Female-Headed Households and Their Nuanced Meanings of Housing in Kathrada Park, Johannesburg

Mziwandile Sobantu
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8516-4623
University of Johannesburg,
South Africa
msobantu@uj.ac.za

Emmison Muleya
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5931-1872
University of the Witwatersrand,
South Africa
e.muleya@yahoo.com

Lydia Mmola
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0267-2628
University of Johannesburg,
South Africa
baby.mmola@gmail.com

Abstract

In South Africa and globally, families have undergone social and economic transformation owing to globalisation, apartheid, and migration, among other factors. Female-headed households (FHHs) have become a common permutation of African families. While urbanisation has presented multiple social and economic opportunities for women, a nexus of structural constraints still presents challenges for many FHHs from accessing social welfare services such as housing. Informed by a social exclusion lens, this qualitative study employed an exploratory design to collect and analyse data from eight heads of FHHs in a low-income community in Johannesburg to explore the different nuanced meanings that FHHs attach to housing. Participants were selected through snowball sampling, and one-on-one semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, which were transcribed verbatim. A thematic content analysis found that FHHs attach explicit and nuanced meanings to housing. Although located in a low-income community, their housing gives them a sense of self-worth and dignity, offers them some level of safety and security for their children, and is conveniently located for their livelihood. Among others, this study recommends more social work research that focuses on the intersection of feminisation, housing, and FHHs. More importantly, the authors argue that the meaning of housing in relation to the poor and vulnerable such as FHHs is relevant to social work as a discipline that is informed by human rights and

social justice, because housing is key to the politics of safety, security, and belonging.

Keywords: female-headed households; housing; poor housing; poverty; social exclusion

Introduction and Background

Most contemporary societies globally are familiar with family structures other than the traditional structure of a female mother and a male father (Elliot, Powell, and Brenton 2015). Cohabitation, voluntary childlessness, same-sex, and single-parent families are common worldwide (DSD 2021). To accommodate all families and cater to their unique needs, most governments have come up with inclusive policies and are obliged to reconfigure their social and economic policies to respond to the dynamic needs of these families. As defined by the Department of Social Development ([DSD] 2021), a family is 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, and go beyond a particular physical residence. Specifically, Raniga and Ngcobo (2014) defined female-headed households (FHHs) as households that are headed by women, who are mostly single, and where there is no father figure.

In both developed and developing societies, FHHs are gaining much attention from policymakers and advocates of gender equality, women, and human rights (Nyathi and Thobejane 2018). This is due to the intersectionality of economic and cultural stereotypes, practices, and beliefs that disadvantage women from engaging in social and economic production and accessing better social welfare services such as housing (Mwedzi 2022). Worth noting are the variations of FHHs, which include "older women … women with disabilities, women who are single parents, childless women, divorcees, and women who are not and never have been married" (Tually 2011, 38). Many others are widows who find themselves homeless with their children after the death of their husbands (Adonis 2020; Zaroba 2016). As heads of families (households) who are recognised by their dependents, they assume de facto breadwinner roles in addition to presiding over key decisions associated with taking care of their families.

Housing is one welfare item that is central to redistribution and an integral component for all families to develop optimally (Sobantu 2022), yet Raniga (2022) posits that FHHs experience high levels of housing instability largely because of poverty and social exclusion associated with single women as heads. Access to housing and property has been skewed against women in many developing societies in the world for some time (Chant 2014; Mmola 2021; Tually 2011), undermining their right to shelter, safety, security, piped water, electricity, and sanitation. In many societies, women are disadvantaged in three broad dimensions compared to men, i.e., poor education, a lower return for a heavier workload, and interrelated obstacles to socioeconomic mobility (Chant 2014). The consequence of the latter is poor housing or lack thereof altogether (Sobantu 2022).

Poor housing and lack of other associated rights for women emanate from multiple factors that are not limited to feminisation of poverty (FoP) and continued exclusion from development. Most of the female heads in South Africa were excluded from quality education by colonial and apartheid policies. Consequently, most of them are unable to buy their own housing from the market and even qualify for subsidised housing which is means-tested. Their incomes are either unbanked, underbanked, or unbankable (Charlton 2013). In many developing countries, including South Africa, women in particular earn insignificant salaries from casual employment, of which social grants become an important source of income for their livelihood. With the added childcare and home-making responsibilities, most single mothers are unable to engage in productive economic activities to boost their incomes. Sobantu (2019) argues that vulnerable populations such as FHHs can benefit economically from access to conveniently located, adequate housing. Using a social exclusion framework in this study illuminates the structural elements that impede the FHHs' access to housing and related rights.

