A qualitative exploration of parents' perceptions on a Parenting Skills Training Program in Kitgum, Northern Uganda

Master's thesis presented to achieve the degree of Master of Science in Social Work

by

Fien Vandendriessche

01208345

Promotor: Prof. Dr. Ilse Derluyn
Mentor: Leen De Nutte
Abstract

Title:

A qualitative exploration of parents’ perceptions on a Parenting Skills Training Program
in Kitgum, Northern Uganda

Student: Fien Vandendriessche - 01208345

Academic year: 2015-2016

Education: Master of Science in Social Work

Promotor: Prof. Dr. Ilse Derluyn

Many programs have been elaborated that are aimed at enhancing parents in their ability to parent, in the hope that outcomes for children may ultimately be improved (Halpeny et al., 2009; Moran et al., 2004; Ghate & Hazel, 2002). Most parenting programs were elaborated by western organizations that carried out a western approach towards parenting support or tried to adapt their implementation to the local setting (De Mey & Vandenbroeck, 2014). Also, limited attention is paid to the evaluation of parenting programs that focus on parents living in impoverished neighborhoods. This dissertation explores the views of parents who attended the SCORE Parenting Skills Training Program in Kitgum, Northern Uganda. A qualitative methodology was used in order to obtain a deeper understanding of parents motives for enrollment and what impact this parenting training has had on various areas of their social life. Twenty parents were interviewed, all of whom had completed the training. The data from these interviews were analyzed through the use of thematic analysis. The results were divided into eight identified main themes, each with several sub-themes. The results suggest that for these parents attending the Parenting Skills Training provided them with significant benefits. A much cited reason for enrollment is the opportunity to interact with others who shared the same concerns. The latter seemed to be of great value since parents were able to develop a greater sense of self-esteem and expand their social network, which among other things led to the relieve of stress. In addition, the opportunities to develop various skills supported parents to alter the initial approaches they have passed on to their children. Parents uttered the wish for the extension of the program and for it to continue for a longer period of time, mostly because of the support from other group members which they have experienced as beneficial. The results also suggest that there is a need for other kinds of support in a parenting program such as material support and ongoing monitoring.
Acknowledgements

As far as I can remember, the African continent with its history and cultures intrigues me in a way I can’t even put down in words. I always imagined myself working in an African country as a social worker and being able to connect with the local communities. A few months ago that dream became reality to some extent, as I had the opportunity to conduct my master thesis in Uganda, which was, without a doubt, an unforgettable and rewarding experience. Not only because I have grown as a person but as a social worker as well. Therefore I would like to thank some people that gave me the opportunity to undergo this experience and stood by me during the whole process, which was, I must admit, not entirely rosy.

To begin with I would like to thank the whole organization of AVSI and particularly, Alfred Biribonwa Agaba, who gave me the green light to conduct my research in Kitgum. In addition I would like to utter my gratitude toward a few people of AVSI in Kitgum itself namely, Charles Ayoli, Joseph Lokong and Richard Komakech because they cared for me from the beginning and supported me throughout the journey.

Another special someone I would like to thank is Irene Lajul, the woman who supported me in my study as an interpreter but also has become a wonderful friend. She inspired me on so many levels and I want to thank her for her patience, inspiring words and her inner peace she passed on me during challenging situations.

I would like to offer my acknowledgments to my promotor, Ilse Derluyn, and my mentor, Leen De Nutte for their constructive advice, suggestions and critical views on some issues which made me reflect twice.

I would like to thank all my friends and family who stood by me the whole time. Thanks for putting your trust and faith in me, your support, for listening and encouraging me to continue to strive to accomplish this project. You definitely kept me going! Without a doubt they are as relieved as I am that I have been able to complete this final part of my studies.

Thank you Fiona for reading through my dissertation, for encouraging and supporting me, which made me believe in myself.

Finally, my biggest appreciation goes out to the participants, the welcoming parents who opened up their houses for me, shared their stories and expressed their believe in me. I want to voice my deepest gratitude for their vital input into the study. Therefore I have to thank Nixon Ocit and Ocen John Bosco from Meeting Point Kitgum, for guiding me through the search for participants. It was great to experience your contagious enthusiasm that you both have for your job.

