., 2014:3). Two participants shared how they employ flexibility in their relationship.

> *It is trial and error. We have a couple of little fights and some discussions on how we want to do things in our relatioship.* (M, 28 years)
> *So we play it by the ear so every time we encounter something we discuss and from there I know what I should do and not do.* (Mb, 32 years)

In the absence of any certainty as to which set of rules or script to follow in cohabitation (Gold, 2012:316; Knight, 2014:276), flexibility becomes the key component to manage relational quality (Nicoleau et al., 2014:3). A moderate level of flexibility is deemed ideal as it allows the relationship to balance change and stability, taking into consideration that too high or too low levels of flexibility can be challenging over time (Nicoleau et al., 2014:3).

Resolving some of the conflicts may be gendered considering that women derive relational satisfaction from open communication through talking about issues.

> *I make it a point that we talk. If there is something that I have done wrong or something that he is unhappy about we must talk about it due to nna [meaning I] I talk [with a stern voice]. My boyfriend is not outspoken but I make sure that we talk about our problems.* (Fb, 30 years)
> *Our communication is very good. The couple's communication needs to be good when they are living together. We have learned to communicate over the years. We are two different people when it comes to communication. I am the person who likes to talk about things and he is the person who rather keeps to himself. We needed to learn to find the middle ground.* (Fa, 28 years)

Women are socialised to be relationship oriented and are therefore better at maintaining the relationship and identifying potential problems, compared to men (Afifi, Joseph & Aldeis, 2012:103). However, this assertion is contested by authors who view women as more critical, blaming, and demanding when they discuss relationship problems (Hira & Overall, 2010:629). Women are regarded as confrontational with

their partners when they believe that the standard of openness is not fulfilled (Thompson & Vangelisti, 2015:2). This may be detrimental to the relationship as partners tend to react negatively when they feel personally targeted (Matte & Lafontaine, 2012:114).

Finding a balance between the couple's daily tasks and giving attention to each other in cohabiting relationships can often be a source of disagreement (Schramm, Marshall, Harris & Lee, 2012:251).

> *So, we have the calendar that we use that just shows our social commitment when we are going to be in and out of the house. For example, she is studying at the moment doing a part-time course. On the calendar the weekends during which she will be in class are marked. If we have got a dinner or work function that runs late we write it on the calendar. Yes, we tell each other about it verbally but it is also on the calendar as a reminder that I will be home at eight o'clock tonight.* (M. 28 years)
>
> *My partner operates a pub business now and he is hiring out a sound system. He is always out until early hours of the mornings. My problem is when he is busy out there he doesn't answer his phone. He also doesn't check up on me. He just feels that it is enough that he told me he is at work. I would be home worried about him. That upsets me. He then asked one of the older guys that we know to come and speak to me on his behalf. It was my boyfriend who consulted him and he sat both of us down and we spoke about it. Now I know his daily schedule and we are happy.* (Fb, 29 years)

Communication assists couples to establish clear norms to avoid any confusion regarding partners' daily life activities (Pace et al., 2012:251). Within cohabitation, individuals need to make adjustments to maintain their interdependence in an effort to promote a healthy relationship (Knight, 2014:276). Therefore, correct relationship maintenance behaviour may be enhanced through open communication to avoid ambiguity and uncertainty often associated with cohabitation.

Cohabitees are more likely to value personal autonomy and individual freedom (González, Miret & Treviño, 2010:445; Wiik et al., 2010:272). They largely consider individual context when taking life choices, especially on private matters on how to establish and maintain romantic relationships (Ojeda, 2011:439). Some participants consider romantic relationships as a private matter (Wetzler et al., 2011:317). Cohabitees therefore prefer to protect their privacy from external interference.

In the beginning when we started dating I would tell my friends about our disagreements. But as you mature into the relationship it doesn't help to tell friends. It's just that if we can be happy together then we should tolerate each other when we disagree on an issue and we should be able to resolve those issues. Now, I don't think our business should be known to the public. The sooner we work through this problem of consulting others the better. If one follows his or her heart and stop consulting others, the better. It's a general problem amongst women but the thing is you need to eventually get rid of that problem and follow your heart which is what I did. (F, 25 years)

We are able to talk to each other about anything. So I don't think there is no need to bring in third party if one of us has a problem with what the other has done we are very good at talking about it, getting it out there and putting our points across. It's only us. Up to this point we have not consulted anyone because we have never had situation where we disagree or anything like that we could not resolve by chatting with each other, telling each other what we feel. Sometimes it takes a week but it has always been resolved. We are private people. I think we have made quite good strides to be more open with each other but I don't see us going to anyone for help unless we cannot resolve it ourselves. It's our relationship. It's our way of life...it's our life. We have both been raised to say you can do what you want. (M, 28 years)

We do engage in arguments but we have never argued to such extent that we needed to consult outside people like my family. However I have realized that there is no one in his family that I can consult with when I experience some relational distress because they are scared of him. Another thing that prevents me from consulting his family is that "they don't know me". I was never introduced to them by him properly. (Fa, 35 years)

The findings corroborate the view that cohabiting couples are able to negotiate and reach an agreement without any external intervention (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:792). Cohabitation "represents a lifestyle that best expresses the relationship of a couple based on dialogue" (Martigani, 2011:572). Similarly, the private nature of cohabitation allows it to exist within the couple's interaction and it presents the couple with more freedom about their choice (Manning et al., 2011:122). However, this individualistic nature may also leave couples with no support for their relationship during turbulent times other than the sense of togetherness (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:790; Manning et al., 2011:122).

6.1.1.4 Category 3.1.4: Withdrawing from the situation and avoidance

A lack of proper communication skills has been shown to be a major issue leading to dissatisfaction in couples' lives. The following excerpts suggest that some cohabitees prefer to remain silent when they experience conflict in their relationships:

> *There are times when he doesn't want to talk about it and the whole day at work he is quiet. Then at night we will have to face the problem. But the thing is eventually the problem has to be solved.* (F, 25 years)
>
> *Normally we talk about our problems even though we don't agree most of the time and sometimes someone keeps quite. We don't talk to each for a couple of days.* (Fa, 30 years)
>
> *It usually happens that when someone is feeling unhappy they would be silent for half a day or something and the other one would be confused not knowing what to do. Eventually we would talk about it. One would say, what's up? No I don't like what you did. So we have never had a situation where we needed outside help.* (Mb, 32 years)

At times cohabitees strategically avoid open discussion in their relationships in order to maintain equanimity in the relationship (Knight, 2014:271). It has also been noted that partners in romantic relationships tend to avoid talking about sensitive topics as they perceive open communication as a risk for them, their relational partners, or their relationships (Donovan-Kicken, Guinn, Romo & Ciceraro, 2011:308). Avoidance becomes a method of strategic conflict management. However, avoidance is an unassertive and ineffective conflict management style which is basically characterised by denying and deflecting conflict (Monteiro & Balogun, 2015:5). Prolonged avoidance in addressing tension in the relationship is likely to cause relational distress.

Men and women display differing personality characteristics when resolving conflict in their relationships. The phenomenon is called *spousal discrepancies* which are likely to pose relational distress (Kilman, 2012:132).

> *Generally with her mostly there would be silence and I would suspect that I have done something wrong and we will then talk about the issue. I have also noticed that she prefers to be silent on emotional matters such as tension. All the practical stuff get dealt with immediately. If let's say I made coffee and I made a mess in the kitchen and I didn't clean-up she would say you didn't do this. Personally I go silent because I find her to be very argumentative. She is almost confrontational and I don't like confrontations. I avoid confrontation as much as possible and I have to mull over the issue with myself and eventually say I don't like it when you do this.* (Mb, 32 years)

Personal attributes determine how people react to relational distress (Morry, Kito, Mann & Hill, 2012:45). The narrative above resonates with the assertion that "partners who reflect large discrepancies on personality variables seem to foster incompatible relationship perspectives, leading to relational distress" (Frisby & Western, 2010:974). Conversely, couples who share similar norms and values with regard to resolving relationship differences are likely to enjoy a healthy relationship (Schramm et al., 2012:248). The onus is therefore on partners to engage in a deliberate effort to understand each other's personalities.

A destructive personality trait such as stubbornness is associated with a poor quality romantic relationship (Galinha et al., 2012:417; Campbell & Moroz, 2014:533). Some cohabitees tend to possess personality characteristics that are adversarial in nature.

> *I think the main problem is that we are both very stubborn and we don't listen to each other.* (F, 34 years)

This extract confirms that cohabitation itself does not necessarily cause poor relationship quality, but rather that the characteristics of individuals who cohabit contribute significantly towards disagreement and tension (Brown et al., 2015:3). Adversarial personality traits are likely to escalate conflict and undermine collaborative communication (Sanford, 2014:1071; Wetzler et al., 2011:323). For example, some partners are unable to talk about emotional issues without shouting at each other (Roberts et al., 2016:250). Such individuals require guidance how to unlearn their negative behaviour and learn new healthy interaction skills.

Conflict management in cohabitation is often characterised by the demand-withdraw pattern where an individual demands open communication in resolving conflict but the partner withdraws (Afifi et al., 2012:105). A common demand-withdraw pattern occurs when one partner demands to talk about an issue whilst the other either refuses to talk about it or withdraws from the discussion.

> *We do support each other in our relationship. He supports me a lot but he is not open with me when he is troubled by something. I will only notice some changes in his behaviour that there is something wrong with him or there is something that is troubling him. He does not talk much. He would come back from work and after eating his supper he would lie on the bed and not say anything. When*

> *I ask him about it he will only say that he will resolve the matter on his own. It will only be after nagging him that he would tell me what is bothering him like if he had an argument with his friends or colleagues.* (F, 34 years)
>
> *He is one person who keeps quite when you do something that he does not like. When I point out his mistakes then he refers you back to what I did wrong previously. My concern is that he does not tell me if he is unhappy. Before we moved in together we didn't have many problems but now that we stay together, we need to be open with each other about every aspect of our lives.* (Fa, 32 years)

These extracts demonstrate the gendered demand-withdrawal pattern and the power dynamics that exist between men and women. Men and women seem to have different expectations of openness in intimate relationships. Men insist on maintaining their autonomy whilst women, on the other hand, place greater significance on expressing their emotions (Kilmann, 2012:132). This is attributed to the fact that women are generally socialised from a tender age to express their emotions and talk about relationship problems, and are therefore more likely to insist on talking about relationship problems even in their adult lives.

Thus far, attempts to explain the demand–withdraw pattern have been made ranging from gender (Afifi et al., 2012:103), culture (Soller, 2015:338), relational uncertainty (Theiss, 2011:567; Theiss & Nagy, 2012:549), power dynamics (Worley & Samp, 2014:2), and perceived relationship quality (Knee et al., 2013:317; Monteiro & Balogun, 2015:1;Thai, Lockwood, Pinkus & Chen, 2015:2).

Some cohabitees avoid expressing their views on a particular matter by removing themselves from their partners' presence.

> *When we argue over an issue I move from the room where my partner is. I usually go to my bedroom and read or to the kitchen. I separate myself from the situation and allow another person to calm down a bit. Mostly if I leave the argument for an hour or so it will eventually blow over.* (Fa, 32 years)
>
> *I am one person who doesn't talk much when I am upset and he does the same. When I notice that the situation is tense for days I go back to my parents' house until one of us decides to phone the other and we talk about the issue. We don't involve other people.* (Fa, 28 years)

The findings demonstrate how two female participants handle tense and uncomfortable situations which may or may not be acceptable to their partners. In

some cases, partners may feel disrespected when one leaves the presence of the other, unless the couple agreed beforehand that this is the best way to handle tension between them, considering that individuals are socialised differently. It is conceivable that when couples are dissatisfied with each other they are more likely to avoid being in the presence of each other (Afifi et al., 2012:105). These individuals engage in such behaviours in order to avoid confrontation (Impett et al., 2013:650). However, Soller (2015:338) is of the view that when people walk away from their partners to avoid confrontation, they sacrifice their own happiness.

6.1.1.5 Category 3.1.5: Terminating the cohabiting relationship

Very few couples cohabit indefinitely (Smith, 2014:2). Long-term cohabiting without the prospect of marriage is perceived as a dead end (Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007:544). Hence, most cohabiting partners are eventually confronted with two options: either get married, or separate (Baker & Elizabeth, 2014:394) whilst some relationships may end due to the death of a partner (Wilson & Stuchbury, 2010:46). However, couples do not necessarily exhaust the advantages and disadvantages of their decisions about the future of their relationships (Joel et al., 2013:461). The participants' personal accounts provide more insight into the reasons for the dissolution of cohabiting relationships.

Some of the participants intend to terminate their co-residence relationships in order to encourage or coerce their partners to transform their relationships into marriage (Moors & Bernhardt, 2009:227). This practice is called *ukutheleka* among the Shixini community in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, where cohabiting women are said to return to their parental homes to prompt men to initiate the *magadi* negotiations (Van der Vliet, 2007:223). Two participants decided to leave their places of abode in order to encourage their partners to marry them.

> *He is aware that I am planning to move out but he thinks that I am threatening him when I tell him that I am moving out. The flat is currently in his name but we have moved in together. I just feel it is the best decision for our relationship. I am not ending the relationship. I am just moving out so that he can feel my absence and act as a man and marry me. If I leave now I can only come back if we are married. I told myself that I am moving out because we have been trying to resolve our problem with his mother. I want to feel free in this relationship* [silence]. *I should really move out. Although he feels that I am moving out to threaten him I told him that maybe he would have time to think about his marital intentions when he is alone.* (Fa, 32 years)

> *I just told myself that the best way to deal with this was to move out and we would visit each other. Maybe he will come to his sense and propose I did not really ask him about that* [marriage]. *I am afraid to ask him because he told me that my family and I are putting him under pressure. I told him that I am planning to move back to my parents' house and when I he asked me about my reason I just told him that there are things that I need to sort out at home. He just felt that I am doing it to put him under pressure to marry me. Honestly, I don't know his intentions about us and this relationship.* (Fa, 35 years)

The two participants have been in cohabitation for five and three years respectively. They moved in with their partners without any discussion about marital plans. Initially, they moved in with their partners due to a lack of accommodation but hoped that the relationships would transition to marriage. The findings illustrate that female cohabitees who hope to get married become increasingly disillusioned when the relationship does not transition to marriage (Brown et al., 2015:18). It has been noted that women often commit themselves to the relationship with the hope that their partners would reciprocate with equal commitment by marrying them (Li & Fung, 2012:275). However, when this expectation is not met the relationship is bound to fail (Towner, Dolcini & Harper, 2015:354). Similarly, cohabitees who are not secure in their relationships are more likely to move out of the common residence (Doyle & Molix, 2014:103). It has been noted that although some of the cohabitating relationships may culminate in marriage (Forrest, 2014:540) most couples do not marry their cohabiting partners (Gold, 2012:316; Brown et al., 2015:2). This is often attributed to the fact that most dating couples do not discuss their aspirations and expectations at the point of transition to cohabitation. Poor communication skills also tend to exacerbate the problem as couples are not able to express their views, thus resorting to extreme measures such as moving out of the couple's place of abode.

6.1.2 Subtheme 3.2: Participants' viewpoints on professional support by social workers as well as aspects to be addressed by social workers

Social work is a profession that seeks to enhance individuals' wellbeing by intervening in their personal and collective lives (Houston, 2016:4). Although social work practice is generally effective, there are instances where individuals' wellbeing fails to improve. The lack of understanding of the individual's situation may lead to failure to meet the expectations of recipients of social work services (Tambling, Wong & Anderson,

2014:29). In this section, the presentation focuses on the participants' expectations of social work services, which include assistance with financial matters, motivation for cohabiting, group work intervention, cultural sensitivity, premarital counselling, legal insecurities, unfavourable social circumstances, bereavement counselling, and professional attitudes. It should be borne in mind that none of the participants consulted social workers for assistance. Therefore, their suggestions on social work intervention for cohabitees are based on their assumptions and not their lived experiences.

The findings pertaining to professional attributes relate to the social workers' non-judgemental attitudes and professional objectivity, and because they adopt similar approaches when rendering services to cohabiting individuals and couples. Suggestions based on case work are: (i) assistance with exploring reasons for cohabitees' choice to cohabit; (ii) a male cohabitee requests to be assisted with language to express himself as a man; (iii) dealing with experiences from previous relationships which manifest themselves in the current relationship; (iv) discussion relating to financial responsibilities in the relationship; (v) prevalence of infidelity in cohabitation; (vi) legal uncertainties; and (v) pre-marital counselling for couples with marital intentions.

Social work has a clearly defined set of professional values and ethics that requires social workers to follow the specific value priorities in their practice (Tartakovsky, 2015:2). For instance, social workers are expected to create a safe environment for emotional disclosure, conduct themselves respectfully towards the clients, and refrain from being judgemental (Wetzler et al., 2011:325). Three participants made a plea to social workers not to impose their personal opinions about family formation during their intervention with cohabiting couples:

> *The only thing is that social workers should not label cohabiting individuals. I have realised that people tend to label people as married and other as unmarried but both groups experience the same issues in their relationships, irrespective of the status of the relationship.* (F, 25 years)
> *I think that the social workers should also be open-minded. Obviously we didn't all grow up in the same circumstances. Some of us have grown up in poor circumstances which forced us into cohabitation as a means of survival. Social*

workers should therefore establish my reasons for cohabiting and not jump into wrong conclusion. (Fa, 30 years)

Social workers should understand that my boyfriend and I are in love and it was our decision to live like that (cohabit). They should not judge me. Although social workers are professionally trained to be non-judgemental some people may think that when you are a professional you must behave in a certain way. Although I am also a social worker at the end of the day I am a human being and I am susceptible to make mistakes (silence). They shouldn't be judgmental and they should also respect my views and my decisions. (Fa, 29 years)

These extracts relate to the non-judgemental attitudes of social workers, which is the cornerstone of the profession (Toseland & Rivas, 2014:64). This principle should be upheld by social workers and they should refrain from passing judgement on service users as their mission is to understand the beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of cohabitees (Egan, 2014:35; Martin, 2016:43). Social workers should suspend all their assumptions and preconceived ideas when interacting with cohabitees (Rober, 2015:106). Moreover, they should always be mindful of their personal beliefs and biases pertaining to family formation which they can inadvertently impose on the cohabitees (Coy & Miller, 2014:238).