Housing is more than the physical structure, with its meaning largely derived from its emotional values in providing shelter, self-worth, dignity, and linking communities to opportunities (Sobantu 2022; Turner 1972). Literature indicates that there is a direct correlation between housing and wellbeing, and rape and other crimes against women and their children (Abrahams et al. 2020; Maphosa 2022; Sobantu and Noyoo 2022). FHHs and women of all categories are much safer and more secure in adequate housing than in some informal settlements or when homeless. A study conducted by Sobantu and Noyoo (2022) exploring the impact of housing location on older persons' well-being in Alexandra, South Africa, found that the type and quality of dwelling had direct bearing on their physical and psychosocial wellbeing. To fully appreciate what housing means to women and FHHs, it is pertinent to be aware of the systemic exclusion of women, and the indignity associated with lack of sanitation and basic amenities in inadequate housing in South Africa (Sobantu 2022).

Our research, therefore, aims to explore the different nuanced meanings that FHHs attach to housing. Here, we provide an overview of FHHs and housing within the context of a social exclusion framework. Our findings are categorised according to three themes: self-worth and dignity; safety for women, children, and the community; and livelihood.

Literature Review

Exclusion, Intersectionality, and Female-Headed Households

This study is informed by the social exclusion theoretical framework, which implies that there are structural factors that block some groups from engaging with mainstream society. For example, Perelman (2019) refers to the urban underclass which was concentrated in America's urban ghettos and was marginalised from the wider social and economic society. In the same vein, Gillborn (1997) points out that structural

inequalities in the United Kingdom gave rise to spatial planning and architecture that excluded many poor citizens from accessing advanced housing and related social welfare services. Due to entrenched patriarchal and cultural beliefs and practices in some societies, it is not surprising that women and female heads become victims of such exclusion and therefore lose out on housing-associated benefits. This resonates with South Africa's post-apartheid urban landscape, which is both fragmented and often divided into poorly resourced informal settlements that are largely populated by black women and FHHs (Mar and Edmonds 2010). Waetjen and Vahed (2012) and Raniga (2022) highlight that many women and women-headed households are severely disadvantaged in South Africa largely because of the related impact of patriarchy, gendered roles, and FoP. Furthermore, Madingwaneng et al. (2024) and Matotoka and Odeku (2022) argue that although women and men perform the same jobs in the workplace, the former are likely to be paid less and thus be excluded from the opportunities to equally access housing property and maintain their homes.

In most African cultures, women still experience challenges to own property and/or inherit it after the death of their husband or partner (Mmola 2021). Similarly, Mwedzi (2022) posits that in one way or another, women and FHHs are excluded based on factors such as race, culture, class, nationality, and socio-economic status. He states that "whilst [women and FHHs] share common [housing] experiences, the extent of their oppression and discrimination varies depending on their class, age, gender and socio-economic status" (Mwedzi 2022, 55). Maphosa (2022) and Paglione (2006) cite housing exclusion for women as one of the factors that contribute to gender-based violence (GBV), and rampant child abuse in South Africa because of poor housing.

Female-Headed Households, Poverty, and Gender

South Africa is an essential part of the global community, which shapes South African families in numerous ways (Budlender 2013). Regional, rural-urban, and inter-continental migration often fragment families and communities, with mostly women remaining in the home country to continue with childcare duties (Lebni et al. 2020). It must be remembered that the colonial and apartheid economies in South Africa were sustained by male migrant labour from the homelands and from neighbouring countries (Noyoo and Sobantu 2019). The long working hours, poor remuneration, and movement restrictions of the colonial era meant that most men working in the mines and on the farms spent more of their lifetime working than with their families (Chirau 2022; Noyoo and Sobantu 2019). Most families today no longer depend on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood, but more on the formal economy, where mostly men work in industries and regularly send remittances back home to the family (Chirau 2022). Such arrangements pose risks for divorce or separation, with women remaining as heads and sole breadwinners. Another factor that has led to the rise of FHHs is the longer lifespan of women compared to men, meaning that by default widows take over headship after the death of their husbands or partners (Naidoo, Miles-Timotheus, and Ndagurwa 2023).

Almost all societies have FHHs. Saad et al. (2022) share that the global median percentage of FHHs was 28% in 2021, ranging from 1.7% in Afghanistan to 50.1% in Belarus. Symphorien and Georgievna (2019) state that Europe and the United States of America have significant numbers of families headed by women. In 2016, Iran had 12.7%, and Armenia had the highest rate at 33.20% (Lebni et al. 2020). In the developing world, and particularly in Africa, there is also a relatively large number of these types of families. Elliot (2023) observes that nearly one in four households in Africa are headed by women, e.g., 41% in Zimbabwe, 36% in Kenya and 35% in Liberia. According to Lebni et al. (2020), the proportion of FHHs in Namibia was 43.90% in 2013, and 40.60% in Zimbabwe in 2015. Significant proportions, at 25%, were also recorded in the 2013–2014 Demographic and Health Survey of the Democratic Republic of Congo ([DRC] 2014). Furthermore, Uganda's average proportion of FHHs in 2019 was close to three in every ten households (27%), with the highest percentage in Karamoja (48%) and the lowest in Elgon (18%) (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2021). Mubiru, Kombe, and Limbumba (2022) contend that FHHs in Kampala, Uganda, must address the inefficiencies in the delivery of formal housing and a lack of financial assets, which hamper efforts for these families to access the urban housing market, cutting them off from advanced services that are concentrated in urban centres. Symphorien and Georgievna (2019) state that housing is an essential asset for such families as it improves their quality of life through social and economic integration and redistribution.