That is why I want to say ‘Afoyo Matek’ to all of you (i.e. thank you very much in Acholi).
# Table of Contents

**Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 1

**Chapter 1: Literature review** ......................................................................................... 3

1 Parenting .......................................................................................................................... 3

1.1 “Good-enough” parenting? ....................................................................................... 4

1.2 Parenting styles .......................................................................................................... 5

1.2.1 De-contextualization of parenting (styles) .......................................................... 6

1.2.2 Cultural influences on parenting ........................................................................ 7

2 Parenting in context ........................................................................................................ 7

2.1 Risk factors in upbringing ......................................................................................... 9

2.2 Protective factors in upbringing .............................................................................. 9

2.2.1 Social support ....................................................................................................... 10

3 Parenting Training Programs .................................................................................... 10

4 Summary ........................................................................................................................ 13

5 The SCORE Parenting Skills Training ...................................................................... 14

6 Context of the study ...................................................................................................... 15

6.1 Introduction of the historical and political context of Northern Uganda ............ 16

6.2 Social context in Uganda ......................................................................................... 17

6.2.1 Relationship between humanitarian and development aid ......................... 17

6.2.2 Role of the NGO’s ............................................................................................... 17

6.2.3 Role of the Government ...................................................................................... 18

**Chapter 2: Methodology** ............................................................................................ 20

1 Research statement ....................................................................................................... 20

1.1 Research question(s) ............................................................................................... 20

2 Research procedure ..................................................................................................... 21

2.1 Participants ............................................................................................................... 21

2.1.1 Sample characteristics ..................................................................................... 21

2.1.2 Participants’ characteristics .............................................................................. 21

2.2 Method of data collection ....................................................................................... 22

2.2.1 Design of the interview protocol ..................................................................... 22

2.3 Method of analysis .................................................................................................... 24

2.3.1 Data transcription ............................................................................................... 24

2.3.2 Data analysis ...................................................................................................... 24

2.3.3 Social constructionist approach and concept of reflexivity ............................ 25

2.4 Ethical considerations .............................................................................................. 26

3 Quality in qualitative research .................................................................................... 28

3.1 Rigor .......................................................................................................................... 28
2.2 The predominant focus on the educational aspect ........................................50

3 Socioeconomic context .................................................................................51
  3.1 Importance of social interaction ...............................................................51
  3.2 Importance of other kinds of support .........................................................53

Conclusion ........................................................................................................54

1 Limitations of the study ................................................................................54
2 Recommendations for future research ........................................................55

References .........................................................................................................57

Content of appendices .......................................................................................69
  A. Informed consent .......................................................................................69
  B. Interview Protocol ......................................................................................70
Introduction

In the past twenty years the view on parenting has changed substantially (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002; Halpenny, Nixon & Watson, 2009). Therefore, parenthood has become a focus of political attention throughout our modern welfare-state societies (Richter & Andreassen, 2012), and even parenting itself can become subject for state intervention (Gillies, 2012). On the basis of this reasoning and in the light of research evidence many programs have been elaborated that are aimed at enhancing parents in their ability to parent, in the hope that outcomes for children may ultimately be improved (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Halpenny, Nixon & Watson, 2009; Moran, Ghate & van der Merwe, 2004). An important thought to take into account is the notion that a large amount of these parenting programs were developed in a certain context and were then implemented in different contexts afterwards (e.g. Triple P in South Africa). Thus, most of the support programs that arose were elaborated by western organizations that carried out a western approach towards parental support or tried to adapt their implementation to the local setting (De Mey & Vandenbroeck, 2014). While previous studies have shown that parenting programs prove their impact, these have few positive results when they are aimed at families with low socioeconomic status (Miller & Prinz, 1990; Tolan & McKay, 1996; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1990). Consequently, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the context in which parenting is embedded within the parenting support system, since research on parenting programs that are conducted in non-western societies is not always representative (Gorman & Balter, 1997).