However, the notion of being non-judgemental does not necessarily imply that social workers do not have personal opinions regarding family formation; however, they should always bear in mind that cohabitees are experts of their own lives. In the event that social workers' values are inconsistent with those of service users, it is expected of social workers to adopt an "ethical lens" and refrain from moral judgements (Reamer, 2013:3). Cohabitees are more likely to express their thoughts and feelings if social workers are neutral and non-judgemental (Nelson-Jones, 2013:49).

Similarly, three participants equate cohabitation with marriage and demand that social workers should not treat them differently during intervention.

Social workers should have the same conversation such as the one they have with the married couple with us. (F, 25 years)

Social workers should just regard cohabiting partners as people who entered into an agreement although it is not written anywhere or noted anywhere. They should just regard them the same way as married people because they live like married people. My take is that the only difference is that married people have signed papers […] and they were blessed by the pastor. But when we are home

it is the same with cohabiting partners. It is just we need to perform our cultural rituals like paying magadi. Apart from that there is no difference. Cohabiting couples have also entered into an agreement to love one another. We also have the same responsibilities, the same chores, and the same respect that is there in marriage. (Fb, 29 years)

I also think that social workers should be aware that the same services that they offer married people they should also provide to us. We deserve those services as well due to at the end of the day a family is just a family. (Fb, 27 years)

These extracts caution social workers that cohabitation and marriage may be governed by similar clinical issues and resemblance in quality (Gold, 2012:320). Social workers should then treat cohabitees the same way as they do married couples. However, other authors contend that although cohabitation may have relational dynamics similar to those in marriage, it presents a unique context for individuals as cohabitation has not yet been formally institutionalised as is the case with marriage (Willoughby & Belt, 2016:181).

Professionalism in social work denotes that social workers are experts with the necessary techniques and skills (Nsonwu, Casey, Cook & Armendariz, 2013:3). In everything that they do, they are expected to abide by professional values. Two participants stated that they prefer to consult social workers due to their perceived objectivity and neutrality.

It is important for cohabiting couples to consult with professional therapist such as social workers when they experience problems in their relationships. I also think that sometimes I just need to speak to someone who is neutral and objective and if I speak to a friend the person is never going to be objective. A friend is never going to tell me that you I am wrong. (Fa, 27 years)

Professional therapists like social workers can help with counselling. They can also advise us on how to deal with the problems that we encounter in cohabiting relationships. If you seek advice from people who are not professionals they usually say that you should be more tolerant and things will get better although that might not be necessarily true. They are just trying to comfort you. (F, 26 years)

These extracts suggest that participants perceive social workers as experts in engaging individuals and couples in enabling them to express their relational difficulties in an effort to facilitate healthy relationships (Wetzler et al., 2011:331; Rober, 2015:106). Similarly, some authors assert that counselling is a safe place for

service users when the social worker is actually listening whilst remaining neutral (Abrahamson et al., 2012:1507). However, it is not entirely correct that social workers are superior experts who have all the answers to service users' problems. Social workers do not usually give advice to service users as it is deemed disempowering instead of enabling them to be self-reliant (Gerald & Gerald, 2005:09).

The participants further call for social workers to assist them in exploring their precise reasons for choosing to cohabit.

> *I think social workers should help cohabiting couples to express their reasons to cohabit people…*[silence for a moment]…*they should also establish the reasons why those people are staying together in the first place. The reason I am staying with him is that I love him and I wish he can marry me and that is the reason I am staying with him until now but I don't know if he is planning to marry me. His reasons for cohabiting may be completely different from mine.* (F, 31 years)
> *I think social workers assist the couples to a better understanding of why people cohabit. For me that is something* [reasons to cohabit] *which people still don't take into consideration...the reason for people to...bahlalisane* [cohabit] *as I have mentioned is to share financial responsibilities because the high cost of living is just too high…those are my reasons and I am certain my partner has her own reasons for agreeing to move in with me.* (M, 31 years)
> *From my personal experience I suggest that social workers should assist couples to discuss their reasons to cohabit. I don't think me and my boyfriend know why we have moved in together. The second thing that I want to say is that I don't expect the man to wake up and say I want to move in with you. He must tell me why he wants to move in with me and how does he see our future…He has some intentions now. In a relationship, moving in without getting a clear understanding of the reasons is difficult because at the end you break up because you were not clear why you moved in the first instance. I believe talking about it will help unlike just moving in without talking about it. (Fa, 32 years)*

The participants' plea to social workers confirms the initial ambiguity of cohabitation in terms of how couples understand the meaning of the move to cohabit (Johnson, 2011:23). It has been noted that cohabitees' reasons for cohabitation are often not aligned (Johnson, 2011:23). For instance, women seem to perceive cohabitation as a relationship that involves a longer-term commitment, intended to precede marriage to the same partner, whereas men regard cohabitation as a temporary state which is not necessarily aligned to marriage, at least not to the same partner (Huang et al.,

2011:889). It is therefore important for social workers to assist cohabiting couples to communicate their intentions and expectations regarding their decisions to cohabit. Past relationship experiences often affect attitudes and behaviour in the current one (Ruch, cited in in Ruch, Turney & Ward 2010:19). One male participant says that he is struggling to express himself as a man in the relationship as he grew up without a father.

> *I think for me I would like to have the language to express myself. I think sometimes I lack that. For example, the kind of frustration for me is because I did not have a good father figure and I don't know how to deal with women. I don't know how to deal with confrontation…what a man should do in a particular scenario. Sometime I will ask myself if I should remain silent and bottle things up and not resolve them.* (Mb, 32 years)

The father-son relationship is important and has a life-long impact on the child's development, (East, Jackson & O'Brien, 2006:284; Ratele, Shefer & Clowes, 2012:553). Moreover, the father-son relationship provides the child with a male role model. Conversely, the father's absence can lead to the child's maladaptive behaviour, such as difficulty to maintain a meaningful intimate relationship (Lopez & Corona, 2012:2). This difficulty was further expressed by a male participant in another study who indicated that a child's father is supposed to be there for his son to teach him how to do certain things (Hunter, Friend, Murphey, Rollins, Williams-Wheeler & Laughinghouse, 2006:432). Similarly, another male participant in a study conducted by Ratele et al. (2012:553) also shared his difficulty in growing up without a father when he needed to share life challenges with a male figure.

Although the absence of a biological father is often perceived negatively, it has been noted that among Black communities the absence of a biological father does not necessarily mean that the children grow up without a male figure. Within the spirit of *ubuntu* (communalism), fatherhood in these communities goes beyond the conceptualisation of a biological father (Makusha, Richter, Knight, Van Rooyen & Bhana, 2013:140). It extends to any male person who is related to the child through blood such as uncles, grandfathers, brothers, or extra-familial figures such as religious and community leaders. These male figures are commonly referred to as social fathers (Hunter et al., 2006:432; Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012:259; Makofane, 2015:34). Children can turn to these male figures for guidance.

Another female participant expressed her concern about her partner who is not willing to open up about his past experiences. She attributes the challenges in her current relationship to these experiences.

> *The social worker can help with counselling because I think most of us get into relationships with baggages from previous relationships. I think that if the social worker can assist with counselling we would be able to talk about our experiences from previous relationships. I will also suggest that counselling should come in before you get into a new relationship because your partner might expect you to replace his previous partner. People are not always honest about their experiences of previous relationships. With me I only get to know about his past relationships when he compares me with his previous partners. It is difficult to get into a relationship whilst you have not dealt with issues from the previous relationship. The fact that he is not open to me and does not confide in me might be as a result of experiences from his previous relationships. (F, 34 years)*

This extract confirms that past experiences often affect the attitudes and behaviour of partners in a current relationship (Ruch in Ruch et al., 2010:19). Cohabitees struggle to communicate these experiences and resort to hostile forms of communication behaviour (Sanford, 2014:1070) such as silence (Ephratt, 2008:1911; Oduro-Frimpong, 2010:2331) or withdrawal (Sanford, 2014:1070). Couple therapists should therefore enable individuals to improve their ability to express themselves and explore new ways of communicating and relating to their partners (Wetzler et al., 2011:331; Abrahamson et al., 2012:1507).

Financial matters are more likely to affect the quality of romantic relationships (Ashby & Burgoyne, 2008:462). Hence, one participant suggests that financial matters should feature prominently when social workers intervene in cohabiting relationships. Financial behaviour and management generally reflect beliefs, norms, and values about family life, which is important for relationship quality (Dew, 2011:180; Hamplova et al., 2014:984).

> *Money! I think people who think of cohabiting should be assisted with their finances. No doubt! We can work around housework. You can work around cooking time but you need to understand certain things before going in such as whether partners will be paying an equal amount towards rent or that the one who earns more will pay more? Are we going to say I do sport and I eat a lot of*

food and do I therefore pay more for food? [posing questions to himself]. (M, 28 years).

Financial issues in cohabiting relationships are difficult to discuss (Raijas, 2011:557), and they are more likely to be problematic, pervasive, and recurrent than in any other romantic relationship (Hamplova et al., 2014:984). However, the decision to cohabit inevitably calls on cohabitees to decide if they should merge or keep their finances separate (Steuber & Paik, 2014:1155). Such a decision tends to be complex due to the relational uncertainty around the viability of the relationship, which poses a financial risk should the relationship cease to exist, either through death of a partner or separation (Ashby & Burgoyne, 2009:520; Steubert & Paik, 2014:11557). It has been observed that cohabitees are likely to avoid open discussion on financial matters and prefer to handle their finances separately (Ashby & Burgoyne, 2009:519). On the other hand, separate financial management is likely to cause relational distress (Dew, 2011:178).

Infidelity or cheating is an important factor in sexual health. Engaging in multiple sexual relations increases the risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Macauda, Erickson, Singer & Santelic, 2011:352). One participant indicated that social workers should advise cohabiting couples on infidelity, which is associated with risks of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

> *Social workers should advise people about the cheating and sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) that are very common in cohabitation. I also think that social workers should make people aware that if they are cheating they would contract STIs and they will also infect their partners who might be faithful.* (F, 26 years)

This extract suggests that social workers are expected to be knowledgeable about infidelity and the associated risks of infections in cohabiting relationships. Some authors are of the view that infidelity is one of the most complex problems to address in cohabiting relationships (Gordon, Baucon & Snyder, 2008:151; Morrissette, 2012:149). Although the majority of individuals in intimate relationships expect to be monogamous, infidelity or flirting are common problems among couples in cohabitation (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, Markman, Williams, Melton & Clements, 2008:243; Boisvert et al., 2011:367). This attitude is attributed to the fact that

cohabitees are transitioning through exploring their identities during young adulthood by engaging in multiple sexual partners, which expose them to STDs (Eyre et al., 2012:232).

The lack of legal regulation poses financial risk for cohabitees who depend on their partners financially (Botha & Booysen, 2013:435; Gassen & Perelli-Harris, 2015:432). One participant expressed the need for social workers to educate people about the legal limitations of cohabitation.

> *Currently, I do not enjoy myself in this relationship. It is hurting that I cannot even go to the social workers because the first thing they will ask me about the commitment that we have. I once heard that there is a law that if people cohabit for a minimum of three months they are legally regarded as married. Even if that was the case I understand you still have to go through lawyers which could be costly. Social workers should advice people who are intending to stay together to have an agreement, whether they get married or if not they should put their agreement in writing. We should agree on something. Currently, I have not agreed on anything with him.* (Fa, 35 years)

This extract is consistent with an unfounded belief that if people cohabit for a certain period they are by law automatically regarded as married, and that they qualify for all the legal benefits of marriage. This myth seems to explain why cohabitees may not take the necessary legal steps to safeguard their interests in a relationship. However, cohabitation in South Africa does not enjoy any legal status, irrespective of its duration (Gustafsson & Worku, 2009:6; Mashau, 2011:7; Botha & Booysen, 2012:160). Therefore, social workers may refer cohabitees to legal experts for guidance.

Some cohabitees appreciate the need for pre-marital counselling, thus refuting the notion that cohabitees are ready for marriage since they have been living together. Two participants expressed the need for couples to receive premarital counselling when they are ready to marry.

> *Personally, I may think that the fact that I have been staying with a partner in a cohabiting relationship is the same as marriage. The social workers should then assist with pre-marital counselling and perhaps prepare us about the realities of marriage.* (Fa, 29 years)
> *You know I think that there should be pre-marital counselling for cohabiting couples who are seriously considering marriage as the next step in their relationship.* (F, 25 years)

These extracts confirm that cohabitees still require marital guidance regardless of the fact that they have been living together for a long time. This demonstrates the understanding that there is a difference between cohabitation and marriage. Moreover, "cohabitation does not prepare the couples for the kind of the marriage they expect in terms of knowledge, attitudes and relationships skill as well as optimistic expectations" (Johnson, 2011:23). Marriages that are preceded by cohabitation are less stable and usually end in divorce as couples often slide into marriage without full consideration of the implications (Benjamin & Haze, 2011:791; Chaney & Monroe, 2011:660). Unfortunately, some cohabiting couples may disregard the significance of premarital counselling, assuming that they have been living together and therefore know everything that is to be known about each other and the relationship. Premarital counselling may prevent marital distress and discord (Wetzler et al., 2011:312).

Support groups provide members with the opportunity to share and exchange advice on handling challenging situations through mutual aid and enhancing members' coping abilities (Toseland & Rivas, 2014:20).

> *I think meeting other people who are in cohabitation will help us to meet people who are going through the same experience. Sometime we think we are the only people going through that and when you hear that others are doing the same thing then you can identify with them based on their experiences and say oh! what I am doing is actually normal. So, I think professionals like social workers should conduct groups of cohabiting couples.* (Fa, 27 years)

Group work affords couples an opportunity to hear one another's stories of troubled relationships, disappointment, and frustrations (Wetzler et al., 2011:326). It will provide cohabitees with the opportunity to socialise and develop mutual aid. Furthermore, being in a group will also provide cohabitees with the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging and feel that they are not alone. Cohabitees are more likely to benefit from interacting with fellow cohabitees with similar or diverse experiences through the social support that group discussions provide (Higginbotham & Skogrand, 2010:145). It has been noted that most individuals who belong to such groups leave a meeting with this popular saying: "I thought I was the only person (in cohabitation) but now I realise that there are many people who are in this situation" (Higginbotham & Skogrand, 2010:145).

One of the fundamental values of social work is the promotion of social justice and human rights through social action and social change (Martin, 2016:57). It is the mission of the profession to challenge social injustices, such as discrimination, and to pursue social change on behalf of marginalised individuals (Brueggeman, 2014:39). Six participants called for social workers to extend their services beyond traditional family therapy to include the larger community.

> *Social workers need to educate the community…I think people's perceptions...this is so unfortunate because you probably can't change it but society needs to be more liberated, open-minded, less judgmental and more empathetic because you will never understand why some people...my story is different from another person's story. There is a reason for a couple to move in together. You don't understand that reason. Don't judge them. People should respect relationships the same way they respect marriage.* (F, 25 years)
> *The general community need to understand that sometimes you don't always need to put a title on a relationship. Just because two people are staying together they do not need to get married. For some people it might work that they live together for years and start families. They don't have to be married.* (Fa, 27 years)
> *It is almost like a new trend that people can live together for 15 or 20 years without getting married and they are okay with it. Community members often look at us and pass remarks like oh! they are not married but they have kids. People should know that the face of modern family is changing. Cohabitation is a different kind of family.* (Fb, 27 years)

Cohabitees are frowned upon by communities for deviating from cultural norms since they regard marriage as the only acceptable family formation (Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015:607). Social workers should therefore assess the connection between social contexts and their own views on cohabitation (Manning et al., 2011:117; Kasiram & Thaver, 2013:156). Although social acceptance of cohabitation is increasing in South Africa (Willoughby & Carrol, 2012:1469), cohabitees often risk social disapproval and loss of respect as cohabitation still carries a measure of social stigma (Chaney & Monroe, 2011:657). Some traditional communities still hold the belief that only marriage confers respectability (Huang et al., 2011:894), thus creating social pressures and expectations for couples to marry (Rolfe & Peel, 2011:323). Such communities steadfastly hold the belief that the survival of the community depe nds on the institution of marriage and associated procreation (Okyere-Manu, 2015:48). Failure to conform to this belief is seen as a major offence in the eyes of such communities. Social workers should facilitate partnerships with stakeholders to

promote social change through empowerment of cohabitees and communities. They should support community participation and not unilaterally attempt to facilitate structural change.

Unemployment is one of the main challenges facing young people between the ages 25 and 35 (Bernstein, 2014:22). According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), South Africa is one of the countries with the highest unemployment rates (Nattrass, 2014:87). Even though none of the participants' male partners were unemployed at the time of the study, one of the participants shared the following suggestion:

> *I wish to offer a solution. I suggest that the state should offer assistance to people who have an intention of getting married but are unable to do so due to financial difficulties. The state should provide more job opportunities for unemployed people so that they can afford to marry. If they charge 10 thousand or 10 million for magadi where will the poor man get the money to pay it? I can't expect him to go and steal. Due to unemployment it is possible that people can stay together in a cohabiting relationship because they don't have money to pay magadi. I think it is difficult for women in cohabiting relationships to provide the money for magadi because the guy will turn back and tell you that you married yourself when we fight.* (Fb, 35 years)

This extract demonstrates the frustration and the devastating effects of unemployment in South Africa. The high levels of unemployment in South Africa limit men's ability to pay *magadi,* thus encouraging them to enter into or remain in cohabiting relationships (Makusha et al., 2013; Madhavan et al., 2014:3). Marriage becomes an unattainable dream as they cannot afford but are expected to pay *magadi* in order to prove their manhood and readiness to start a family.