Gauteng City Region Observatory indicates that in South Africa, three out of five households have a male head, with the remainder headed by women (Naidoo, Miles-Timotheus, and Ndagurwa 2023). While most households in Gauteng are headed by males, some municipalities in the province have a higher proportion of FHHs, including Emfuleni, which has the highest concentration of these families (Naidoo, Miles-Timotheus, and Ndagurwa 2023). Furthermore, there is a well-defined clustering of FHHs in some areas of low-income townships such as Evaton and Sebokeng-North in Vanderbijlpark, where 60 to 86% of households are headed by females. Soweto has a similarly high prevalence of FHHs, ranging between 60 and 75% (Naidoo, Miles-Timotheus, and Ndagurwa 2023). Recently released 2022 census data indicate that almost half (49.6%) of households in South Africa are headed by females (Statistics South Africa 2023). Consistent with previous research, such as Nwosu and Ndinda (2018), Naidoo, Miles-Timotheus, and Ndagurwa (2023) share that FHHs are concentrated in the rural provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal (53.1%), Eastern Cape (51.9%), and Limpopo (51.6%). Notably, Gauteng province has 47.9% FHHs with 11% of these households living in informal dwellings (Statistics South Africa 2023).

The foregoing statistical overview justifies the need for focused attention on FHHs in Gauteng, as research provides evidence that many women and female heads find themselves immersed in a web of sustained institutionalised structural barriers that prevent them from enjoying housing-related socio-economic rights (Mar and Edmonds 2010; Sobantu 2021). It is also the view of the authors that in South Africa, there is a

dearth of social work literature that focuses on the intersection of FHHs and housing. Thus, in line with the aim of this study, we provide different nuanced meanings that FHHs attach to housing, using data collected from the participants from Kathrada Park, which is a low-income community.

Methodology

Approach and Design

We adopted a qualitative descriptive and exploratory approach for this study, as the intention was to obtain a rich, in-depth understanding of the different meanings that FHHs attach to housing. The sampling design enabled us to explore various details of what and how participants frame their meaning of housing through their lived experiences (Cypress 2015). Using open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews guided by social work values and skills of empathy, respect, and active listening, the participants shared freely their housing and home experiences (Geyer 2021). Zufferey, Yu, and Hand (2020, 1106) insist that understanding the housing and home environment is integral to social work, which is expected to "confront social inequalities such as sexism and racism, and become advocates within unequal housing systems."

Population and Sampling

Population refers to the "constituency from which the sample will be drawn" (Ritchie et al. 2014, 120). Kathrada Park is a low-income community synonymous with poverty, and consistent with most informal settlements in the country. The study considered all single female mothers who head households in this community. Snowball sampling was then used to select eight single mothers who head households in Kathrada Park. Guest, Namey, and Mitchell (2013) describe sampling as a process of selecting a small number of items from a bigger population to use in a study. Snowball sampling was necessary as not all FHHs and heads of households were known to the researchers. One of the researchers knew one female head in the community, who was requested to refer the researchers to the seven other potential participants. Bowles and Alston (2013, 90) advise that this kind of sampling could be employed when there is little information about the population, which makes identification and access difficult. The single mothers were selected based on the following criteria: They 1) were single, female, aged 30 and above, and heading a household; 2) had lived in Kathrada Park for a minimum of two years; 3) had their own accommodation; and 4) engaged in a formal or informal livelihood activity. From our practical experience as social workers, we have found that most female heads are aged 30 years and above and it is envisaged that those who have been in this low-income community for two years and more would have accumulated ample housing experiences and have developed a defined set of meanings to housing that they could share to benefit this study. To facilitate access into the community and to the participants, the ward councillor was used as a gatekeeper.

Data Collection

The study used one-on-one semi-structured interviews to collect data from the participants. Aided by the interview schedule, the semi-structured interviews facilitated open-ended conversations with each of them, which allowed them to influence the direction of the conversation to some extent (Geyer 2021; Gill et al. 2008). The interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes. Some interviews were conducted in English and some in the home language of the participants. All the conversations were recorded digitally to have a "permanent record of what was said and not said" (Gill et al. 2008, 293), and transcribed verbatim. In addition, note-taking was done to capture non-verbal gestures that could not be recorded digitally.