Therefore, a brief introduction will be given on parenting and parenting programs. Chapter one sheds light on how parenting has been viewed the past decades and how this has influenced parenting practices and styles. With reference to this study, the focus is on parenting in context, since parenting is a social construction that occurs in a cultural, social and political context. After a glimpse on both risk- and protective factors that have an influence on parenting, a focus will be placed on parenting programs in their entirety with a specific focus on previous research. Also, it is equally important to outline the historical and political context of Northern Uganda since this had a transformative impact on family structures. In the second chapter, we will continue to attach importance to the methodology that was used in this dissertation, in which an emphasis is placed on the research statement and the research questions, sample characteristics and the participants, data collection, method of analysis, ethical considerations and quality in qualitative research. Chapter three, presents the results obtained from the twenty participants. To what extent the results relate to the research questions and the existing literature will be delineated in the discussion part.
To end, a conclusion will be formed with attention for limitations in the study and recommendations for future research on parenting programs.
Chapter 1: Literature review

1 Parenting

Nowadays, parenting enjoys increasing amounts of attention within scholarly debates (Lee, Bristow, Faircloth, & Macvarish, 2014). Despite the frequent use of the concept of parenting, it seems difficult to define what exactly it entails (Hoghughi & Speight, 1998). Hoghughi and Speight (1998) mention that the act of parenting refers to a profound relationship, an ongoing process and a series of activities. According to The Blackwell encyclopedia of social work, Davis Martin (2000) wrote that “parenting or child rearing is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, financial, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Parenting refers to the aspects of raising a child aside from the biological relationship” (p. 245). Bornstein (2012) completes this definition by saying that the biological parent(s) not necessarily need to be viewed as the most common caregiver(s) in the upbringing of the child because uncles and aunts, the grandparents, older siblings, an authorized guardian, neighbors, other family members or even friends can take over in certain settings. This definition recognizes the statement that the usual Western image of a family is a narrow construct, for that reason that it does not culturally relate to the more extended concepts of family in non-Western communities (Cameron, 2007).

In the African context, as mentioned by Evans, Matola and Nyeko (2008), a parent is anyone who performs the role of a parent. In other words, anybody who is able to take that responsibility. They continue by saying that single- and- female- headed households have become dominant. In addition, they state that boys are not given a training to prepare them for parenthood but girls are, so this clarifies why the mother often takes full responsibility for the upbringing in African households (Evans et al., 2008). This in contrast with Howes, Rodning, Galluzzo and Myers (1988) who state that “the older pattern of mother as caregiver and father as breadwinner changes to mother and father juggling work and caregiving roles plus additional caregivers in the form of extended family members, nannies, or out-of-home care in family day care or centers” (p. 403).

To continue, both Hermanns (1995) and Nys &Vandemeulebroecke (2000) consider upbringing to be a transactional process. The raising of children is thus seen as a continuous process of influence between caregivers and children that is embedded in a broader social context. Geens & Vandenbroeck (2013) wrote elaborately on the subject of how parenting is a social construction which is determined both by historical and direct contextual influences. This leads some researchers to argue about the fact that the effects of parenting depend on the cultural and social contexts in which it occurs (Mandara & Murray,
2002). Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster and Jones (2001) wrote that it is precarious to consider differences in upbringing merely as a difference in beliefs about the aspects of upbringing. They noted that “in our attempts to be sensitive and respectful of differences in childrearing attitudes and approaches, we might fail to recognize when parental behaviors such as lower levels of warmth result not from overarching cultural norms or values, but rather from stressful neighborhood and family conditions” (p.952). Thus, as mentioned by Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie (2006), the general context contributes to parenting and partly constructs the parent-child relationship.

Further, the notion of parenting has been subject to change. Lee, Bristow, Faircloth & Macvarish (2014) have put forward that the history and the use of the term parenting can be traced back to specific fields, for example, psychology. Recently, parenting has simply been reduced to behavior modification, as criticized by De Winter (2011). He explains that, where parenting difficulties have long been seen as life issues that belong to the realm of morality and religion, they are now associated with unconscious processes and trauma, relationship difficulties or wrong conditioning techniques (De Winter, 2011). Hence, as cited in Lee et al., (2014), the emphasis now placed on parenting could be clarified on the basis of Furedi’s (2002) criticism towards the targeting of parental behavior as deficient. He notes that “it is this more recent turn towards an explicit focus on the parent and their behavior that emerges as the general, distinctive attribute of the contemporary term ’parenting’” (Lee et al., 2014, p. ix). In his work, Paranoid parenting, he describes the increasing interference of experts, policymakers and even divers market operators who will find any reason in undermining parents’ self-confidence and their authority (Lee et al., 2014).

Connected with this idea, Furedi (2001), Ramaekers (2009) and Schaubroeck (2010) comment on the prevailing ways of thinking about parenting, in particular, parents encounter new feelings of guilt, a sense of always falling short, because they are supposed to seek professional advice or become professionals themselves. Beck (1992) makes a similar point towards this feeling of parenting insecurity. This parental insecurity increases the feeling of parental responsibility, which means parents will do whatever it takes to ensure their children are able to expand their competences, capabilities, talents, etc. in order to develop the best outcomes for their children (Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012).