Apart from experiencing grief in the event of the death of a partner, the surviving cohabitee faces myriad practical problems. This challenge was expressed by one female participant as follows:

> *I think the social worker should assist cohabitees with the issue regarding death. In case he passes on it might be difficult to inform his family. Social workers should advise us on how to deal with such instances. It might even be difficult to inform your own family because they would want to know if and how you got married to him. You won't have answers. That is difficult.* (F, 33 years)

The finding confirms that in the event of death of a partner in cohabitation, the surviving partner may be treated as a stranger by the deceased partner's father on cultural grounds (Okyere-Manu, 2015:55). As a result of shock and denial, parents may say *waka ngwana ke mo nyaka a phela* (in Sepedi, literally meaning that I want my child alive). This attitude emanates from the belief that the couple's union was never formally acknowledged and therefore the surviving partner is not recognised. In extreme circumstances, the surviving partner is not even permitted to mourn the death of his/her partner. In South Africa there are known cases of families of surviving partners who confiscated all asserts from the surviving partner claiming that they belong to their deceased child. Some of these cases ended before the law courts. Sadly, surviving partners who are unable to afford exorbitant legal fees may end up losing their possessions.

6.2 Conclusion

This chapter focused on theme 3 of the data collected, which is conflict management strategies of cohabitees and suggestions for social work intervention. It was evident from the findings that cohabitees often experience relational distress which might need intervention. Female cohabitees are more likely to seek professional help than men in order to save the relationship. Some participants indicated the importance of seeking advice from parents when they experience challenges in their relationships. However, support from parents is not always guaranteed as cohabitation does not enjoy universal support from parents and extended families. Nonetheless, for the majority of the participants, close family members remain a reliable source of support during turbulent times. Cohabitation seems to increase this source of support as the participants are able to consult their partners' families for advice. Equally, some of the partners are able to communicate with each other and resolve their conflicts amicably. Others turn to friends for support during challenging times in their cohabiting relationships with the belief that friends will not judge them. Cohabitees seem to understand that communicating openly and having healthy conflict resolution skills have a positive impact on the relationship in resolving challenges. It has been shown that a lack of communication can lead to dissatisfaction in the lives of a cohabiting couple, which can eventually lead to avoidance of the problem by keeping quiet or

withdrawing completely from the situation. Some couples can eventually end the cohabitation or the relationship. It was interesting to note that all the female cohabitees who are considering moving out of the mutual place of abode are not necessarily terminating the romantic relationship, but it is a strategy to encourage their partners to marry them.

In terms of participants' viewpoints on professional support by social workers, it was observed that participants need social workers to desist from imposing their personal opinions regarding family formation. They would prefer social workers to be non-judgemental and adopt an objective approach when they render services to cohabitees. It emerged that few participants actually rely on professional support for intervention when they experience relational stress.

CHAPTER 7
LESSONS FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

7.1 Introduction

This chapter would benefit social workers who are rendering services to cohabitees. It oulines and discusses seven lessons drawn from the findings for social work intervention, as well as suggestions for social work intervention according to social work primary and secondary methods. The primary methods refer to case work (micro), group work (messo) and community work (macro). Secondary methods include social work management and administration as well as research.

7.2 Lessons drawn from the research findings

Seven lessons emanated from the findings namely, cohabitation is not a well-thought-through and planned relationship; the meaning of cohabitation is gendered; cohabitees adhere to prescribed social roles; uncertainty underlies almost every domain of cohabitation; cohabitation is an expression of an individual's self-determination; cohabitation is characterised by communication problems between partners; going back to the drawing board: the *lobola* practice to be revisited.

Lesson 1: Cohabitation is not a well-thought-through and planned relationship
Dating couples often cohabit without discussing and clarifying the purpose and meaning of the transition to cohabitation. Deliberations about the future of the relationship, financial and assets management, and childbirth and childrearing do not take place. Most couples cohabit for pragmatic reasons such as a need for accommodation or addressing the inconvenience of commuting between residences. Without a conscious and clear discussion about the future of the relationship, couples run the risk of encountering myriad complications, for example, buying assets together, that will complicate the relationship and exacerbate the deteriorating quality of the relationship (Vennum et al., 2014:413). When couples have children, jointly incurred debts and accumulated assets may add to the already difficult issue of

dissolving the relationship. In certain instances these constraints may compel the couple to marry despite the poor relationship quality.

It is important that social workers should explore the cohabiting couple's reasons to cohabit as it is fundamental to the understanding of their behaviour in the relationship (Baxter et al., 2010:1511). Moreover, exploring such reasons deepens the social worker's understanding of couples who are at risk of relational distress and possible separation (Rhoades et al., 2009b:234).

Lesson 2: The meaning of cohabitation is gendered

The findings show that male and female cohabitees hold differing expectations of the relationship. For the majority of female cohabitees across all ages, race, ethnicity, and employment status, cohabitation is a transition phase towards marriage (cf. Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1: Thoughts of men and women in cohabitation

This figure presents the thinking processes of men and women which precede cohabitation. In the event of both partners thinking that cohabitation precedes marriage the likelihood is that marriage will take place. Conversely, diverse expectations among dating couples prior to cohabitation are likely to result in relational distress and separation.

This is compounded by the fact that the cohabitees' understanding of transition is seldom openly shared. Women avoid open discussion with their partners about their marital intentions, and use indirect hints to communicate their marital wishes. This is attributed to the fact that most female cohabitees are socialised to believe that marriage is the ultimate status that a woman should aspire to, even though the decision to propose lies solely with a man. Unfortunately, women's tendency to suppress their desires and feelings may have serious implications for their emotional wellbeing and the quality of the relationship. It has been found that an individual who suppresses her feelings is likely to suffer from high blood pressure and depression over time (Impett, Kogan, English, John, Oveis, Gordon & Keltner, 2012:708). Women are also more susceptible to deteriorating wellbeing if they are not satisfied with their relationships because they are relationship oriented by nature (Afifi et al., 2012:103).

The female cohabitee with religious affiliations lives with the hope that a day will come when the minister of religion will make the appropriate pronouncement from Mark 10:9 at her wedding: "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (New International Version Holy Bible, 2008). Hence, the failure of her partner to fulfil her expectations leads to disappointment. Despite internal emotional turmoil, some female cohabitees still opt to stay in the relationship whilst others decide to move out of their shared residence with the hope that their partners will ask for their hand in marriage.

Although women perceive cohabitation as a long-term commitment intended to precede marriage, men, on the other hand, seem to regard it as a temporary state which is not necessarily aligned to marriage (Huang et al., 2011:889). Among men, a possible underlying motivation in favour of cohabitation may be the fear of long-term commitment (Gold, 2012:319). Male cohabitees seem to define the meaning of cohabitation in terms of practical arrangements; moving in with their partners who will carry out domestic chores. To these men, the idea of marriage is distant and not related to cohabitation. This misalignment of views is likely to lead to relational distress. However, in instances where the couple's aspirations are aligned, they are more likely to experience a long-lasting and happy relationship (cf. Figure 7.1). It is important that social workers who serve cohabiting couples take cognisance of the gendered meaning that cohabitees' assign to the concept cohabitation. They should strive to assist cohabitees to develop communication skills which would enable them

to share the meaning they attach to cohabitation and future aspirations with their partners.

Lesson 3: Cohabitees conform to socially ascribed gender roles

Men and women are generally socialised to fulfil socially prescribed roles such as a man being the provider and protector of his family whilst a woman is expected to care for the needs of all family members. Gender is a cultural and social construct consisting of expectations, characteristics, and behaviour which are considered appropriate for a girl, boy, man or woman (Pfeffer, 2010:167). Contrary to the commonly-held view that cohabitation is ideal for individuals who support egalitarian gender roles (Hardie & Lucas, 2010:1143; Poortman & Mills, 2012:357), it has been found that household responsibilities in cohabiting relationships are still carried out according to gender as cohabiting men still spend less time on household work and remain in control of relationship progression (Miller & Sassler, 2012:429). In situations where men are unable to carry out their responsibilities as breadwinners or women earn more than their partners, women tend to downplay their achievements and humble themselves to their partners. This is done to show respect to the man as head of the family and thus maintain relationship stability. In cohabiting relationships where women believe in egalitarian gender roles whilst men adhere to socially ascribed gender roles, these opposing views are likely to strain the relationship.

Social workers should engage cohabitees in discussions on their perceptions of gender roles and how these manifest in their relationship. It is therefore imperative that cohabitees agree on their individual roles in the relationship to avoid conflict. Social learning theory is one of the helpful theories which social workers can apply to understand how individuals observe and model their behaviour, attitudes, and emotions from their social context (Yun & Kim, 2015:1169; Merrill et al., 2016:249).

Lesson 4: Uncertainty underlies cohabitation

Cohabitation is a transitional relationship characterised by uncertainty about the future of the couple. This uncertainty is often associated with avoidance of discussions on the future of the relationship, reduced relationship quality, and the emotional wellbeing of the couple, which may have dire consequences for the relationship. Since men hold the key and power regarding the progression of the relationship, female cohabitees

are the ones preoccupied with and stressed by the uncertainty of cohabitation. Women generally prefer confidence in relationships and that their partners are right for them (Whitton et al., 2014:859). Thus, a decrease in relationship confidence may fuel feelings of helplessness and hopelessness among female cohabitees. In view of these uncertainties, female cohabitees tend to be cautious when committing themselves into a relationship due to possible breakdown of the relationship.

Uncertainty regarding the stability and the future of cohabiting relationships also determines the social support that cohabiting couples receive from people in their social networks such as parents and relatives (James & Beattie, 2012:637). For instance, parents of cohabiting couples may not be clear on their own roles in dealing with certain situations such as conflict between the couple. As such, families may be reluctant to invest their energy and effort in a relationship with an uncertain future.

In assisting the cohabitees to communicate and clarify uncertainties regarding the future of the relationship, social workers should take cognisance of the power dynamics within cohabitation. For instance, some female cohabitees, particularly Africans, are socialised not to confront or engage their partners regarding their intentions about the relationship. The progression of the relationship remains the prerogative of the male. Social workers should therefore create an environment conducive for cohabiting couples to discuss the future of the relationship without any fear of rejection.

Lesson 5: Cohabitation is an expression of an individual's self-determination
Cohabitees' decision to cohabit resonates with self-determination, which posits that human beings engage in activities that will meet their inherent needs. The findings of the current study confirm that many cohabitees opt for cohabitation without any marital intention but to create an independent relationship outside the realm of marriage. Such autonomous behaviour is likely to thrive in environments that are supportive and accommodative of an alternative or a non-traditional lifestyle. (Koehn et al., 2016:1086). Few cohabitees' are rejected by their families, stigmatised, and isolated by communities that regard cohabitation as a contravention of the traditional norms and values of marriage. These negative reactions have adverse effects on cohabitees who then attempt to conceal their living arrangements. Seemingly, traditionalists and

certain religious groups are not yet ready to acknowledge cohabitation as an alternative form of a family.

This intolerance is unfortunate as cohabitees' rights to enter into any union of their choice, is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The Bill of Rights 9(3) states that no individual may be directly or indirectly discriminated against on the basis of their relationship status. On the contrary, Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration seems to place emphasis on marriage as it states that "men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found [establish] a family."

Social workers should be mindful of the negativity towards cohabitees and consciously refrain from imposing their beliefs and values on them. Moreover, social workers have to respect and promote the service user's right to self-determination. Three participants who dismissed marriage as irrelevant and outdated suggested that social workers acknowledge and respect cohabitation as a family of choice. This calls for social workers to differentiate between their personal and professional values and to refrain from dissuading service users from cohabitation. Professional values are based on a body of knowledge, which is learned through formal training (Sheafor, Horejsi & Horesji, 2000:200), whilst personal values refer to personality traits, belief systems, personal preferences, personal opinions, and a person's life experiences (Taylor & Cheung, 2010:160). Social workers should continuously reflect on their practice and become aware of how their beliefs and values impact their professional values (Bell, 2015:41). Social workers' professional values have to serve as guiding principles during intervention (Sheafor et al., 2000:41).

Lesson 6: Cohabitation is fraught with communication problems between partners
Poor commutation skills seem to be a major causal factor of relational distress in cohabitation. The absence of clear communication guidelines and uncertainty about the future of the relationship are detrimental to cohabitation. The findings show that some participants were uncomfortable with their partners' silence and withdrawal in conflict situations.

Since disagreements in any relationship are on the whole inevitable, cohabitees should be assisted by social workers to clarify the rules of engagement to avert conflict. Commitment, openness, taking responsibility, and compromise are ingredients for building good behaviour in a relationship (Ganong et al., 2015:18). Therefore, cohabitees should be helped to understand that it is not the conflict that necessarily strains the relationship, but the manner in which they engage to address the conflict (Wetzler et al., 2011:331; David, 2015:431). Couples should also be assisted with relationship-engaging behaviour such as the willingness to apologise (Schumann, 2012:998). Cohabiting couples who manage to master the ability to seek forgiveness after transgression tend to enjoy a happier relationship.

Lesson 7: Going back to the drawing board: the *lobola* practice revisited

All African female cohabitees regard *magadi* as a symbol of commitment and adherence to tradition (cf. Addendum H). However, the payment of *magadi* has several challenges. The magnitude of the challenges is perpetuated by the commercialisation of *magadi* by unreasonable parents who demand exorbitant amounts, thus compromising the future of their daughters' relationships. Men are expected to pay the bride-price regardless of his financial status. Attempts by women to initiate a discussion about *magadi* with their partners is often rebuffed or deemed as undermining the partner's manhood. The determination of an amount for *magadi* is based on a number of factors, including the woman's educational achievements, the number of children, and employment status – with a higher amount required for those who are highly qualified. Most young men are trapped in the triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment that are currently experienced in South Africa, limiting their ability to afford the required, often high, amounts of *magadi*. Even the president of the country, Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma, acknowledged this during the state of the nation address that the triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment continue to affect the lives of many South Africa people, particularly African communities (17 June 2014). It is against this backdrop that the researcher anticipates that cohabitation is likely to increase as many young men are either unemployed or are employed in lower paying jobs and will therefore not be able to afford *magadi.*

Another challenge is that some African cultures are against payment of *magadi* for divorced women, who are ridiculed and labelled as "damaged goods" or "return soldiers". A divorced female participant was told by her partner that she should not expect him to pay *magadi* since she was married previously and does not have any value worth *magadi.* This implies that some divorced women are likely to settle for cohabitation if their partners are reluctant to pay *magadi* and facilitate a proper marriage.

Despite the payment of *inhlawulo* in cases where children were born out of wedlock, payment of *magadi* is still the only culturally sanctioned practice that allows children to assume their fathers' surname (last name). Children born in cohabitation use their mothers' surnames. This is contrary to the African belief that children belong to their fathers' families; by using their mothers' last names, these children lose their cultural identity. Therefore, children raised in cohabitation will continue to be regarded as illegitimate or born out of wedlock despite the presence of both parents. During intervention in cohabitation, social workers should explore the practice of *magadi magadi* and its impact on the quality of the relationship.

7.3 Suggestions for social work intervention

Social workers are required to intervene in situations where individuals, groups, and communities are experiencing social and emotional difficulties (Ruch, 2010:16). After a thorough assessment of the service users' situation, social workers decide on the most appropriate intervention based on sound theories (Milner, Myers & O' Byrne, 2015:2).

This section presents the relevance of assessment within the primary and secondary social work methods of intervention (Figure 7.2).
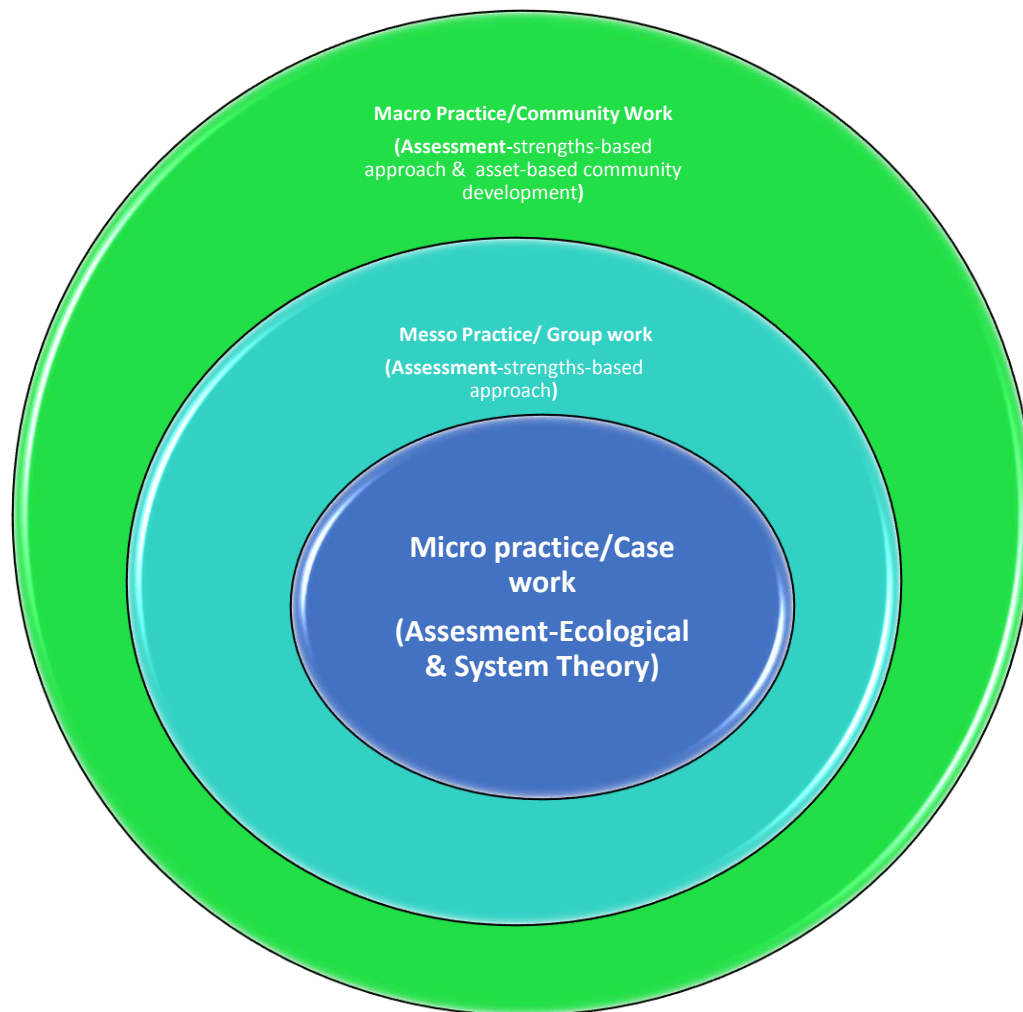
Figure 7.2 Primary and secondary social work methods

Figure 7.2 categorises an individual's environment into overlapping spheres namely, micro level, messo level and macro level. Micro level includes an individual and his or her family. Messo level includes entities such as an individual's neighbourhood and macro system includes organisations, society, and culture (Smith et al., 2009: Nicholas, Rautenbach & Maistry, 2010:10).