Data Analysis

The study made use of Braun and Clarke's (2017) thematic analysis approach which involved these steps: data familiarisation, code generation, theme identification, review, refinement, naming, and integration into the research report. This deliberate process enabled us to conduct a thorough exploration and interpretation of the interview data guided by the objectives of the study. Thematic analysis was integral in developing themes and patterns within and across data in an iteration with literature and the theoretical framework (Clarke and Braun 2017). Finally, notable intersecting strands of meaning of housing coalesced into the following main themes: self-worth and dignity; safety for women, children and the community; and livelihood and independence.

Ethics

Research must follow standard ethical practices and standards with the intention to protect human beings from harm and promote their dignity. This study was granted ethical clearance by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of the University of Johannesburg and allocated the approval number REC-01-256-2020. The entire data collection process ensured that the participants did not experience any harm from participating in the study. For example, measures were taken to ensure that no participant was coerced into taking part in this study (Strydom and Roestenburg 2021). Strydom and Roestenburg (2021) posit that observing confidentiality, remaining culturally sensitive, being respectful and honest, ensuring voluntary participation, and obtaining consent to conduct the study and to record the interviews, are key in ensuring no harm is posed to the participants.

A research information sheet was shared with all prospective participants during the recruitment process. It was written in simple language, read to them in the language they understood, and explained in detail. Questions were responded to in a respectful manner. This was key to obtaining voluntary participation and consent from the single female mothers who took part in the study. Dual consent for participation and digital recording of the interviews was obtained through respectful discussion and negotiation. Furthermore, they were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and assured that their responses would not be traced back to them, as pseudonyms would be used instead of

their real names (Strydom and Roestenburg 2021). At regular intervals during the interviews, participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any stage from the interview and could choose not to respond to any questions that they were not comfortable answering. To avoid creating expectations from the participants, the researchers explained that there was no benefit to be gained from participating in the study. As social workers, we ensured that the study did not cause any harm to the participants.

Limitations of the Study

In line with the selection criteria, this study focused only on single mothers who head households. They all happened to be Africans, despite the racially-inclusive criteria. A study that focuses on other areas outside Kathrada Park and targeting other racial groups would obviously enrich the data by illuminating the levels of exclusion among other racial groups. Kathrada Park is a low-income community and the levels of gender, social, and economic exclusion are not uncommon (Flatø and Pelser 2017). However, FHHs also exist in other and high-income communities, and they may experience other nuanced forms of exclusion. Perhaps, it would be important to extend this type of study to other income groups.

Findings

Socio-Demographics of the Participants

Altogether, eight participants were recruited to participate in the semi-structured interviews; see their demographic details tabulated below (Table 1). Participants have been living in Kathrada Park between 10 and 23 years. Their ages ranged from 37 to 71 years, and all had dependents. The 71-year-old pensioner was caring for two dependents (47 and 49 years old). Similarly, the 39-year-old and 42-year-old dependents were being taken care of by a 62-year-old pensioner. In terms of employment and livelihood, six of the eight participants were engaged in the formal economy whereas two were engaged in the third-sector economy. Half (50%) of the participants were employed as a marketing consultant, security guard, payroll administrator, and nursing assistant. The two oldest participants (aged 62 and 71) had obtained a Grade 10 and Grade 6 education, respectively. The 37-year-old (the youngest participant) had dropped out of university, while the remaining participants had college diplomas. One 47-year-old participant was still studying towards a university degree.

Meanings of Housing by Female-Headed Households

The interviewees were asked a direct question: "What does a house mean to you?" As the sample was homogenous in terms of gender, the participants' meaning of housing coalesced into three main, closely related themes, i.e., self-worth and dignity, safety, security, and promoting livelihood and economic independence. They define housing based on its usefulness to the various physical, social, and economic dimensions of their lives with their dependents. Despite the poor state of their housing, they appreciate the significant role it plays and the impact it has on their lives. This is in line with Turner's (1972) description of housing as a verb, which refers to the usefulness of the house to the occupants. Verbatim quotations from the responses (Table 1) are used to magnify the participants' voices, but their real names were replaced with pseudonyms.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the research participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Educational Level	Marital Status	Number of Dependents	Dependents' Age Group	Years at Kathrada Park	Employment Status	Type of Employment
Sindi	42	College, Diploma	Single	7	1–10 years=3 11–18 years=2 19–21years=2	More than 10 years	Employed	Marketing consultant
Dineo	47	University, studying	Single	1	22–30 years=1	20 years	Employed	Security guard
Busi	37	University first year dropout	Single	4	1–10 years=3 11–18 years=1	10 years	Self-employed	Day care centre
Obohlokwa	41	College, Diploma	Single	1	11–18 years=1	23 years	Employed	Payroll administrator
Seipati	45	College, Diploma	Single	2	11–18 years=1 18–21 years=1	24 years	Employed	Nursing assistant
Lerato	45	University first year dropout	Single	2	1–10 years=1 20–30 years=1	22 years	Unemployed	Unemployed
Gladys	71	Grade 6	Single	2	40–50 years=2	25 years	Pensioner	Pensioner
Kgopotso	62	Grade10	Single	2	30–40 years=1 40–50 years=1	23 years	Pensioner	Pensioner

Theme 1: Self-Worth and Dignity

As women who are single and taking care of children and families in a challenging social and economic context in South Africa, the participants view a house as a symbol of accomplishment and fulfilment. Having a house that they and their children could improve through various physical and psychosocial homemaking investments brings them respect. In other words, a house means pride, respect, and dignity to these FHHs who find it difficult to own property in South Africa. Below are some of the responses provided regarding what it means to have a house.

> Whether there is something there or not. But when there is a home, that is the only important thing. It gives you dignity and you will feel that you are a woman who is responsible, who is bringing up her children. (Gladys)

> Housing is very important to me because a house is where we find shelter from the rain and warmth. In addition, you get dignity when you live in a house. (Kgopotso)

> Even the children will not give you respect when they see that you are struggling. They will respect you, but they will be torn, and they will say that their mother is struggling. (Sindi)

Theme 2: Safety for Women, Children, and the Community

The participants revealed that housing means safety for their children and the entire community. They stressed that it is important for all FHHs and all households in their community to have secure housing to ensure safety for every individual and family. While sharing their insights on how housing is close to their hearts and why they attach a lot of meaning to it, they reflected on the high incidence of rape, GBV, and crime in their communities. Although they pointed out that their housing was poor, they did appreciate the level of safety and security that it offered them. The excerpts below touch on the high level of crime and break-ins, and some participants expressed their appreciation for the housing that they have.

> It's a pity that our community is not safe. You just have to live and pray that nothing will happen to you till the next day. A good house is very important here. (Busi)

> I cannot guarantee my safety because there's people who have experienced it. At the back and front of my house there's been break-ins. At least I have a house, even though it's not that good when it comes to protection. With me, it's only God's protection that saves me. I don't want to lie. (Dineo)

> At night, drinking with friends at night. One must know that they must be in their houses and homes at night. Even if it can be safe, but when walking late at night, you will attract trouble. It's better in your house. (Kgopotso)

Theme 3: Livelihood

Arku (2006), Raniga and Ngcobo (2014), and Sobantu (2022) eloquently articulated the economic vulnerability of FHHs. Housing is cited as an equaliser, particularly for women and FHHs, with multiple benefits for their economic and livelihood independence while also promoting self-worth, safety and dignity. This is also the case for the participants, some of whom explained:

> This garden is helping us so much. At least my kids at the creche get to eat greens every day, which is good. And it keeps us busy. (Busi)

> I like gardening. So, when I got this house, I made space for gardening, and I planted fresh vegetables in my yard. I also have a backyard shack for renting out. (Kgopotso)

> I only have a garden that helps to feed us with healthy food. (Gladys)

Discussion of Findings

The study aimed to engage with FHHs to explore their meaning of housing. The findings of this study align with previous studies that describe the social and economic burden that FHHs bear while taking care of their children and grandchildren alone in dilapidated housing and some in precarious living arrangements. Sobantu and Noyoo's (2022) study of older persons' housing experiences in Alexandra focused only on females who were heading families, most of whom occupied overcrowded, poor housing, with some taking care of their children who are over 60 years of age and several grandchildren, some of whose parents had died. Similarly, in this study, a 71-year-old pensioner took care of her 47- and 49-year-old dependents. Despite the numerous housing benefits that accrued to them, they also shared how they grappled with the pain of raising their children in poor housing. Similarly, participants battled with the same huge responsibilities providing for their dependents with very little help from the extended family and government.

It is evident that the participants' definition of housing is tied to its value and benefits to them, in line with Hohman's (2013) view that housing undergirds all social and economic relations of the occupants and is a source of protection from severe deprivation. Though poor by modern regulatory standards, the FHHs appreciated the benefits they enjoyed, such as shelter and security. Turner (1972) was a proponent of self-help housing, and argued that the poor must be allowed to build their own housing using locally available materials because of the "use value" of housing to poor families and communities. To him, shelter is the basic form of social and economic security that allows the occupants to achieve higher-order social and economic satisfaction. One participant expressed her appreciation that "at least I have a house." Possessing a house as a poor woman taking care of a family, is a huge achievement in the context of feminisation of poverty and, consequently, restricted access to housing and other basic services.