Intervention by social workers takes place at micro, messo, and macro levels, which are called primary methods in social work. Micro practice refers to case work, which entails intervening on a one-on-one basis with individual service users who experience challenges in social functioning, including immediate families and friends (Blok, 2012:74; Langer & Lietz, 2015:21; Sekudu, cited in Schenck, 2015:110). Messo practice or group work allows social workers to expand their intervention strategies beyond case work (Dominelli, cited in Glisson, Dulmus & Sowers, 2012:4). It focuses

on interpersonal relationships which are less intimate but meaningful such as therapy groups. Macro practice, also termed community work, refers to social work practice within communities and organisations, or even society as a whole (Sheafor et al., 2000:09). There are also two secondary methods namely, social work management and administration and evidence-based practice (research), which are discussed in this chapter. Theories and approaches which are deemed appropriate in applying social work methods are discussed henceforth.

Social work is a professional practice which is firmly grounded in theory (Langer & Lietz, 2015:11). Theory refers to a set of interrelated ideas that seek to explain particular phenomena (Dudley, 2011:6). In practice, theory refers to what the social worker thinks about a specific situation and determines the next event, based on that situation. With the application of theory, social workers are often able to predict, explain, and assess a service user's situation (Teater, 2014:1). Moreover, the application of theory enables social workers to understand and explain behaviour or situations and further provide insight as to what happened in the past and what is likely to happen in the future. It has been observed that social workers' practice is influenced by their subjective assumptions and belief systems that are informed largely by their personal or professional experiences, and not a theoretical framework. However, social workers have the professional responsibility to base their intervention on established and empirically researched theories. Thus, becoming an effective and knowledgeable social worker begins with understanding the common and well-established theories and methods applicable in social work practice (Teater, 2014:5)

In social work the term *theory* is often used and applied interchangeably with the terms *method*, *perspective*, and *intervention* (Teater, 2014:3). Methods are "specific techniques that social workers utilize in their work with clients to accomplish tasks and reach specific goals" (Teater, 2014:1). A perspective describes a broader framework in understanding a particular situation (use appropriate literature). Intervention is broadly defined as a purposeful goal-oriented action that seeks to influence and steer the behaviour of individuals, groups, and communities in a desired direction (Blok, 2012:107). All these concepts are considered part of the profession's conceptual framework (i.e., a set of concepts, beliefs, values, propositions, assumptions, hypotheses) that forms the basis of social work practice.

Although the list is not exhaustive, the systems theory, ecological perspective, and the strengths-based approach are deemed relevant when rendering services to cohabitees. A brief summary of the three is provided below, including the justification for their inclusion in the presentation. Moreover, the discussion entails how these theories can be combined with other theories when rendering services to cohabitees.

System theory stems from the desire to explain the complex relations between and among various parts of the system and how the different parts interact to create a whole (Teater, 2014:16). One of the most recognisable social systems is the family, which is composed of interrelated and interdependent parts such that an alteration in one part affects all components of the system. This theory is included in the presentation since it is appropriate to use in the three primary social work methods. Based on the outcome of the assessment, the theory can be applied in conjunction with other theories or perspectives such as the ecological perspective, especially where the intervention seeks to enhance the functioning between the service users and the systems within which they interact. Both the system theory and the ecological perspective are concerned with the interaction between the person and the environment (Langer & Lietz, 2015:42).

The ecological perspective focuses on the study of individuals within the context of their environment –a phenomenon commonly referred to as person-in-environment configuration, commonly referred to as PIE (Teater, 2014:16). This perspective also seeks to explain and understand individuals' behaviour as well as explaining and understanding the social environment in which they function (Nicholas et al., 2010:89). The ecological perspective is deemed appropriate when working with cohabiting individuals and couples as it enables social workers to assist them in improving their interactions and transactions with other individuals, families, groups, and/or communities to promote continual positive growth and development (figure 7.3) (Teater, 2014:16).
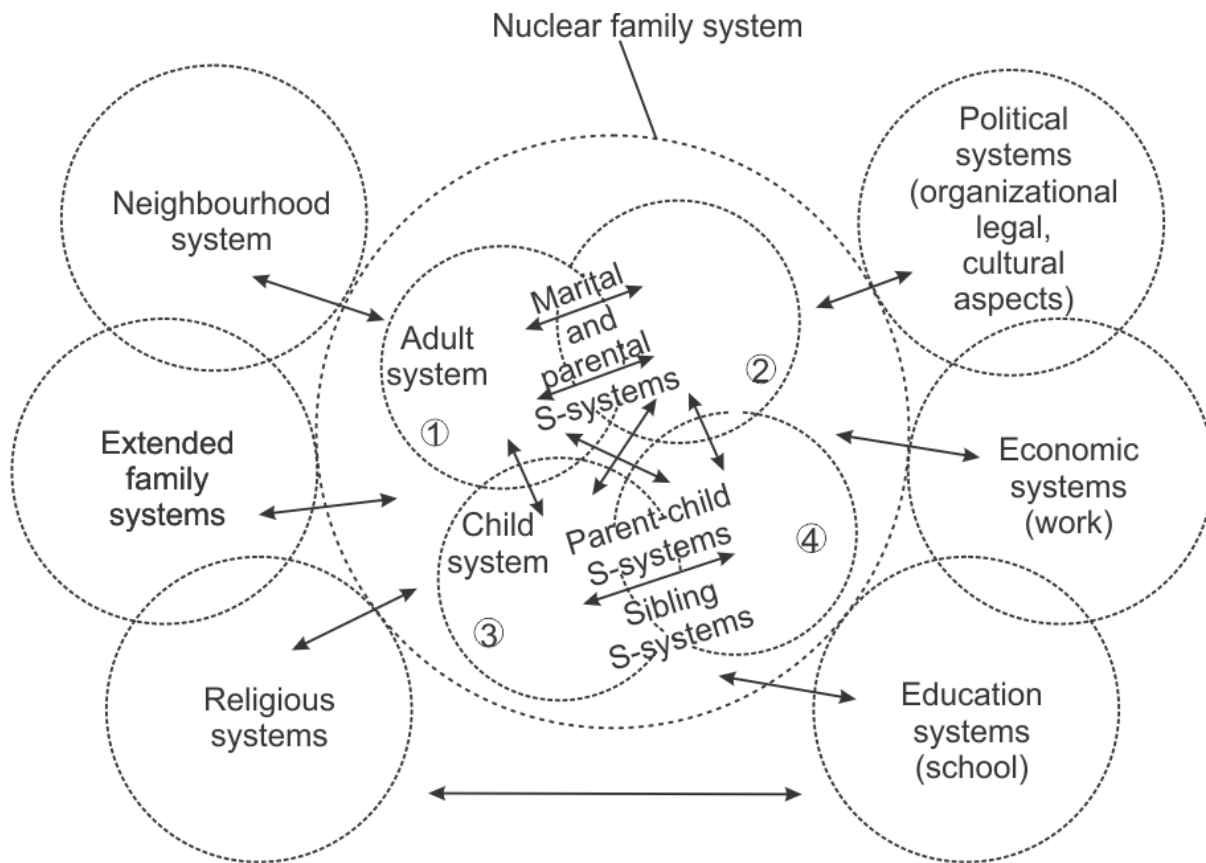
Figure 7.3 A family system (Milner et al., 2015:90)

Figure 7.3 illustrates the interaction between an individual and various systems such as partner, children, extended family, neighbourhood, political and cultural system, economic system (work), education system (school), and religious system. The ecological perspective and the system theory will enable social workers to adopt a holistic view in assessing the service user's situation rather than just seeing the individual in isolation.

The strengths in the strengths-based approach are defined as skills or personal attributes that enable individuals to successfully confront and meet the challenges and demands placed upon them by the larger social context (Parham, cited in Gallardo, Yeh, Trimble & Parham, 2012:32). This approach is premised on the assumption that each individual, family, and community has strengths and the ability to grow and develop (Teater, 2014:39). Rather than seeking to understand how individuals are overwhelmed by challenges in their lives, social workers should focus on assessing how their skills or personal attributes enable them to successfully adapt to challenges and diversity (Milner et al., 2015:158). Moreover, the strengths-based approach

reminds social workers to focus on coping mechanisms, problem-solving and decision-making skills rather than focusing entirely on individuals' deficiencies (Glicken, 2007:52). Focusing on the strengths, social workers will be able to improve the resilience of individuals, groups, and communities (Weyers, 2011:26). This approach is appropriate when working with cohabiting individuals and couples as it is applicable from the time of assessment to intervention, and it can be used with other strengths-based approaches such as the asset-based community development approach (ABCD) (Schenck, Nel & Louw, 2010:6; Weyers, 2011:13; Teater, 2014:39). For instance, during intervention, social workers can invite cohabitees to share their aspirations, dreams, hopes, and the desires that motivate them to cope in the midst of challenges.

In the next section, the presentation discusses assessment and how social workers can apply this in their intervention with cohabitees.

7.3.1 Assessment and social work intervention in cohabitation

Assessment is an important process in social work practice. Without it social workers are likely to intervene in an unplanned and uninformed manner (Milner et al., 2015:1). Social work assessment is more than diagnosis, which is more appropriate in the medical field (Rosenberger, 2014:23), as it involves gathering, organising, and making judgements about information (Toseland & Rivas, 2014: 232). However, a broader social work assessment entails the process of understanding an individual's overall level of functioning pertaining to social, economic, political, and relationship factors as well as the individual patterns of thinking and behaviour (Miller, 2006:62). It also entails weighing the impact of "age, gender, sexual orientation, physical and mental health, family structure, conditions of living, past and present social forces shaping individual and group experience" (Rosenberger, 2014:23).

Assessment is not a single event but a continuous process that starts from intake to facilitate the understanding of the service user's situation to form the basis for intervention (Kadushin & Kadushin, 2013:189). Social work assessment entails four overlapping stages that include the following (Milner et al., 2015:2):

- First, the social worker should gather information, including the views of service users, their families and other stakeholders, about the problems as well as previous attempts at resolution. In regards to cohabitation, the social worker should ask, among others, questions relating to the service users' relationship with their partners, the service users' intra- and interpersonal conflicts; the social context in which the problem manifests and the service users' coping capacity.

- Second, the social worker should apply professional knowledge (practice wisdom as well as theory) to make sense of the service user's situation and to eventually form an overall picture.

- Third, the social worker should make a professional judgement about the relationship, the needs, risks, and seriousness of the situation, and the capacity and potential of service users to cope or to change.

- Last, the social worker should decide on an intervention strategy and/or recommend what needs to be done, how, by whom, when, and how progress will be reviewed. Makofane (2015:18) is of the view that proper assessment should lead to the selection and implementation of an appropriate intervention strategy that would hopefully produce positive results.

7.3.2 Assessment and intervention in case work

In case work, assessment is a step-by-step process of exploring the service users' situation by gathering information related to their perceptions regarding their situation, their family and other agencies, and their own attempts at finding solutions to their problems (Milner et al., 2015:2). Assessment, which is focused on the person, should also enable service users to understand themselves better and make sense of their lives (Egan, 2014:184).

When rendering service to cohabitees, system theory and the ecological perspective are appropriate for assessment as they provide guidelines to assess the cohabitees' interaction with other systems such as family and neighbourhood (Teater, 2014:1). Therefore, social workers should not only gather information about an individual cohabitee or couple but also focus on their interaction with their environment such as

parents, siblings, and friends. Social workers should, subsequent to this multi-system assessment, be able to determine where the intervention should be focused: the cohabitee or the couple, their families, or the community (Langer & Lietz, 2015:41). In assessing the cohabitees' system, the social worker needs to focus on their strengths and coping strategies. Hence, the strengths-based approach is also appropriate in case work assessment. This approach is aimed at the individual's future rather than the past as well as the individual's potential rather than pathology (Saleebey, 2006:16; Milner et al., 2015:30). In order to assess cohabitees' challenges, social workers may request them to share their achievements and survival strategies to cope with life's adversities. The intention of this approach is to encourage cohabitees to develop alternative viewpoints of their lives by focusing on possible successes rather than failures. Although this approach does not focus on pathology, it does not necessarily imply that cohabitees' painful experiences or weaknesses are ignored.

The social worker's deep understanding of the cohabitees' social context is therefore a prerequisite for designing any intervention programme. Social workers should be sensitive to and take into consideration aspects such as the person's psychological, social, educational, and religious affiliations as well as cultural background (values and norms), and how these impact cohabitees' decision to cohabit. . It has been observed that the terms *ethnicity* and *culture* are often confused and used interchangeably (Miller, 2006:6). However, the two concepts denote different things. Ethnicity is only limited to the group from which individuals have descended and the essence of their sense of peoplehood (Miller, 2006:6). Culture, on the other hand, is a broad multi-dimensional concept where all the dimensions of an individual, including ethnicity, converge (McGoldrick & Ashton, 2012:251). Culturally focused assessment should also establish the importance that culture has for the service user, and an understanding of cultural values that shape an individual's life (Gallardo, 2012:65).

Cohabiting couples will feel heard and understood when the therapist shows acceptance, empathy, genuineness, a non-judgemental attitude, and respect (David, 2015:339). The social worker's judgemental attitude may elicit defensiveness, hostility, silence, and a loss of trust by the service user. Such reactions will impact negatively on the working relationship and even precipitate premature termination. The social worker's communication skills, such as listening and paying careful attention, are also

important components of the helping process (Egan, 2014:55). In rendering services to cohabiting individuals and couples, social workers should listen to cohabitees' beliefs, values, norms, and assumptions (Egan, 2014:77) and how these influence their behaviour in the relationship.

In addressing relational uncertainty, particularly financial commitments, social workers should assist couples in the exploration of financial issues and how they impact relationship quality. Due to concerns that social workers may have of issues outside their spheres of expertise and competence, it is advisable that they refer cohabitees to, for example, financial counsellors to lessen any relational distress (Reese-Weber, Kahn & Nemecek, 2015:321). Cohabitees are more likely to benefit from relational financial therapy that seeks to understand cohabitees' financial strain and finding more effective ways of coping individually and as a couple (Falconier & Epstein, 2011:303). Moreover, relational financial therapy can reduce financial strain by providing couples with the tools to improve their communication about financial issues, thus protecting and strengthening the couple's relationship (Falconier, 2015: 237).

7.3.3 Assessment in group work and intervention

Group work is commonly referred to as social group work, and refers to a conscious and purposeful activity by social workers, carried out in the context of professional practice which is aimed at meeting the socioemotional needs of small groups of people (Blok, 2012: 74; Toseland & Rivas, 2014:11). Social work efforts are aimed at individual members as well as the group as a whole (Toseland & Rivas, 2014:11). This method allows individuals to expand their thinking beyond their individual concerns (Ragg cited in Glisson, 2012:6).

Assessment within group work seems to be more complex than assessment in social case work since the whole group, rather than the individual, becomes the target of the social worker's change efforts (Miller, 2006:171; Brueggemann, 2014:47). In applying the strengths-based approach, social workers, in their roles as group facilitators, should explore and use the strengths, such as cultural diversity, that each member brings to the benefit of the whole group (Toseland & Rivas, 2014:149). Similarly, assessment should also focus on members' strengths rather than their problems.

In order to maximise the benefits of group work practice, it is advisable that social workers interact and familiarise themselves with various groups such as support groups, educational groups, growth groups, therapy groups, socialisation groups, and self-help groups. Among various types of groups that are common in social work practice, social groups are deemed beneficial to cohabiting individuals or couples due to their supportive intervention strategies such as fostering mutual aid and enhancing members' coping abilities to manage stressful life events (Toseland & Rivas, 2014:12). Cohabitees can also benefit from support groups by developing self-esteem and self-confidence through teamwork and learning new social roles such as leadership and assertiveness (Brueggemann, 2014:47). Moreover, support groups can also be effective in meeting the needs of socially isolated individuals such as cohabitees who are stigmatised by some communities.

7.3.4 Assessment in community work and intervention

The definition of community is central to the assessment process in community work as there are varying and often contrasting definitions of community in the literature. Community work is broadly defined by Weyers (2011:29) as "…the method of social work that consists of the various processes and helping acts of the social worker that is targeted at the community system, as well as its sub-systems and certain external systems, with the purpose of bringing about required social change…" However, community can also be defined in terms of the geographical location or a social unit that has a sense of identity and togetherness (Fuchs, cited in Glisson et al., 2012:62).

Assessment is a crucial component of community practice intervention, which is likely to provide social workers with a clear understanding of a situation in the community in order to plan the change that is required. The strengths-based approach is appropriate in community work due to its focus on community members' capacity and resilience, instead of their deficiencies (Brueggemann, 2014:156). Social workers who apply the strengths-based approach should assess the resilience of people in their everyday lives. For instance, social workers can focus on reports of triumph, resilience, joy, and love that exist in cohabitation despite the myriad challenges frequently reported. These positive reports should be acknowledged and afforded prominence in social work practice.