The participants' meaning of housing also centred around enhancing self-worth and dignity. They listed that it gave them a sense of pride, respect, and self-worth despite being low-cost housing. All the participants indicated that, despite raising children on their own, their children had shelter and a home, could use flushing toilets, and had access to water and electricity; all this gave them a sense of pride. In a similar study, Sobantu (2022) shows that housing for single women that is located proximal to educational and health facilities, and livelihood and recreational centres, result in improved education and health outcomes for their children in addition to enhancing their self-esteem. The participants further added that even very basic housing improvements and homemaking activities uplifted their self-worth and dignity as female heads. Malpass and Murie (1999, 1) observe that quality housing gives beneficiaries an "address [which is also an] indicator of social position," which restores self-esteem and a sense of pride. In South Africa, the Bill of Rights in the country's Constitution affirms that everyone has the right to dignity of life, safety and security, and privacy (Republic of South Africa 1996). One other critical meaning and usefulness of housing cited by participants was that it enhanced their livelihood and independence. For example, they shared that homeownership enabled them to plant vegetables for nutrition and an income. The problem is that these positive housing experiences and meanings of housing exist within class, gender, and economic stratification, which have a huge potential to reproduce and perpetuate inequalities.

South Africa is a very unsafe society in terms of crime and GBV. To the participants, house- and homeownership signified some level of safety and security. Although they appreciated their housing and the low-level protection it offered, all the participants nonetheless indicated a low sense of security and safety because of rampant crime in the community. In South Africa, very few housing studies, particularly in social work, have highlighted how poor housing poses safety and security risks to the marginalised groups such as women and children. Chenwi and McLean (2009), Sobantu (2021), and Waetjen and Vahed (2012) emphasise how unsafe the housing is that most single mothers occupy with their families.

We are aware that the housing challenge in South Africa is a perpetual and universal problem, and all women deserve priority policy attention from gender lens and FoP theoretical perspectives. However, those who head families bear additional social and economic strain as there are no perceptible housing strategies to cushion from homelessness with their dependents, most of whom are children and vulnerable. They suffer intersectional challenges because of how they are intuitionally excluded in various interrelated ways.

Implications and Conclusions

The participants' perceptions indicated that housing is more than just shelter to them because it contributes to their identity and dignity, earns them respect, and provides safety, security, and a livelihood, which has multiple benefits for their economic

independence. With the support of the South African government's programmes and policies, single mothers who are heading families could have access to adequate housing to improve their lives. Social work plays a key role in ensuring the implementation of a social development approach for poor people in general and women in particular. As Patel (2015, 127) asserts, developmental social work seeks "social justice" and to ensure that poor societies' needs are met, which is in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, it is in pursuit of the ideals of social justice, and particularly inclusion, that the socio-economic rights and needs of vulnerable women who also head households can be fulfilled.

Implicit in the different nuances was the appreciation that housing fosters self-worth and dignity, proffers respect, enhances safety, security, and a livelihood. Despite this it also emerged that safety is a major concern for some. Given these findings, government needs to pay attention to making changes in housing policy and services that are directed towards addressing housing concerns for all, particularly poor single mothers and their children, to ensure security of tenure. Furthermore, government housing policies should be gender sensitive and make provision for women to access land or housing even when there is no male partner. The authors contend that housing delivery should be a thoughtful process that allows the poor to live in secure settlements that are connected to amenities and economic opportunities. This study recommends more social work research into the intersection of feminisation of poverty, housing, and FHHs. For more concrete policy recommendations, further research could explore not only the impact of adequate housing on FHHs but also how the housing process could be as inclusive and bottom-up as possible to cater to the needs of the poor. In addition, this study contributes to the already existing literature that seeks to urge government and stakeholders to prioritise adequate housing for women, particularly single mothers who are heading households.

References

Abrahams, N., S. Mhlongo, E. Chirwa, C. Lombard, K. Dunkle, S. Seedat, A. P. Kenge, B. Myers, N. Peer, C. M. Garcí-Moreno, and R. Jewkes. 2020. "Rape Survivors in South Africa: Analysis of the Baseline Socio-Demographic and Health Characteristics of a Rape Cohort." *Global Health Action* 13 (1): 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2020.1834769

Adonis, M. L. 2020. "Exploring the Economic and Psychosocial Experiences of Widowed Mothers." MA dissertation, University of Johannesburg.

Arku, G. 2006. "The Housing and Economic Development Debate Revisited: Economic Significance of Housing in Developing Countries." *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 21 (4): 377–95. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-006-9056-3

Bowles, W., and M. Alston. 2013. *Research for Social Workers: An Introduction to Methods.* 4th ed. London: Routledge.

Budlender, D. 2013. "The Debate About Households Headship." *Social Dynamics* 29 (2): 48–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/02533950308628675

Chant, S. 2014. "Cities Through a "Gender Lens: A Golden 'Urban Age' for Women in the Global South?" *Environment and Urbanization* 25 (1): 9–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247813477809

Charlton, S. 2013. "State Ambitions and Peoples' Practices: An Exploration of RDP Housing in Johannesburg." PhD thesis, University of Sheffield. https://doi.org/10.18772/22014107656.13

Chirau, T. 2022. "Female Headed Households Livelihoods in Eastern Cape: A Qualitative Study." *Asia-Africa Journal of Academic Research and Review* 2: 14–25.

Clarke, V., and V. Braun. 2017. "Thematic Analysis." *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12 (3): 297–298. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613

Cypress, B. S. 2015. "Qualitative Research: The 'What', 'Why, 'Who' and 'How.'" *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 34 (6): 356–361. https://doi.org/10.1097/DCC.0000000000000150

DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo). 2014. "Demographic and Health Survey 2013–14: Key Findings." Accessed November 23, 2023. https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/sr218/sr218.e.pdf.

DSD (Department of Social Development). 2021. Revised White Paper on Families in South Africa. Government Gazette No. 540. Accessed July 1, 2024. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202107/44799gon586t.pdf.

Elliot O. 2023. "A Place to Call My Own: The Significance of Housing for Women." Accessed November 2024. https://fsdafrica.org/blog/a-place-to-call-my-own-the-significance-of-housing-for-women/.

Elliot, S., R. Powell, and J. Brenton. 2015. "Being a Good Mom: Low-Income, Black Single Mothers Negotiate Intensive Mothering." *Journal of Family Issues* 36 (3): 351–370. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13490279

Flatø, M. R. M., and A. Pelser. 2017. "Women, Weather, and Woes: The Triangular Dynamics of Female-headed Households, Economic Vulnerability, and Climate Variability in South Africa." *World Development* 90: 41–62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2016.08.015

Geyer, L. S. 2021. "Interviews as Data Collection Method." In *Research at Grassroots: For the Social Sciences and Human Services Professions*, edited by A. S. Fouche, H. Strydom, and W. J. H Roestenburg, 355–378. Cape Town: Van Schaik Publishers.

Gill, P., K. Stewart, E. Treasure, and B. Chadwick. 2008. "Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews and Focus Groups." *British Dental Journal* 204 (6): 291–295. https://doi.org/10.1038/bdj.2008.192

Gillborn, D. 1997. "Racism and Reform: New Ethnicities/Old Inequalities?" *British Educational Research Journal* 23 (3): 345–360. https://doi.org/10.1080/0141192970230307

Guest, G., E. E. Namey, and M. L. Mitchell. 2013. *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research.* London: Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506374680

Hohman, J. 2013. *The Right to Housing: Law, Concepts, Possibilities.* Oxford: Hart Publishing

Lebni, J. Y., A. M. Gherehghani, G. Soofizad, B. Khosravi, A. Ziapor, and S. F. Irandoost. 2020. "Challenges and Opportunities Confronting Female-Headed Households in Iran: A Qualitative Study." *BMC Women's Health* 20: 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-020-01046-x

Madingwaneng, M. J., T. R. Motswaledi, T. C. Garutsa, and K. M. A. Mpahlele. 2024. "Gender Pay-Gap: Utilising Multivariate Approach to Understand the Causes of Unequal Pay Between Men and Women in South Africa." *International Journal of Professional Business Review* 9 (2): 3–18. https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2024.v9i2.3304

Malpass, P., and A. Murie. 1999. "Introduction: Analysing Housing Policy." In *Housing Policy and Practice*, edited by P. Malpass and A. Murie, 1–19. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27443-7_1

Maphosa, N. 2022. "An Evaluation of a School-Based Intervention for Adolescents Exposed to Domestic Violence." PhD thesis, University of Johannesburg.

Mar, T. B., and P. E. Edmonds. 2010. "Introduction: Making Space in Settler Colonies." In *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, edited by T. B. Mar and P. E. Edmonds, 1–24. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277946_1

Matotoka, M. D., and K. O. Odeku. 2022. "Unequal Remunerations in the South African Private Sector." *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development (formerly Journal of Gender, Information and Development in Africa)* 11 (1): 81–96. https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2022/v11n1a4

Mmola, L. B. R. 2021. "Exploring the Housing Experiences of Single Mothers Who are Heading Households in Kathrada Park, West of Johannesburg." MA dissertation, University of Johannesburg.

Mubiru, M. B, W. Kombe, and T. M. Limbumba. 2022. "'No Woman is an Island': The Housing Market Access Strategies by Female-Headed Households in Kampala." *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review* 5 (6): 17–34. https://doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v5i6.409

Mwedzi, T. 2022. "Childcare Arrangements Amongst Zimbabwean Immigrant Families in Soweto, South Africa: Types, Usefulness, Challenges, Perceptions and Recommendations." MA dissertation, University of Johannesburg.