A cultural context is important when social workers are assessing the moral nature of behaviour such as cohabitation (Martin, 2016:37). For instance, in a conventional community where marriage is the only preferred family formation, married couples enjoy support from the communities. Such a strong sense of solidarity in a community can offer members a sense of belonging. This community spirit is commonly referred to as *ubuntu* in South Africa (Brueggemann, 2014:156). Ubuntu is a Zulu/Xhosa word which Basotho/Bapedi/Batswana call *botho*. Although the concept *ubuntu* can be interpreted differently across various contexts, it basically means an African philosophy of humanity and community. It derives its expression from the age-old African idiom, *Motho ke motho ka batho*and *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means "A person is a person through other persons" or alternatively "I am because we are: we are because I am" or "I am because we exist". African thinking and acting are considered informed and influenced by communal life. Individuals are an integral part of a larger community, and it is the community that facilitates the individual's self-realisation (McCluskey & Lephalala, 2010:23; Theron, Theron & Malindi, 2013:66).

Conversely, in conventional communities, cohabitation may be perceived as a deviation from traditional norms thus leading to intolerance and rejection. Brueggemann (2014:156) ascribes this intolerance and stigma to the community's fear of being perceived as different. Community members may attempt to maintain solidarity by resisting any change, or limiting any choice, that members may consider.

In a country such as South Africa with its diverse cultural groups, social workers should be culturally competent or sensitive to understand the meanings attached to cultural practices. During assessment, social workers should determine whether cohabitees are viewed as having deviated from the societal norms of family formation (Gold, 2012:320). It is equally important for the social worker to assess the extent of societal influence on the cohabitees' relationship (Manning & Cohen, 2012:378; Coy & Miller, 2014:238) to determine the impact thereof on their relationship. Developing such cultural competencies requires social workers to explore the complexities of dominant values and cultural identities (McGoldrick, Giordano & Garcia-Preto, 2006:2; Bustamante, Nelson, Henriksen & Monakes, 2011:155). In South Africa, cohabitation remains both a cultural and moral issue and social workers should strive to understand how the cultural context influences the quality of the relationship.

7.3.5 Social work administration and management when rendering servces to cohabitees

Social work administration and management are integral parts of social work practice, and they cannot be isolated from this practice as they affect all levels of service delivery. Without social work management and administration, service users may not receive quality service.

The terms *social work management* and *administration* are overlapping concepts which are often used interchangeably. Social work management entails four inter-related activities namely, planning, organising, leading, and control. Planning is the process of deciding what the welfare organisation wants to achieve and clarifies stipulations as to how those goals are to be achieved. Organising involves the resources required to realise the plan. Control is the last activity, which involves assessing the first three activities with the intention of taking corrective action where necessary (Rankin & Engelbrecht, cited in Engelbrecht, 2014:15; Weinbach & Taylor, 2015:6). Although administration is often reduced to recordkeeping, it entails making top-level decisions pertaining to important organisational policies and objectives (Rankin & Engelbrecht, cited in Engelbrecht, 2014:14). It is important to note that management and administration are not only the responsibilities of certain people in an organisation, but that of everyone involved in order to ensure that service users receive the best possible service. Social work practitioners should not absolve themselves from these responsibilities or view these responsibilities as outside their practice.

The environment within which social workers provide services is a very important determinant of the quality of the service. The working environment can either be highly supportive, which promotes effective service delivery, or it can be destructive, which is likely to impact negatively on service delivery. Weinbach and Taylor (2015:6) are of the view that social work managers should strive to build a highly supportive environment that will promote efficient delivery of effective service to users. In South Africa, there were reportedly 25274 social workers in 2016, who were servicing an estimated population of 54 million (Statistics South Africa: mid-year population estimates, 2014). A study by Schenck and Alpaslan (2012) also revealed that social

workers work under unfavourable conditions such as high caseloads, poor remuneration, staff shortages, poorly equipped offices, and poor or inadequate supervision. Hence, social workers are reported to be leaving the profession in large numbers to pursue other careers. Although this study was conducted in the rural areas of the country, some inferences can be made with regard to the working conditions of social workers in the cities. Due to rapid urbanisation, many people are migrating to the cities to seek better-paying jobs thus putting additional strain on the provision of services in urban areas.

In South Africa, the provision of social work services occurs within the social development paradigm. Informed by the strengths perspective, the social development paradigm focuses on strengths, competencies, capacities, capabilities and resilience of individuals, groups, and communities, instead of placing emphasis on problems and pathologies (Engelbrecht & Terblanche, cited in Engelbrecht, 2014:31). Furthermore, this paradigm seeks to move away from perceiving service users as passive recipients of services by ensuring that services providers strive to empower and enhance the capacity of service users to improve their situations.

It has been observed that services for cohabitees currently lack coordination and there is no dedicated directorate for or focus on cohabitation. Those who are entrusted with management and administration responsibilities should develop an effective case management system to improve services to cohabiting individuals and couples. Case management entails the comprehensive coordination of a cluster of services for service users with multiple needs by allocating a single social worker to manage them (Frankel & Gelman, 2012:4; Turner & Rowe, 2013:65). This activity can be achieved through a process of collaborating and consulting with other professionals to offer comprehensive services to cohabitees. Collaboration involves partnering with professionals with specialised skills and knowledge that are not available in social work. For instance, social workers may explore the possibility of collaborating with legal experts on matters of asset management in cohabitation. Alternatively, social workers may request the assistance of individuals such as psychologists and financial experts, who have specialised knowledge and skills, to deal with issues which fall outside the purview of social work. Social workers who are rendering services to cohabiting individuals or couples may also consult with a pastor on religious matters.

These processes should be clarified to service users as they may be mistakenly viewed as a sign of incompetence on the part of the social worker.

Wimpfheimer (2004:48) advises that managers should keep abreast of modern social and public policy issues that affect social service delivery. They should further strive to acquaint themselves with the latest knowledge related to social work practice. It is also the social work manager's responsibility to ensure that social workers in practice are competent to intervene in non-traditional family matters, such as cohabitation, by continually assessing the staff's personal development needs and helping them to acquire appropriate and relevant skills to provide effective service. For instance, in organisations where services are rendered to cohabitees, the social work manager can include the social workers' competencies pertaining to cohabitation as part of a key performance area (KPA) during contracting and performance evaluation. Weinbach and Taylor (2015:79) further suggest that social work managers should demonstrate the ability to motivate social workers to provide effective services. Wimpfheimer (2004:48) is of the view that improvement of public relations and marketing of social work services are important to inform the public about the various services that are available.

Social work administration and management cut across all levels of intervention in social work. Is it also an important component of social work practice that deserves careful attention if social workers are to provide the best possible service. The impact of social work intervention is therefore dependent on the competencies of those who are entrusted with managing social work services to discharge their responsibilities effectively.

7.3.6 Evidence-based practice for social workers who are rendering services to cohabitees

Evidence-based practice based on the outcome of research is critical for social work service delivery. Social work intervention should, among others, be based on proven methods and approaches that can be achieved through the application of scientific research methods (Nicholas et al., 2010:89; Langer & Lietz, 2015:13). Ethically, social workers have the responsibility to consider the best scientific evidence available as

part of their decision making (Rubin & Babbie, 2013:22). However, there is dearth of literature on social work intervention in cohabitation.

Research in social work practice involves using the best scientific evidence available in deciding how to provide service to individuals, families, groups, or communities (Rubin & Babbie, 2013:4; Mullen, 2014:59) rather than relying on traditional practice, wisdom, and common sense (Gray, Plath & Webb, 2009:52). As such, research is an essential part of social work practice as interventions should be based on proven knowledge of their effectiveness, derived from sound empirical research (Gambrill, 2010:560; Morgenshtern, Freymond, Agyapong & Greeson, 2011:563). Social workers have the ethical responsibility to justify their choice of intervention; hence, they need to understand and value research as a basis for their practice (Rubin, Vaiutis & Robinson, 2011:39). Furthermore, social workers should be competent to use research to enhance the quality of their intervention. By understanding research findings, and using them to enhance the effectiveness of their own practice, they would have taken a major step towards evidence-based practice (Rubin & Babbie, 2013:4). Key benefits of evidence-based practice include the following:

- It decreases the gaps between research and practice, and addresses uncertainty and ignorance in an honest and informed manner (Gambrill, 2010:31).
- It further requires a critical approach to practice by scrutinising the effectiveness of intervention methods. This process is likely to incorporate new knowledge into accepted practice (Gray et al., 2009:59).

However, evidence-based practice in social work has been criticised for not being applicable to social work intervention. Gray et al. (2009:55) contend that social work interventions are generally not specifically defined or standardised but are adapted to address a particular problem. Hence, in social work practice intervention methods are not implemented the same way due to the differences in the contextual circumstances of service users. Therefore, the process of determining the effectiveness of a particular intervention strategy in social work is often difficult as the same strategy hardly produces the same outcomes.

In the current study, the researcher was able to identify gaps or "grey areas" which could be answered through research. One of the gaps is the dearth of empirical research on the reasons for cohabitees' limited or non-usage of social work services, which may include an assumption that the roles and responsibilities of social workers focus primarily on welfare by providing material resources to the vulnerable and indigent, and services to traditional families, or perhaps a lack confidence in social workers altogether. Five participants who are social workers were reluctant to consult their colleagues when they experienced relational stress. This may be due to fear or lack of compencies in their peers. The participants who are affiliated to medical aid scheme prefer to consult psychologists. This state of affairs calls for an in-depth qualitative and quantitative study to establish cohabitees' attitudes towards social work services. Another gap in literature pertains to the positive accounts relating to cohabitation such as female cohabitees' resilience and willingness to remain in a relationship and make it work in the midst of uncertainty and relational turbulence.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter offered tangible suggestions for social work delivery to cohabiting individuals and couples. The chapter first discussed seven lessons for social work practice, derived from the findings. Although not exhaustive, the lessons provide insights into cohabitation for social work intervention. These lessons are also not prescriptive, and remind social workers that cohabitation is an unplanned transition that is often characterised by assumptions, uncertainty, and a lack of communication skills. Varying thinking process between males and females also come into play in the process leading to cohabitation and during cohabitation, particularly with regard to the future of the relationship, the roles and responsibilities of the individuals involved, as well the progression of the relationship.

The discussion on the application of approaches when rendering services to individual cohabitees, couples, groups, and communities serves as a reminder to social workers of the core purpose of the profession, its values and theory. Social workers should be guided by professional values and theory in their intervention, and they should keep abreast of new knowledge and developments in cohabitation. The secondary methods

in social work practice namely, social work management and administration as well as research, are integral parts of social work practice.

Summaries and recommendations pertaining to the social work research process, social work intervention, social work education, policy, and future research are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8
SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This chapter is the culmination of the research process through reporting on the summaries of the qualitative research process, conclusions reached by the researcher, and recommendations based on education, practice, and policy (Creswell, 2016:232). It is an important chapter as it demonstrates how the goals of the study were attained. Summaries of the previous seven chapters, followed by conclusions derived from the research process and the research findings, based on three themes, are presented. The next section focuses on recommendations pertaining to the qualitative research process, research findings, and suggestions for future studies.

8.2 Summary of the previous chapters

The study comprises eight chapters; the previous seven chapters are summarised as follows:

Chapter 1 provides a general orientation to the research study. The background, problem statement, and motivation for the study are described with the support of relevant literature. The research questions and research goals derived from the topic are provided, followed by objectives that guided the inquiry. The qualitative research methods were briefly introduced including ethical considerations that guided the researcher's conduct during the study. These comprise informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and management of information. Key concepts utilised in the study are clarified to provide context and demarcation.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of eleven theories used to understand cohabitation. First, the chapter presents the basic assumptions and main features of each theory. Second, a brief discussion on how each theory is used to interpret cohabitation is presented. Third, the researcher's views on each theory are discussed. Last, feminist

theories are discussed even though no specific reference was made to them in data analysis and literature control. The justification for the inclusion is provided.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the application of the qualitative research process. The chapter also orientates the reader about the chosen research paradigm and the justification of the relevance of the research methodology in accomplishing the goals of the study. A discussion on the application of the research designs, sampling methods, data collection methods, data analysis and data verification is presented.

Three chapters (4, 5 and 6), summarised below, are based on the presentation of the findings according to the themes. Literature control is utilised to compare and contrast the findings with others. The qualitative data were independently analysed by the researcher and an independent coder to increase the credibility of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the biographical profiles of the participants with particular reference to their race, ethnicity, age, gender, employment, and the duration of cohabitation. Of the 21 participants, 17 were females (15 Africans, and two Whites). Indians and Coloureds were not represented in this study. The duration of their cohabiting relationships ranged from 15 months to 10 years, with an average of five years.

Two themes are presented based on firstly, the detailed descriptions of the participants' narratives on their motivation and decisions to cohabit; secondly, the participants' accounts on how their families, friends, colleagues, and communities learned about their cohabiting relationships and their reactions, which ranged from shock, anger, to relative acceptance.

Chapter 5 presents the participants' reflections on their experiences of cohabiting relationships with reference to their personal experiences on adjustment to cohabitation, commitment to the relationship, infidelity, and cultural and religious matters, including childbirth and child rearing in cohabitation.

Chapter 6 is divided into two sections based on the challenges encountered by the participants during the initial stage of cohabitation, and the relationship itself. Their

accounts include the strategies they employed to address the challenges by soliciting family and/or professional assistance. Of the 21 participants, five female cohabitees were strongly considering terminating their relationships at the time of the study. The participants' views regarding social work services required by cohabitees are presented as well.

Chapter 7 presents seven lessons learned from the findings which social workers need to take cognisance of when rendering services to cohabitees. Suggestions for social work intervention are also presented in this chapter.

8.3 Conclusions based on the research process

The conclusions based on the outcomes of the qualitative research process and the ethical considerations are provided below.

8.3.1 Research questions

The three research questions were answered as follows:

- **From the perspectives of the cohabitees, what is the place of cohabitation in the context of changing family practices?**

The participants' accounts on this aspect are varied and inconclusive. More than half of the participants regard cohabitation as a transition between casual dating and marriage, whereas three consider cohabitation as a permanent arrangement. However, the views on the place of cohabitation in changing family practices were gendered. and varied according to race. All 15 African female participants expressed a desire to get married someday. Their aspirations for marriage are based on personal circumstances such as wanting to do the right thing or acceding to pressure from their families. On the other hand, four male participants did not succeed in determining the place of cohabitation in changing family practices, and this is attributed to the fact that they do not value marriage the same way women do. Hence, this matter needs to be pursued further through empirical research among young men from different racial, educational, and economic backgrounds.

- **What are the participants' experiences in cohabiting relationships in relation to the benefits, challenges, and mechanisms to address the challenges?**

This was adequately addressed as cohabitation is generally equated with companionship, whilst challenges varied from the intra- and interpersonal relationships of cohabitees, including their families' and communities' negative attitudes towards cohabitation. Most of the mechanisms used by cohabitees to address numerous internal and external challenges do not seem effective, by their own accounts, considering that the future of their relationships is characterised by uncertainty.

- **Based on the cohabitees' perceptions and experiences, what are the lessons for social work practice?**

None of the participants have utilised social work services in the past. Their responses on social work services required by cohabitees were based on their perceptions. Even though participants have not consulted social workers in the past, their subjective opinion about them was that they are judgemental and should do their best to understand cohabitation from the cohabitees' frame of mind. According to the participants, a non-judgemental attitude would enable social workers to offer cohabitees objective and effective services.

The research questions emanated from the topic, which was formulated following extensive literature review on cohabitation. The following conclusions were reached pertaining to the research questions in this study.

- The research questions were specific, concise, and researchable in terms of its focus on the place of cohabitation in the context of changing family practices and lessons for social worker intervention.
- The research questions were relevant in terms of responding to the identified gap in knowledge about the place of cohabitation in the context of changing family practices.

8.3.2 Research goals and objectives

The goals of this study were threefold: (i) to develop an in-depth understanding of the place of cohabitation, in the context of changing family practice, from the perspectives of the cohabitees; (ii) to gain insight into the participants' experiences in cohabiting relationships in relation to the benefits, challenges, and mechanisms to address any challenges; and (iii) to proffer lessons for social work practice based on cohabitees' perceptions and experiences. All the research goals were achieved. With regard to the first goal, the participants' accounts indicate that cohabitation is a transitory state of the relationship as most cohabitees harbour marital aspirations. However, such marital aspirations are not always openly expressed (Cf. the participants' narratives and descriptions of their circumstances preceding cohabitation in – chapter 4). Second, the participants' narratives demonstrate that cohabitation is both beneficial and challenging. The main benefits of cohabitation include companionship and the opportunity for the couple to know each other's personalities and preferences more intimately, which would not have been expedient if the couple were still residing in separate residences. The participants' pertinent challenging experiences include the deteriorating quality of the relationship due to factors such as infidelity, complacency, and excessive alcohol intake and drug use. The feeling of guilt is evident among African cohabitees for going against the traditional norms by cohabiting. Mechanisms to deal with challenges include communication and consulting with their social support as families and friends. Few participants sought the assistance of professionals when they experienced relational distress. Third, the research was able to offer seven lessons aimed at social work practice, based on cohabitees' perceptions and experiences, which are discussed in chapter 7.

The research objectives of the inquiry were accomplished as elucidated below.

- To obtain a sample of individuals in cohabiting relationships in Gauteng Province. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to draw a sample that met the criteria (cf. Chapter 3). Snowball sampling enabled the researcher to reach potential participants in various areas of the province.
- To conduct semi-structured interviews with cohabitees to explore the place of cohabitation in their family systems. The interviews provided the researcher an opportunity to listen to the participants' narratives, expressed in the language

of their choice. The interviews facilitated probing for clarification on specific aspects.

- To sift, sort, and analyse data according to the eight steps of qualitative data analysis constructed by Tesch (in Creswell, 2003:186). The semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded after permission was granted by the participants. These recordings facilitated the transcriptions of the interviews and the analysis of data by the researcher and an independent coder to increase the credibility of the study.

- To describe the place of cohabitation in family systems, from the perspective of cohabitees. However, the participants' descriptions of the place of cohabitation in family systems, including lessons for social work intervention, were inconclusive.

- To draw conclusions and make recommendations about the place of cohabitation in family systems, from the perspectives of the cohabitees. These issues are presented in this chapter.