Naidoo, L., S. Miles-Timotheus, and P. Ndagurwa. 2023. "The Distribution of Male-Headed and Female-Headed Households in Gauteng." Gauteng City Region Observatory (GCRO). Accessed November 18, 2024. https://doi.org/10.36634/TJJG2755

Noyoo, N., and M. Sobantu. 2019. "Deconstructing and Decolonising Spatiality: Voluntary and Affordable Housing for a Transforming Johannesburg." In *Reversing Urban Spatiality*, edited by M. T. Myambo, 35–42. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429453304-3

Nwosu, C. O., and C. Ndinda. 2018. "Female Household Headship and Poverty in South Africa: An Employment-Based Analysis." *Economic Research Southern Africa* 3 (71): 1–26.

Nyathi, N. A., and T. D. Thobejane. 2018. "Poverty Among Female Headed Households in Matabeleland South Province in Zimbabwe: A Perennial Problem or an Enlightening Experience?" *Gender and Behaviour* 16 (2): 11250–11262.

Paglione, G. 2006. "Domestic Violence and Housing Rights: A Reinterpretation of the Right to Housing." *Human Rights Quarterly* 28 (1): 120–147. https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2006.0012

Patel, L. 2015. *Social Welfare and Social Development in South Africa.* Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Perelman, M. D. 2019. "Urban inequalities." In *Urban Underclass. The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Urban and Regional Studies,* edited by A. M. Orum, 2583–2587. Basingstoke: Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118568446.eurs0402

Raniga, T. 2022. "Experiences of Women in Precarious Employment in South Africa's economy." *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development* 34 (1): 1–18.

Raniga, T., and N. Ngcobo. 2014. "Economic Experiences of Single Mothers in Bhambayi, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa." S*ocial Work*/*Maatskaplike Werk* 50 (4): 516–528. https://doi.org/10.25159/2708-9355/8847

Republic of South Africa (RSA). 1996. Constitution of South Africa. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Ritchie, J., G. E. Lewis, G. Elam, R. Tennant, and N. Rahim. 2014. "Designing and Selecting Samples." In *Qualitative Research Practice.* 10th ed., edited J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. M. Nicholas, and R. Ormston, 111–145. London: Sage Publications.

Saad, G. E., H. Ghattas, A. Wendt, F. Hellwig, J. DeJong, T. Boerma, C. Victoria, and A. J. Barros. 2022. "Paving the Way to Understanding Female-Headed Households: Variation in Household Composition Across 103 Low- and Middle-Income Countries." *Journal of Global Health* 12: 1–12. https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.12.04038

Sobantu, M. 2019. "A Model for Enhancing Voluntary Housing Within a Social Development Approach in South Africa." PhD thesis, University of Johannesburg.

Sobantu, M. 2021. "Housing and Women's Rights in Gauteng, South Africa: The Role of Social Work in Sharpening the Focus." *African Journal of Social Work* 11 (1): 23–31.

Sobantu, M. 2022. "Social Rental Housing and Empowerment: Voices of Beneficiaries from Gauteng, South Africa." *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development* 34 (2): 1–15. https://doi.org/10.25159/2708-9355/7222

Sobantu, M. and N. Noyoo. 2022. "Impact of Housing Location on Older Persons' Perceptions of Safety, Privacy and Psychosocial Wellbeing in Alexandra, North of Johannesburg." *Journal of Human Ecology* 78 (1): 37–47. https://doi.org/10.31901/24566608.2022/78.1-3.3339

Statistics South Africa. 2023. Census 2022 Statistical Release. Accessed November 20, 2023. https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014_Census_2022_Statistical_Release.pdf.

Strydom, H. and W. J. H. Roestenburg. 2021. "Ethical Conduct in Research with Human Participants." In *Research at Grassroots: For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*, edited by A. S. Fouche, H. Strydom, and W. J. H. Roestenburg, 117–136. Cape Town: Van Schaik Publishers.

Symphorien, N. A. and B. L. Georgievna. 2019. "Social Housing for Women Heads of Household in Congo Brazzaville." *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 7: 383–396. https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2019.78028

Tually, S. 2011. "Women and Housing: The Australian Experience." In *An International Analysis*: *Women and Housing,* edited by P. Kennett and C. Wah, 22–51. London: Routledge.

Turner, F. C. 1972. "The Re-Education of a Professional and Housing as a Verb." In *Freedom to Build*, edited by J. Turner, and R. Fichter, 148–150. New York: Macmillan.

Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2022. *National Service Delivery Survey 2021 Report.* Kampala Uganda: Uganda Bureau of Statistics.

Waetjen, T., and G. Vahed. 2012. "Gender, Citizenship and Power: The Westcliff Flats Residents Association." *The Oriental Anthropologist* 12 (2): 249–268. https://doi.org/10.1177/0976343020120203

Zaroba, M. 2016. "The Socio-Economic Challenges Faced by Widows in Urban Zimbabwe: A Study of Ward 34 in Mufakose High Density Suburb in Harare." PhD thesis, University of Zimbabwe.

Zufferey, C., N. Yu, and T. Hand. 2020. "Researching Home in Social Work." *Qualitative Social Work* 19 (5–6): 1095–1110. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325019880244