8.3.3 Research approach

Qualitative research was employed to obtain the participants' valuable and unique lived experiences on cohabitation. The flexibility of qualitative research called for the researcher to enter into a cyclical process, which is challenging but beneficial in the long run. Reflexivity enabled the researcher to keep his views based on experience under constant check, and as a result, managed to mitigate contamination of the participants' stories during the presentation and interpretation of the findings.

8.3.4 Research design

Phenomenology, exploratory, descriptive, and contextual research designs were applied in the following manner:

The **phenomenological research design** facilitated an exploration of the participants' subjective meaning and understanding of cohabitation within the context of changing family practices.

The **exploratory research design** helped in uncovering factors that influenced the participants' decisions to enter into cohabitation, an area with little information in the South African context. The basis of such decisions, benefits, and challenges of cohabitation were explored as well.

The **descriptive research design** enabled the researcher to provide descriptions of the participants' experiences, based on the areas which were explored during the research process. The descriptions of their experiences were compared and contrasted with existing literature.

The **contextual research design** enabled the participants to share their realities which are influenced by the social, religious, personal, economic, and cultural factors within the South African diverse context. Such a context has a different impact on different individuals at different times.

8.3.5 Ethical considerations

The prescribed ethical considerations namely, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, protecting participants from harm, and management of information were observed during the process of the study. All the participants consented to participate in the study, and the researcher assured them of anonymity and confidentiality which were observed by using letters of the alphabet as codes to conceal their identity. Although measures were put in place to ensure that participants' identities are not revealed, it is difficult to guarantee anonymity as the involvement of gatekeepers may compromise such guarantee. The study will also be published in the print and electronic media.

8.4 Conclusions based on the research findings

Conclusions drawn from the findings (cf. chapters 4, 5 & 6) are presented below in terms of the themes and subthemes.

Conclusion based on the descriptions of reasons for moving in together

- The participants' accounts of how their dating relationships progressed to cohabitation demonstrate a complex and lack of a clear motivation to do so.
- Couples enter into cohabitation with different objectives and motives in mind. This may be due to a lack of communication regarding the meaning of

transition. Assumptions made by cohabitees about the relationship are likely to lead to relational distress and disappointments when expectations are not realised.

- Factors that motivated participants to cohabit include convenience, outright rejection of marriage, as a precursor to marriage, and an indication of commitment to the relationship by cohabitees.

- Dating couples often slide into cohabitation before making any mutual commitment, and the transition often occurs before individuals fully comprehend their actions. Transitions of this nature are typically preceded by one-night stayovers until a point where one partner moves in permanently. These relationships are therefore likely to be shadowed by uncertainty.

- Perceptions of the implications of the transition and its meaning to the couples varied according to gender. All 15 African female participants harbour marital aspirations due to the culture that holds marriage in high esteem. However, their partners do not necessarily share these aspirations.

- The payment of *magadi* was mentioned by African cohabitees' as a factor that delays prospects of marriage. Only men are expected to pay *magadi* and they are the ones to determine if the marriage will take place or not. Despite the commercialisation of *magadi*, African female participants are of the view that honouring this tradition shows that a man loves a woman and is committed to the relationship.

- Although cohabitation is used as a trial marriage by some cohabitees, it became apparent that such an arrangement may not be ideal to prepare cohabiting couples for marriage due to a lack of openness between partners.

- Even though literature purports that cohabitation poses a threat to marriage, it has been observed that cohabitation will not replace marriage considering that 18 participants harboured marital aspirations and plan to marry. Only three participants were vehemently opposed to marriage as the only acceptable family formation, and decided to opt for cohabitation. Such cohabitees reject marriage as a social construct and ideology, which means little to them.

- Some cohabitees are attracted to cohabitation due to its perceived lack of relational obligation. This perception, however, seems to be gendered as men laud the sense of independence that exists in cohabiting relationships.

- For 15 participants, across both genders, the decision to cohabit was a pragmatic response to meet needs of accommodation, raising children as a couple, avoiding the inconvenience of commuting between two places of abode, and their poor social circumstances.

- Contrary to the notion that cohabitation is an ideal strategy for cohabitees to share financial expenses, only one female participant indicated the need to share living costs as her main motivation for cohabitation. The responses of the majority of the participants demonstrate that cohabitees do not necessarily perceive themselves as a unit, and are not likely to pool their financial resources.

- Unmarried women with children may leave their parents' homes to join their partners. Such cohabitees risk rejection and isolation from parents who disapprove of cohabitation. However, parents who are supportive of cohabitation would help their relationship to thrive.

Conclusions made, based on the participants' accounts, of how their families, friends, colleagues, and wider communities learned about their cohabiting relationships, and their reactions

- The participants' families reacted with mixed feelings to their decisions to cohabit. The majority of the participants' families expressed disapproval of this living arrangement. Only three families were supportive. Three participants opted not to disclose their living arrangements to their families for fear of disapproval or rejection.

- In instances where parents responded positively towards the participants' cohabitation, they nonetheless deliberately or inadvertently exerted pressure on cohabitees to get married. This state of affairs places strain on the relationship, especially if the man does not have the financial means to pay *magadi.* Despite the internalised traditional family formation, some African cohabitees defy their parental wishes by entering into cohabitation hoping that someday their partners would ask for their hand in marriage. Such cohabitees are largely encouraged by their personal pursuit of happiness and autonomy. However, this occurrence seems to prevail mostly in metropolitan areas when cohabitees live far from their parents.

- Cohabitees who are close to their mothers are likely to disclose to them their living arrangements with their partners. Mothers are regarded as understanding and easy to talk.to. One participant's narrative indicate that although some mothers express shock and disapproval of cohabiting relationships, they may nonetheless conceal such information from their husbands to protect the children from their father's wrath.

- The decision to cohabit is often accompanied by a sense of maturity and responsibility among cohabitees to refrain from risky behaviour such as regular partying and excessive alcohol consumption. The participants' experiences indicate that they seem to devote their time and efforts towards the relationships.

- Although traditionally religious denominations encourage dating couples to marry rather than cohabit, it was observed that such influence has waned substantively as charismatic churches have become liberal in their religious teachings on family formation.

- The practice of requesting for damages or *inhlawulo* is still prevalent in cohabitation. Men are not absolved from such responsibility on the basis of cohabitation. However, there is evidence of men who reside with their partners and raise their children without having to meet the cultural expectation of paying *inhlwawulo.*

- Cohabitation in South Africa does not enjoy automatic legal rights and responsibilities that are accorded to married couples.

- Cohabitee rely on their friends for emotional support as more than half of female cohabitees consult their friends for guidance on how to cope in cohabitation. Only two African participants discussed their relationships with their colleagues whilst two White participants kept this to themselves.

- The majority of the participants migrated from rural areas to urban settings due to job opportunities. In such communities people do not concern themselves with the personal living arrangements of others. Hence, few indicated that their communities are receptive to cohabitation. Nonetheless, the majority of the participants reported that their relatives and communities in rural areas are not aware of their arrangements.

Conclusions made on the participants' reflections on their experiences of cohabiting relationships

The positive experiences and benefits of cohabitation were reported as follows:

- The main benefit of cohabitation is the need for couples to know each other better, in terms of their behaviour, on a daily basis.

- Cohabitees regard cohabitation as serious and more than casual dating. It is an ideal opportunity for couples to grow closer, become more open to each other, and enjoy sexual intimacy.

- The benefits of cohabitation vary according to gender. Female cohabitees appreciate companionship, including emotional and social support. Male participants, on the other hand, appreciate the materialistic benefits of cohabitation such as having a partner who cooks, cleans, and irons for them.

- The quality and intensity of cohabitation is equated with marriage as some cohabitees wish to be treated as married couples, by law and by the church.

- The majority of the participants appreciate support and companionship that is readily available when they stay in the same place of abode.

- Participants enjoy the freedom that cohabitation affords them as there is a relative absence of social control in cohabitation. Cohabitees have the liberty to develop their own values and rules in their relationship, such as the allocation of responsibilities. However, there is evidence that cohabitation requires change in behaviour, attitude, lifestyle, and dress code among cohabitees.

- Cohabitation seems to do little or nothing to eliminate male dominance in relationships. There is ample evidence of the influence of patriarchy in most of the female participants' expressions. Some female participants are of the view that women, irrespective of their marital status, should always be submissive to their male partners. Most female cohabitees seem to sacrifice their own personal interests such as reducing their leisure time and being more conservative in their dress code and behaviour to impress their male partners, to keep them in the relationship. The majority of female cohabitees also engage in relational maintenance behaviour such as avoiding situations which could lead to arguments and tensions. Males, on the other hand, hesitantly alter their social activities to accommodate their partners.

- Female cohabitees who have children within cohabitation take pride in their ability to raise their children with little or no assistance from their family. This may be due to the fact that they live far from their parents. There was no evidence of stigma towards childbirth in cohabitation. One participant was pleasantly surprised to get encouragement from her father to fall pregnant as she was not getting any younger.

Conclusions made on the participants' accounts of how commitment is expressed in their relationships

- It was difficult for the participants to provide explicit descriptions of how commitment is shown by their partners. Interestingly, they volunteered the issue of marriage into the discussion when they described how commitment is expressed in the relationship. However, it was mostly female participants who regard their partners' intention to marry as a commitment, which could be misleading considering that men may not follow through. Only three participants did not subscribe to the institution of marriage and were vehemently opposed to the link between cohabitation and marriage. One reason for rejecting marriage is the loss of independence and freedom. They also oppose marriage as the sole institution on ideological grounds.

- Some participants are of the view that commitment is expressed through their partners' expression of appreciation and love, including spending quality time with them. One of the participants indicated that having access to her partner's cell phone is reassuring and demonstrates commitment. This is a contentious issue which is debatable.

- However, one participant associates a mutual decision, for instance buying and taking care of a pet, as an indication of commitment to their relationship.

Conclusions made on cohabitees' accounts on challenges of their relationships since cohabitation

- Male and female participants expressed varying challenging experiences. Female cohabitees are mainly disillusioned about their partners' infidelity, excessive use of alcohol and illegal drugs, and complacency. This is attributed to the fact that female cohabitees may have created expectations that are not

met. On the other hand, one male cohabitee expressed regret having moved in with his partner because he feels restricted in his movements and lifestyle.

- Initially, cohabitees had difficulty adapting and managing the shared space with their partners and enjoying the freedom they used to have.

- Pregnancy and childbirth in cohabitation can also be detrimental to the quality of the relationship since sexual intimacy in cohabitation is often associated with pleasure and not reproduction. In the words of Makofane (2015), "not all men are fathers…" meaning that some male cohabitees may not be ready for fatherhood.

- The uncertainty and ambiguity shared by the participants about cohabitation, renders its status as a family type questionable. The lack of agreement on the terms of the relationship complicates matters further.

- In South Africa, cohabitation does not have legal recognition that safeguards cohabitees in the event of the dissolution of the relationship or the death of one or both partners. Although legal avenues do exists for cohabitees to enter into a legal agreement regarding the distribution of resources after termination of the relationship, none of the participants have entered into such a contract. Failure to have a contract poses risks for cohabitees in the event of separation or death.

Conclusions based on the issues of infidelity in cohabiting relationships

- Infidelity is not only a challenge to married couples. It occurs in cohabitation too. Unfortunately, some female cohabitees tolerate their male partners' infidelity due to a lack of means and resources to establish a home independently. However, such a decision places their health at risk of being infected with STIs and HIV.

- Female participants have a tendency to forgive their partners' cheating behaviour, whereas men do not forgive their partners for similar transgressions. Cohabitation is complex and often characterised by mistrust and lack of honesty, which is detrimental to the quality of the relationship.

Conclusions based on the experiences of cultural dilemmas in cohabiting relationships

- Diverse indigenous ethnic groups prefer and promote marriage as opposed to cohabitation. Marriage is still the basis on which to define and understand family formation. Therefore, cohabitation is discouraged in favour of marriage as prescribed by varying ethnic groups in South Africa.

- African female cohabitees run the risk of being discriminated against, stigmatised, and excluded from community activities initiated by married women. Other manifestations of discrimination take place within the female partner's homes. For instance, a participant was barred from carrying out chores such as cooking family meals and cleaning the family house as she was not married according to traditional practices. On the other hand, none of the male cohabitees experienced any form of discrimination from their communities.

- Divorced women who are in cohabiting relationships are likely to experience abuse from their partners as they are perceived as unworthy of marriage. Men may be reluctant to pay *magadi* for such women as they are referred to as "second hand" or "return soldiers."

- Cohabitees are aware that most cultures and religious denominations do not support cohabitation, but they nonetheless opted to ignore them to satisfy their personal needs. As a result, some live with feelings of guilt and fear for opposing these traditions. The discomfort is attributed to the fact that married couples receive blessings from their families, ancestors, and churches after the performance of certain rituals, whilst those in cohabitation may be perceived as defiant and thus likely to face the wrath of their ancestors.

- Interracial cohabitation is complicated due to partners' misunderstandings of the role of the African culture in a relationship between a man and a woman.

Conclusions based on the participants' descriptions of how responsibilities are allocated in the relationship

- Although there is evidence of gender flexibility regarding the performance of household chores, more than half of the female participants are still responsible

for them. Their partners, on the other hand, only carry out intermittent maintenance work.

- Cohabitation affords female cohabitees the confidence and freedom to pursue their own personal development without feeling guilty that their responsibilities as mothers and wives will be compromised. However, their success may pose a challenge to traditional men who may feel threatened by their partners' success.

- Women who conform to traditional norms and values in terms of the status of a woman in a relationship are conflicted by their role in cohabitation. In their view, cohabitation does not grant their partners the authority to demand services such as cooking and cleaning from them.

- Generally, female cohabitees appreciate their partners' involvement in household chores, and regard that as a sign of sensitivity care.

Conclusions based on participants' experience on ownership and power in cohabiting relationships

- There does not seem to be a sense of shared ownership of assets for almost half of the participants, which is detrimental to the quality of the relationship. Almost all participants still maintain individualistic attitudes such as buying and managing assets separately. Only two participants felt a sense of ownership on the assets that they both own.

- In terms of dynamics of power relations and dominance in cohabitation, the one who owns property is likely to dominate the other partner. This may have a detrimental effect on the quality of the relationship. Couples who share a lease or ownership of the property are likely to work as a team.

- Some women who own their own homes allow their partners to dominate the relationship and in the process relinquish their bargaining power. This is one of the legacies of patriarchy that promotes women's submission to men at all times.

- Due to fear of the unknown, some cohabiting couples are yet to have an open and honest discussion about assets accrued by both within their relationship.

Conclusions based on the cohabitees' experiences and views of raising children in a cohabiting relationship

- Children are more likely to benefit from the economic and emotional support from both parents who reside together. It is anticipated that the parents will pool their resources for the benefit of the children.

- Raising children in cohabiting relationships affords parents the joy and an opportunity to be actively involved in their lives. Fifteen participants who are raising children in cohabitation indicated that their partners tend to devote more time and attention to raising their children. This applies to both biological and stepchildren. Only one female participant experiences challenges with her partner who is neglecting his financial responsibilities towards their child.

- Sharing parental responsibilities in cohabitation lessens the burden placed on unmarried mothers who are expected to single-handedly raise children, with limited financial resources.

- Some women are still sceptical when bringing their children from a previous relationship into a cohabiting one without the assurance of a partner regarding the quality and stability of the relationship.

- Despite enhanced sexual intimacy in cohabitation, some couples choose not to fall pregnant, either due to the poor quality of the relationship or the stigma that is associated with having children outside marriage in some communities.

- Some view having children in cohabitation as a sign of commitment which may lead to marriage whilst others regard it as "a trap" for a man to marry, especially in situations where there was no prior agreement on such a matter.

- Children often assume their maternal surnames in cohabitation, which poses a dilemma for male cohabitees who believe that the children belong to their paternal family and should therefore assume their father's surname.

- Raising children from previous relationships in cohabitation tends to be complicated due to the involvement of the previous partners.

Conclusions based on the influence of religion on the participants' cohabiting relationships

- The participants' religious beliefs pose a challenge to their decision to cohabit. Many religious denominations view cohabitation as an immoral and sinful act which should not be promoted.

- Although most traditional religious churches reject cohabitation, there is evidence that some emerging charismatic churches grant congregants the right to cohabit. These liberal values may be attributed to the fact that such churches guard against losing young followers.

- Unfortunately, in some churches, Women in cohabiting relationships are not treated the same way as those who are married. A participant stated that in traditional protestant churches female cohabitees do not access pastoral services offered to married women. Another participant shared that she is not permitted to wear church robes reserved for married women, whereas her partner is allowed to do so without prejudice.

- The influence of religion on cohabitees is not universal. However, it is assumed that religious cohabitees are more likely to marry or leave the relationship, whereas those who are not religious do not have to deal with challenges imposed by the church on cohabitation.

Conclusions based on participants' accounts of how they resolve their challenges

- Cohabitees employ various methods to manage and handle conflict.

- Cohabitees do not rely on professional assistance from social workers, which is a concern. Only two cohabitees consulted with psychologists regarding the lack of a collective meaning and understanding of the transition, adjustment problems, and lack of communication skills.

- Eight participants still consult their parents for guidance during turbulent times in their lives and relationships.

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- Cohabitees seem to value and rely on their friends for guidance as they are non-judgemental.

- Resolving conflict seems to pose a challenge to most couples as some would like to discuss issues and reach an agreement whilst others prefer not to engage in discussions.

- Cohabitation affords couples an opportunity to address conflict privately with little or no interference from families: hence, some value cohabitation for the autonomy and freedom it provides.

- Women enter cohabitation with strong hopes of marriage. When such aspirations do not materialise, they may be tempted to move out of the shared home as a signal to prompt their partners to ask for their hand in marriage.

Conclusions reached on the participants' suggestions on social work services

Although none of the participants consulted social workers previously, they nonetheless made suggestions on how they should be treated during intervention:

- Social workers should explore circumstances which preceded the couples' decision to cohabit, with particular emphasis on establishing whether the couples discussed and agreed on the transition.

- Cohabitees are of the view that financial matters should form part of the intervention, especially how the couples manage their finances. The decision to cohabit inevitably calls for cohabitees to decide if they should merge or keep their finances separate.

- Due to the individualistic and private nature of cohabitation, social workers should use group work as a method of intervention. Group members can benefit by sharing common concerns, and can socialise, receive support, and achieve personal growth through learning from others. Cohabitees with strong marital aspirations suggest that social workers should offer premarital counselling to prepare them for marriage.

- Social workers should objectively view cohabitation as a distinct relationship with its own challenges, without imposing their values on cohabitees. They

should bear in mind that not all cohabitees have marital aspirations. Social workers should assist couples with healthy communication skills and raise cohabitees' awareness on legal matters.

- In addition to traditional family therapy or case work, social workers are urged to focus more on the wider social contexts to raise awareness about cohabitation.

8.5 Recommendations

Based on the research process and findings relating to social work practice, policy, and social work education and training, the researcher's recommendations – also for future research – are presented below.

8.5.1 Recommendations based on the research process

In view of the difficulties that the researcher experienced in conducting the study within the qualitative realm, it is recommended that the College of Graduate Studies introduce a mandatory introductory short course to focus on key assumptions and principles of qualitative research, with particular emphasis on the role of theory and literature.

8.5.2 Recommendations for social work intervention

- In view of the reluctance on the part of some participants to disclose their relationships to their parents,

- Due to the complexity of the financial matters and its impact on the quality of cohabiting relationships, social workers should collaborate with relevant departments in the College of Economic and Management Sciences or individuals with the necessary expertise in the financial field to develop relational financial therapy programmes, to provide guidelines pertaining to financial matters to cohabitees.

- Due to uncertainty in cohabitation, social workers should assess and, where applicable, intervene appropriately to improve the living conditions of children raised in cohabiting relationships

- In light of the moral implications of cohabitation, which may impact on the professional self of service providers, social workers should consciously reflect on their personal beliefs and assumptions about family formation, which they may inadvertently impose on the cohabitees. Keeping a journal may assist them to reflect on their thoughts and feelings as they render services to cohabiting individuals or couples.

- Social workers should adopt a team approach in order to help cohabitees holistically. Such a team should comprise people from religious denominations, psychologists, safety clusters and custodians of cultural issues, lawyers, sociologists, and cohabitees.

- In an effort to reach more cohabitees, social workers should use media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram to create awareness about their services, and interact with people who prefer social media as a means of communication.

- With the understanding that some cohabiting relationships start when couples are still studying at institutions of higher learning, social workers attached to the Directorate of Student Affairs at such institutions should develop programmes to address the challenges of students who are in cohabiting relationships.

- In order to address the legal deficiencies pertaining to cohabitation, social workers should encourage cohabiting couples, through the assistance of lawyers, to draft agreements to safeguard their interests in the relationship.

8.5.3 Recommendations for policy

- In an effort to address the biases and prejudices that are inherent in the wording of official forms that seek to document marital status, social workers should, through the National Department of Social Development, facilitate discussions to use a more inclusive terminology such as relationship status.

- In view of the legal, cultural, religious, and social exclusions that cohabitees are subjected to, the Chapter 9 Institutions as per the RSA Constitution such as the Public Protector, South African Human Rights Commission, Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic

Communities, and the Commission for Gender Equality, should develop programmes to educate individuals and institutions about the rights of cohabitees and, where necessary, institute recourse for cohabitees whose human rights have been infringed.

- In view of uncertainty regarding the legal status of cohabitation in South Africa, policymakers should develop legislation that will enable cohabiting individuals or couples to enjoy legal protection during and after the relationship.

- In an effort to empower cohabitees to effect change in their immediate environment, social workers should assist them to lobby policymakers on issues pertaining to cohabitation.

- Anticipating that cohabitation will likely increase among African communities due to the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, inequality, as well as the commercialisation of *magadi,* it is recommended that social workers facilitate dialogues in forums such as community *makgotla (indabas),* seminars, symposiums, workshops, and conferences represented by religious denominations, professional groups custodians of cultural issues, legal fraternity, and cohabitees.

8.5.4 Recommendations for social work education

- In view of the dearth of social work literature on cohabiting couples, social work academics should conduct extensive research on cohabitation, document the findings, and include it in the course that introduces students to family issues within the South Africa context.

- After amassing relevant information, social work academics should introduce Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) in collaboration with other relevant disciplines such as psychology and family law to expose students to the intricacies of cohabitation.

- In order to assist practitioners to keep abreast of new developments, social work academics should provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training on cohabitation as per their community engagement mandate.

8.5.5 Recommendations for future research

Based on the research findings and conclusions drawn, the researcher recommends that:

- In view of the complex nature of cohabitation, more social work academics and practitioners should initiate collaborative research projects with sociologists and psychologists to embark on a longitudinal study on the progression of cohabitation.

- Within the social constructivist perspective, more exploratory studies should be conducted to explore how cohabitees construct the meaning of cohabitation.

- In light of the experiences of female cohabitees pertaining to ownership and power, social workers should conduct studies to explore the influence and impact of patriarchy on cohabitation.

- The views and experiences of children who grew up in cohabitation should not be discounted.

- Based on the experiences of women who experienced divorce prior to cohabitation, social workers should employ a multiple case study design to provide a detailed description of their lived personal experiences.

- Due to the religious teachings on family formation, social workers should collaborate with theology academics to conduct a qualitative study on religion and cohabitation.

- In view of the response from the parents of cohabitees, a qualitative study should be conducted and focus on these parents to explore their attitudes towards cohabitation and its impact on their relationship.

- In light of the dearth of literature on the experiences of social workers who are rendering services to cohabitees, evidence-based studies should be undertaken to explore the views of social workers pertaining to cohabitation.

- Given the limited number of male cohabitees who participated in the study, it is recommended that research be conducted to explore and describe the

experiences of male cohabitees from various racial and economic backgrounds.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter offered general conclusions and recommendations based on the outcome of the research. A thorough reflection on the findings was done and conclusions made. A brief summary of each chapter was presented. The three research questions were answered and summarised in detail to give an indication of the extent to which they were answered. It emerged that participants' perspectives on the place of cohabitation, in the context of changing family practice, varied significantly and are inconclusive.

The question on the participants' experiences in cohabiting relationships in relation to the benefits, challenges, and mechanisms was adequately addressed, as was the issue of companionship. The problems associated with the intra- and interpersonal relationships of cohabitees and the negative attitudes of families and communities towards cohabitation were highlighted. Based on the cohabitees' perceptions and experiences on what the lessons for social work practice are, it was discovered that none of the participants had utilised or consulted social work services in the past. The suggestions were therefore based on the participants' assumptions of what the profession entails. Participants advised that a non-judgemental attitude would enable social workers to offer cohabitees objective and effective services and, if that were the case, they might consult social workers in future.

The threefold goals of the study were unpacked and discussed in their entirety to realise the main objectives of the study. A summary of the research approach was presented which highlighted the methodological underpinnings of the study, notably the phenomenological, exploratory, descriptive, and contextual research designs which were applied. Ethical considerations of the study were recapped.

It was established that the reasons given by cohabitees to move in together varied significantly as they were influenced by different motives and circumstances. The reactions of participants' families to cohabitation were varied, but the majority expressed disapproval of cohabitation, as opposed to marriage. This notion was in

most cases influenced by tradition, culture, religion, and societal norms. It was observed that although cohabitees have positive experiences of cohabitation such as the benefits of intimacy, financial support, and strong commitment, they also face challenges such as infidelity, unplanned pregnancy, uncertainty, cultural dilemmas, and no legal recognition of their cohabiting relationships. It was noted that cohabitees resort to different methods to deal with and manage conflict in their relationships. Although none of the participants had previously consulted social workers, they nonetheless made suggestions as to how they should be treated by social workers during intervention.

Numerous recommendations were made based on the conclusions of the research process and findings. These recommendations include a call for social work intervention with regard to financial assistance, improving living conditions for cohabitees, and importantly, that social workers should consciously reflect on their personal beliefs and assumptions about family formation which they may inadvertently impose on the cohabitees. Policy recommendations to the National Department of Social Development should address the biases and prejudices that are inherent in the wording of official forms. A call by social workers to revisit legislation pertaining cohabitation has also been made.

In view of the dearth of social work literature on social work practice associated with cohabiting couples, clear recommendations on how social work academics and practitioners should address this gap, was made. Finally, recommendations for further research on cohabitation were proposed in collaboration with social workers, sociologists, and psychologists.

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ADDENDUM A

A PREAMBLE TO AN INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR A PARTICIPANT	

Dear Participant

I, **Phuti Kgadima**, the undersigned, am the Lecturer employed by UNISA, and also a part-time doctorate student in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. In fulfilment of requirements for the doctoral degree, I have to undertake a research project and have consequently decided to focus on the following research topic: **Cohabitation in the context of family practices: lessons for social work intervention**

In view of the fact that you first-hand information about the subject under study, I hereby approach you with the request to participate in the study. For you to decide whether or not to participate in this research project, I am going to give you information that will help you to understand the study (i.e. what the aims of the study are and why there is a need for this particular study). Furthermore, you will be informed about what your involvement in this study will entail (i.e. what you will be asked/or what you will be requested to do during the study, the risks and benefits involved by participating in this research project, and your rights as a participant in this study).

The ultimate goal of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the cohabitation in the context of family practices. The findings of this study will therefore inform intervention by social workers.

Should you agree to participate, you would be requested to participate in a face-to-face interview(s) that will be conducted at your home at a mutually agreed time for one hour per interview. During the interview(s)[11] the following questions will be directed to you:

---

[1] The independent coder is someone who is well versed and experienced in analysing information collected by means of interviews and is appointed to analyse the transcripts of the interviews independently of the researcher to ensure that the researcher will report the participants' accounts of what has been researched.

The following issues were included in the questions in order to compile the biographical data of the participants:

- Age
- Gender
- Racial classification
- Cultural affiliation
- Employment status
- Duration of the relationship

The following questions were used to elicit more in-depth information on cohabitation in the context of changing family practices as well as the lessons for social work intervention:

- Please share me with me the background of your relationship that led to cohabitation. (Prompts: planned, discussed, it just happened).

- Share with me how you experience your relationship with your partner.
  OR: Tell me about your relationship with your partner since cohabitation.
  (Prompts: commitment, support, sharing of responsibilities, communication, benefits, challenges, and how they resolve them).

- Please share with me your immediate family's view of your cohabitation.

- Please share with me your friends and/or colleagues' views of your relationship.

- Please share with me your community's view of your relationship.

- Kindly share with me if you consulted with any social worker or family/couple therapist in relation to your relationship.

- Share with me the kind of professional assistance you require.
  (Prompts: whether and how the cohabitees would like to be assisted).

With your permission, the interview(s) will be audio-taped. The recorded interviews will be transcribed word-for-word. Your responses to the interview (both the taped and transcribed versions) will be kept strictly confidential. The audiotape(s)/videotape(s) will be coded to disguise any identifying information. The tapes will be stored in my locked office at UNISA main campus in Pretoria and only I will have access to them. The transcripts (without any identifying information) will be made available to my research supervisor(s)/promoter(s), a translator (if they need to be translated into English), and an independent coder[1] with the sole purpose of assisting and guiding me with this research undertaking. My research supervisor(s)/promoter(s), the translator and the independent coder will each sign an undertaking to treat the information shared by you in a confidential manner.

The audiotapes and the transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed upon the completion of the study. Identifying information will be deleted or disguised in any subsequent publication and/or presentation of the research findings.

Please note that participation in the research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in the research. Your decision to participate, or not to participate, will not affect you in any way now or in the future and you will incur no penalty and/or loss to which you may otherwise be entitled. Should you agree to participate and sign the information and informed consent document herewith, as proof of your willingness to participate, please note that you are not signing your rights away.

If you agree to take part, you have the right to change your mind at any time during the study. You are free to withdraw this consent and discontinue participation without any loss of benefits. However, if you do withdraw from the study, you would be requested to grant me an opportunity to engage in informal discussion with you so that the research partnership that was established can be terminated in an orderly manner.

As the researcher, I also have the right to dismiss you from the study without regard to your consent if you fail to follow the instructions or if the information you have to divulge is emotionally sensitive and upsets you to such an extent that it hinders you from functioning physically and emotionally in a proper manner. Furthermore, if participating in the study at any time jeopardises your safety in any way, you will be dismissed.

Should I conclude that the information you have shared left you feeling emotionally upset, or perturbed, I am obliged to refer you to a counsellor for debriefing or counselling (should you agree).

You have the right to ask questions concerning the study at any time. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact me at the following numbers: 081 410 6979 (anytime of the day) or 012 429 6515 (during working hours). My supervisor, Prof M.D.M Makofane is also available at (012) 449 6884 should you need more clarity

Please note that this study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee[12] of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. Without the approval of this committee, the study cannot be conducted. Should you have any questions and queries not sufficiently addressed by me as the researcher, or my supervisor, you are welcome to contact the Chairperson of the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. His contact details are as follows: Dr AH (Nicky) Alpaslan, telephone number: 012 429 6739, or email alpasah@unisa.ac.za.

If, after you have consulted the researcher and the Research and Ethics Committee in the Department of Social Work at Unisa, their answers have not satisfied you, you might direct your question/concerns/queries to the Chairperson, Human Ethics Committee[13], College of Human Science, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003.

Based upon all the information provided to you above, and being aware of your rights, you are asked to give your written consent should you want to participate in this research study by signing and dating the information and consent form provided herewith and initialling each section to indicate that you understand and agree to the conditions.

Thank you for your participation.

Kind regards

Signature of researcher

kgadinp@unisa.ac.za

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[12] This is a group of independent experts whose responsibility is to help ensure that the rights and welfare of participants in research are protected and the study is carried out in an ethical manner.

ADDENDUM B

CONFIRMATION OF DATA SATURATION

-----Original Message-----
From: Marichen van der Westhuizen
Sent: 25 June 2015 9:54 AM
To: Kgadima, phuti
Subject: RE: Transcribed Interviews

Dear Mr Kgadima

I have completed the analysis and attach the analysis report and invoice to this e-mail. I must say, the data reveals some interesting aspects to be considered in our profession, and I wish you well with the product you will deliver.

I detected saturation after the 18th interview and think it is good that you continued with three more interviews to make sure.

I identified 3 main themes with quite a number of sub-themes and categories. You could consider breaking up the main themes into more themes, based on the sub-themes' content.

I hope my report will assist you with the final product. Good luck.

Dr M vd Westhuizen
_____

ADDENDUM C

FLIERS AND TWITTER POSTS
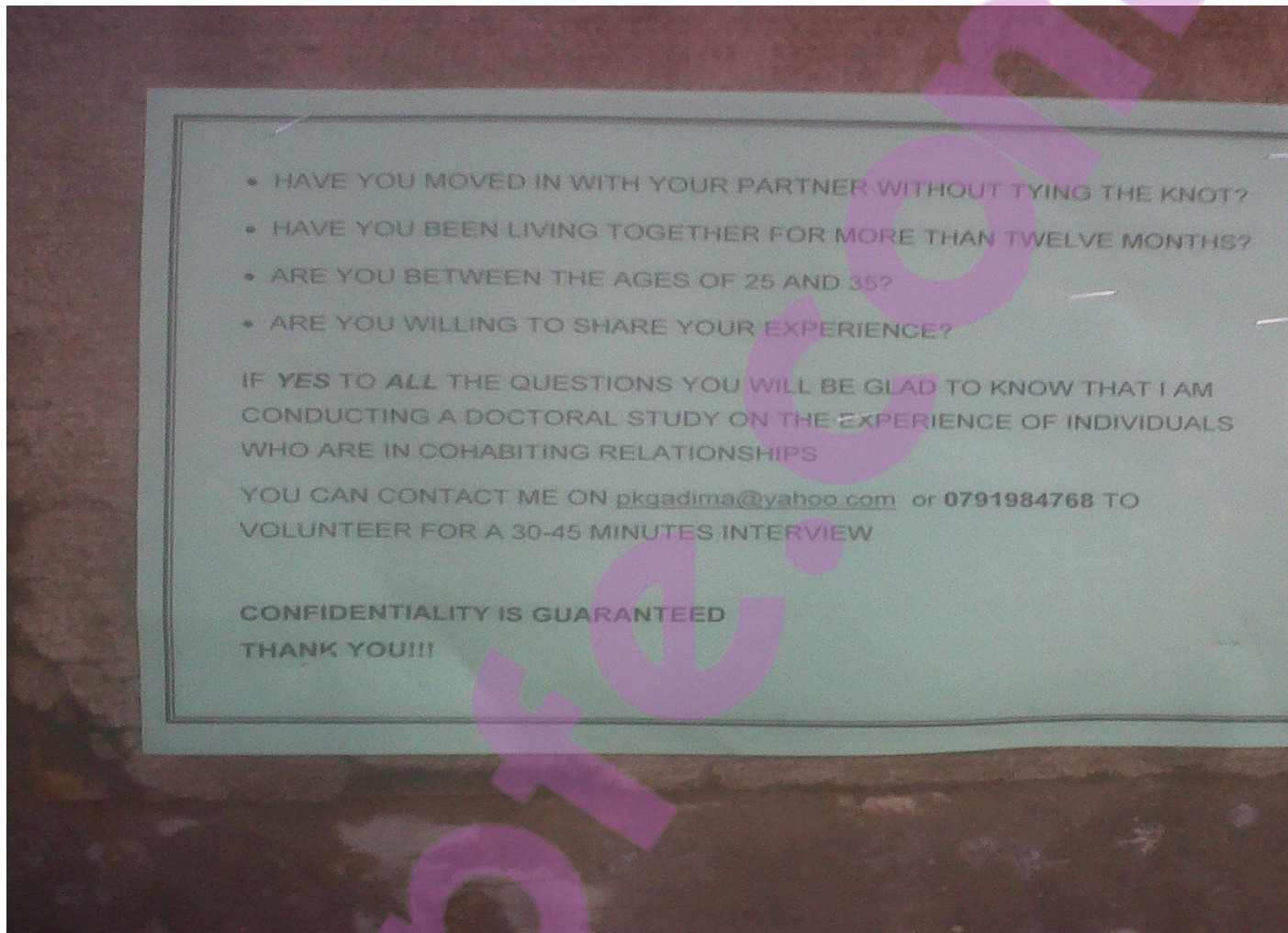
- HAVE YOU MOVED IN WITH YOUR PARTNER WITHOUT TYING THE KNOT?

- HAVE YOU BEEN LIVING TOGETHER FOR MORE THAN TWELVE MONTHS?

- ARE YOU BETWEEN THE AGES OF 25 AND 35?

- ARE YOU WILLING TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE?

IF **YES** TO **ALL** THE QUESTIONS YOU WILL BE GLAD TO KNOW THAT I AM CONDUCTING A DOCTORAL STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCE OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE IN COHABITING RELATIONSHIPS

YOU CAN CONTACT ME ON pkgadima@yahoo.com or **0791984768** TO VOLUNTEER FOR A 30-45 MINUTES INTERVIEW

CONFIDENTIALITY IS GUARANTEED

THANK YOU!!!

phuti,
Your Tweet got retweeted!

phuti
@phutikgadima

@RediTlhabi m conducting a PhD study on cohabitation;m struglin with participants;Can u please spread d word?Thnx Redi

08:24 AM - 06 May 14

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loveLife replied to your Tweet!

phuti @phutikgadima

@loveLifeNGO m conducting a phd study on experiences of cohabiting partners in GP.is there anyway that lovelife can help spread da word? - 09 Jun

loveLife @loveLifeNGO

BOOM RT @phutikgadima: I'm conducting a PHD study on experiences of cohabiting partners in GP. Is there anyway loveLife can spread the word?

11:58 AM - 10 Jun 14

← Reply to @loveLifeNGO   ⟲ Retweet   ★ Favorite

phuti,
Your Tweet got retweeted!

← In reply to Noeleen and 2 others

phuti

335

@phutikgadima

@Noeleen3Talk m doin Phd study on cohabitation.wil u b so kind t spread d word;need participants;kgadinp@unisa.ac.za.m so stressed!

03:29 AM - 31 Oct 14

🔁 **Retweeted by**

♌**Ziyanda $oya** @SoyaZiyanda
To 301 followers.

Learn more about @SoyaZiyanda.

View their profile

🐦 **phuti,**
Your Tweet got retweeted!

↩ In reply to Criselda Kananda and 2 others

phuti
@phutikgadima

@positivegp m doin Phd study on cohabitation.wil u b so kind t spread d word;need participants;m so stressd;kgadinp@unisa.ac.za.Thank u

07:56 AM - 31 Oct 14

🔁 **Retweeted by**

Criselda Kananda @positivegp
To 61263 followers.

Learn more about @positivegp.

View their profile

ADDENDUM D

PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH INVOLVING UNISA STAFF

UNISA | university of south africa

PROF L LABUSCHAGNE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH DEPARTMENT
Tel: +27 12 429 6368 / 2446
Email: llabus@unisa.ac.za
Address: Theo van Wijk Building, 10th Floor, Office no. 50 (TvW 10-50)

10 December 2014

Mr. P. Kgadima
Department of Social Work
College of Human Sciences
Unisa

Dear Mr. P. Kgadima

PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH INVOLVING UNISA STAFF AND STUDENTS

A study into: "Cohabitation in the context of changing family practices:
Lessons for social work intervention."

Your application regarding permission to conduct research involving Unisa staff and students in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Subcommittee of the Unisa Senate Research and Innovation and Higher Degrees Committee (SRIHDC) on 05 December 2014.

The RPSC resolved that you may proceed with the study without formal permission from the RPSC due to the fact that selected Unisa employees will participate in this study in their personal capacity and not in a professional capacity.

We would like to wish you well in your research undertaking.

Kind regards

PROF L LABUSCHAGNE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH

Open Rubric

University of South Africa
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ADDEMDUM E

REQUESTS TO WELFARE ORGANISATIONS IN GAUTENG PROVINCE

The Director
Child Welfare Gauteng

26 March 2014

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Research on **COHABITATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING FAMILY PRACTICES: LESSONS FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION**

My name is Phuti Kgadima (Mr). I am currently employed in the Department of Social Work at UNISA as the Lecturer. I have registered D Phil (Social Work) with UNISA (Student Number 41191676) under the supervision of Prof.M.D.M Makofane.

As indicated on the subject of the letter the interest of my study is on cohabiting partners. The study was influenced by the lack of information on cohabitation as an emerging family practice and in social work knowledge and intervention. The goal of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the place of cohabitation in the family systems and the lessons to be learned by social workers for their intervention. I request your assistance in linking me with potential participants

Since families, caregivers and communities benefit immensely from Child Welfare services I request your assistance in linking me with potential participants. This study will ensure that the formulation and delivery of such programmes are based on research. Participation is voluntary and there is no monetary remuneration.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact me at the following numbers: 081 410 6979 (anytime of the day) or 012 429 6515 (during working hours). My supervisor, Prof M.D.M Makofane is also available at (012) 449 6884 should you need more clarity

Please note that this study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee[1] of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. Without the approval of this committee, the study cannot be conducted. Should you have any questions and queries not sufficiently addressed by me as the researcher, or my supervisor, you are welcome to contact the Chairperson of the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. His contact details are as follows: Dr AH (Nicky) Alpaslan, telephone number: 012 429 6739, or email alpasah@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for your consideration.

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[1] This is a group of independent experts whose responsibility is to help ensure that the rights and welfare of participants in research are protected and the study is carried out in an ethical manner.

ADDENDUM F

REQUESTS TO RADIO STATIONS

REQUEST TO RADIO 702

Dear John Robbie

I am currently employed by UNISA as the Lecturer in the Department of Social Work. I have undertaken a PhD study titled **COHABITATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING FAMILY PRACTICES: LESSONS FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION.** Initially I thought getting people to talk about this phenomenon would not be an issue but the scepticism and reluctance of the people to open up has somehow delayed my progress.

It is my humble request that you assist me with spreading the word should there be anyone who is interested.

One should meet the following criteria to participate in the study:

- **For the purpose of this study, cohabitation refers to any intimate union between a man and woman who share same residence without having gone through any of the marital processes as prescribed by either The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act (Act No. 120 of 1998) and Marriage Act (Act No. 25 of 1961).**

- **Cohabiting individuals who are between the ages of 25-35**

- **Individuals who have been cohabiting for a period of one to five years**

I really hope you can help. My academic future depends on it.

Regards

Phuti Kgadima (Mr)

ADDENDUM G

CONSENT FORM FOR THE PILOT STUDY

A PREAMBLE TO AN INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A PILOT STUDY

Dear Participant

I, **Phuti Kgadima**, the undersigned, am the Lecturer employed by UNISA, and also a part-time doctorate student in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. In fulfilment of requirements for the doctoral degree, I have to undertake a research project and have consequently decided to focus on the following research topic: **Cohabitation in the context of family practices: lessons for social work intervention**

In view of the fact that you first-hand information about the subject under study, I hereby approach you with the request to participate in this pilot study. For you to decide whether or not to participate in this research project, I am going to give you information that will help you to understand the study (i.e. what the aims of the study are and why there is a need for this particular study). Furthermore, you will be informed about what your involvement in this study will entail (i.e. what you will be asked/or what you will be requested to do during the study, the risks and benefits involved by participating in this research project, and your rights as a participant in this study).

The ultimate goal of the main study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the cohabitation in the context of family practices. The findings of this study will therefore inform intervention by social workers.

In this instance you are requested to participate in the pilot study. The main aim of the pilot study is to try out the items in the interview guide in order to inform the final interview guide. Upon completion of the interview you are further invited to share your views on the interviews in terms of its relevance, appropriateness and its usability. You are further welcome to suggest any input that you may deem fit for the purpose of this study.

Should you agree to participate, you would be requested to participate in a face-to-face interview(s) that will be conducted at your home at a mutually agreed time for one hour per interview. During the interview(s) the following questions will be directed to you:

The following questions will be used to compile the biographical data of the participants:

Age:

Gender:

Cultural affiliation:

Employment status:

Duration of the relationship:

The following questions will be used to elicit more in-depth information from the participants on cohabitation in the contest of changing family practices as well as the lessons for social work intervention

- Tell me how it came about that you decided to cohabit? (Prompts: planned, discussed, just happened)

- Share with me how you experience your relationship with your partner, OR tell me about your relationship with your partner.
  (Prompts: commitment, support, sharing of responsibilities, communication, benefits, challenges, involvement of professionals).

- Tell me about your cohabitation and your immediate family's acceptance thereof.

- Share with me how you would describe your relationship with your partner and that of friends and colleagues

- Share with me the community's acceptance of you and your partner's relationship

- Share with me the kind of professional assistance do you require.
  Prompts; whether and how the cohabitees would like to be assisted. Probing will then provide the information on support systems required, as well as lessons to be learnt to assist social workers with regard to interventions to be conducted in working with cohabitees.

Please note that participation in the research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in the research. Your decision to participate, or not to participate, will not affect you in any way now or in the future and you will incur no penalty and/or loss to which you may otherwise be entitled. Should you agree to participate and sign

the informed consent document herewith, as proof of your willingness to participate, please note that you are not signing your rights away.

If you agree to take part, you have the right to change your mind at any time during the study. You are free to withdraw this consent and discontinue participation without any loss of benefits. However, if you do withdraw from the study, you would be requested to grant me an opportunity to engage in informal discussion with you so that the research partnership that was established can be terminated in an orderly manner.

As the researcher, I also have the right to dismiss you from the study without regard to your consent if you fail to follow the instructions or if the information you have to divulge is emotionally sensitive and upsets you to such an extent that it hinders you from functioning physically and emotionally in a proper manner. Furthermore, if participating in the study at any time jeopardises your safety in any way, you will be dismissed.

Should I conclude that the information you have shared left you feeling emotionally upset, or perturbed, I am obliged to refer you to a counsellor for debriefing or counselling (should you agree).

You have the right to ask questions concerning the study at any time. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact me at the following numbers: 081 410 6979 (anytime of the day) or 012 429 6515 (during working hours). My supervisor, Prof M.D.M Makofane is also available at (012) 449 6884 should you need more clarity

Please note that this study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee[14] of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. Without the approval of this committee, the study cannot be conducted. Should you have any questions and queries not sufficiently addressed by me as the researcher, or my supervisor, you are welcome to contact the Chairperson of the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. His contact details are as follows: Dr AH (Nicky) Alpaslan, telephone number: 012 429 6739, or email alpasah@unisa.ac.za.

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14 This is a group of independent experts whose responsibility is to help ensure that the rights and welfare of participants in research are protected and the study is carried out in an ethical manner.

If, after you have consulted the researcher and the Research and Ethics Committee in the Department of Social Work at Unisa, their answers have not satisfied you, you might direct your question/concerns/queries to the Chairperson, Human Ethics Committee[15], College of Human Science, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003.

Based upon all the information provided to you above, and being aware of your rights, you are asked to give your written consent should you want to participate in this research study by signing and dating the information and consent form provided herewith and initialling each section to indicate that you understand and agree to the conditions.

Thank you for your participation.

Kind regards

Signature of researcher
kgadinp@unisa.ac.za

---

[15] This is a group of independent experts whose responsibility is to help ensure that the rights and welfare of participants in research are protected and the study is carried out in an ethical manner.

ADDENDUM H

ARTICLE ON LOBOLA

Handwritten: 11 MAY 2016. DAILY SUN

LOBOLA PAIN!

No men in my family are alive to negotiate!

WE WANT TO GET MARRIED: Orkney Kgopa and his girlfriend Ntholeng Matlomelo are looking for her parents *(Picture by Peter Kungwa)*

IT'S NO WILD GUESS, THIS DESIGNER GROWS HER OWN DRESS! SEE P13

By LUNGELWA MARANGA and TEBOGO MONKWENA

THE ANCESTORS have told Ntholeng to give up her vat-en-sit relationship and get married to Orkney.

Orkney loves Ntholeng so much he can't wait and he is ready to pay lobola.

BUT THERE WON'T BE WEDDING BELLS UNTIL THEY FIND NTHOLENG'S PARENTS.

'I want to do the right thing for my future wife'

THE BIG PG1 STORY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Ntholeng Motlomelo (22), who lives with her boyfriend Orkney Kgopa (28), in Kanana Park, Joburg, told Daily Sun none of her uncles are alive and there is nobody to negotiate lobola for her.

She said she needs her relatives from her father's side.

Ntholeng and Orkney have been together for three years and her ancestors want her to marry. She often gets sick but doctors can find nothing wrong with her, and she's had dreams where people give her messages she doesn't understand.

When she consults sangomas they all tell her that she must find her parents and her father, whom she knows only as Mr Ndlovu, who is still alive.

"I want to find my parents, especially the ones on my father's side so they can accept my lobola and be part of the negotiations."

Ntholeng was raised by her sick gogo. She said none of her mother's family can help her find her father because they have no idea who he is or where he is from.

Anna Mokoena, a traditional healer at Kanana Park, confirmed that Ntholeng is close to finding her father.

"I normally use water to communicate with the ancestors but with Ntholeng it was different," she said. "While we were talking a strong message came into my mind."

She said Ntholeng's ancestors will be at ease when Orkney does the right thing because the ancestors chose Orkney for her.
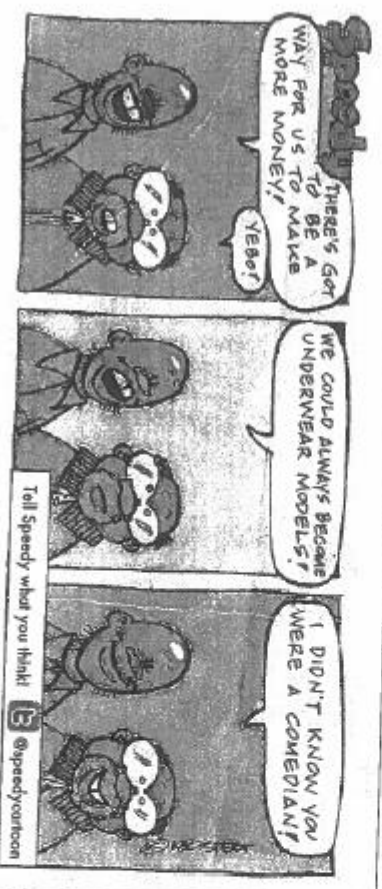
Orkney said he is frustrated. "I feel our lives are stuck. I am tired of living like this.

"I want to do the right thing towards my future wife and her family."

Phephisile Maseko, co-ordinator of SA Traditional Healers Organisation, said Ntholeng's gogo must find someone to represent the family.

"If the immediate family is dead her uncles have responsibilities.

"If she has no uncles, the other sons of the family must take responsibility and if they're not available, she must consult the gogo who raised her.

"Gogo must be the one to choose people.

"The negotiator should be someone elderly and respectable, even if only someone from her community."

ADDENDUM I

INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

COHABITATION IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY PRACTICES: LESSONS FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION

REFERENCE NUMBER: _____

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/RESEARCHER: Mr. Phuti Kgadima

ADDRESS CONTACT: **09 Ditshomo Street, Lotus Gardens, 0008**

TELEPHONENUMBER: 078 968 8394

	Initial
DECLARATION BY OR ON BEHALF OF THE PARTICIPANT: I, THE UNDERSIGNED, _____ (name), [ID No: _____] the participant or in my capacity as _____ of the participant [ID No _____] of _____ _____ _____(address) **A. HEREBY CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:** 1. I... was invited to participate in the above research project which is being undertaken by Mr. Phuti Kgadima of the Department of Social Work in the School of Social Science and Humanities at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.	Initial
2. The following aspects have been explained to me : 2.1 Aim: The researcher is conducting a pilot study to try out the items in the interview guide. The information will be used to refine the final version of the interview guide for the main study.	Initial
2.2 I understand the following: • The goal of the study,	Initial

347

• Why I was chosen, and that my participation is completely voluntary • How the information shared by me will be recorded	
Risks: The researcher undertook to refer me to a counsellor for debriefing or counselling should the information I divulge leave me feeling emotionally upset, or perturbed.	<u>Initial</u>
Possible benefits: As a result of my participation in this study the researcher will be able to refine the version of the interview guide for the main study.	<u>Initial</u>
Confidentiality: My identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications by the researchers.	<u>Initial</u>
Voluntary participation/refusal/discontinuation: My participation is voluntary. My decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect me now or in the future.	<u>Initial</u>
3. The information above was explained to me in............................ I am in command of this language and I was given the opportunity to ask questions and all these questions were answered satisfactorily.	<u>Initial</u>
4. No pressure was exerted on me to consent to participate and I understand that I may withdraw at any stage from the study without any penalty.	<u>Initial</u>
5. Participation in this study will not result in any additional cost on me.	<u>Initial</u>
B. I HEREBY CONSENT VOLUNTARILY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ABOVE PROJECT. Signed/confirmed at _____ on _____2014 _____ _____ Signature	

STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS

STATEMENT BY OR ON BEHALF OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

I, Phuti Kgadima, declare that

- I have explained the information given in this document to_____ (name of participant)
- he/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions;
- This conversation was conducted in………………. and no translator was used.

Signed at _____ on _____20___

                (place)   (date)

_____   _____

Signature of researcher

ADDENDUM J

CERTIFICATE OF VERACITY

D.Phil (Social Work)

COHABITATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING FAMILY PRACTICES: LESSONS FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION

Kgadima, Phuti Nathaniel

Student number: 41191676

I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the editing process comprised the following:

Language editing

- Syntax.
- Sentence construction.
- Grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- Appropriate word selection.
- Final proofreading.

Format/layout editing

- Uniformity in page layout.
- Formatting in-text citations/sources in reference list.

Freelance editor	:	S M Bell
Completed	:	February 2017
Signature	:	*Sue Bell*

TRANS-EDIT - EDITING & AUDIO TRANSCRIPTIONS
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Website: www.manu-type.co.za
Email: mt@trans-edit.co.za