1.1 “Good-enough” parenting?

The concept of “good enough parenting” was introduced by Winnicott, by which he wanted to recognize that it is dishonest to demand perfection of parents and that “the vast majority of parents […] are in all practical respects “good enough” to meet their children’s needs”
The above-mentioned critiques give rise to the question of what experts and policymakers consider as 'good' parenting. According to Ward and Wessels (2013) “good parenting is responsive” (p. 62). In that way that parents need to be consistent in what they are doing. What is considered to be viewed as 'good' parenting has evolved the last decades, but frequently, the assumption that there ought to be universally accepted ‘good’ parenting strategies have been put to the question (Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012). Cameron (2007) cites Hume, Hubberstey and Rutman (2007). They say that 'good' parenting practices “are culturally defined and influenced, and are rooted in the belief systems that define the culture” (Cameron, 2007, p. 5). Furedi (2002) is rather skeptical with regard to the self-evident interpretation of 'good' parenting. He writes: “traditionally, good parenting has been associated with nurturing, stimulating and socializing children. Today it is associated with monitoring their activities. An inflated sense of risk prevails, demanding that children should never be left on their own... Permitting youngsters to be home on their own after school is presented as an act of parental irresponsibility” (Lee et al., p. 5). This approach of what constitutes 'good' parenting suggests that there is a strong focus in contemporary literature on the parenting role and its corresponding parenting styles (Nys, 2010).

1.2 Parenting styles

Studies that got involved into parenting styles have become influential into the exploration of how parenting might influence the development of children’s social and cognitive competences (Darling, 1999). As a psychologist Diana Baumrind began her research on parenting styles and thus has affected many individuals from a wide range of disciplines. Her work is widely recognized as the leading typological approach to parenting by researchers, students, practitioners and parenting educators (Larzelere, Morris, & Harrist, 2013).

Baumrind’s (1967) original typological approach contains three parenting styles: the authoritarian, the permissive and the authoritative style. Each parenting style is associated with specific behaviors and parental characteristics which are often examined through two dimensions: responsiveness (e.g. nurturance) and demandingness (e.g. control). The authoritarian style consists of low responsiveness and high demandingness. Authoritarian parents are using coercive tactics to direct child behavior (Baumrind, 1967; Larzelere, Sheffield Morris, & Harrist, 2013). The strict discipline and control of authoritarian parents results in insufficient nurturance and where physical punishment is lurking. These parental characteristics may contribute to behavior problems (Power & Chapeski, 1986) and may hinder the development of children’s independence (Baumrind, 1967). The permissive style is contrary with the latter, which means parents provide high levels of responsiveness and
low levels of demandingness (Larzelere, Morris, & Harrist, 2013). Permissive parenting is characterized by unclear boundaries, non-punishment and a lack of control and discipline (Baumrind, 1967). In contrast to authoritarian and permissive parenting, the authoritative parenting style imposes high levels of responsiveness as high levels of demandingness (Larzelere, Morris, & Harrist, 2013). This parenting style has been shown to be a predictor of positive child behavior outcomes (Jackson, Brook-Gunn, Huang & Glassman, 2000; Roberts, 1989; Baumrind, Larzelere & Owens, 2010). For this reason, adolescents should fare better when their parents are authoritative. As Sorkhabiand Mandara (2013) express it, “Children with authoritative parents are more competent, better adjusted emotionally, higher achieving, and less likely to use illicit drugs or engage in other risky behaviors compared with those with non-authoritative parents” (Larzelere, Morris, & Harrist, 2013, p. 113).

1.2.1 De-contextualization of parenting (styles)

What is worth drawing attention to is the fact that most research into parenting styles have been conducted with a focus on American, European white middle class population (Phoenix & Husain, 2007). This initiates that Baumrind’s parenting styles are approached from a ethnocentric stance which did not consider the social and cultural context in which a particular parenting style is predominant, for example, the authoritative style in most Western societies (Chao, 1994). Ramaekers and Suissa (2012), uttered their criticism towards this de-contextualization of parenting and the classification of parenting styles. They suggest that specific ways of relating to and interacting with children could possibly not be translated into a particular ‘parenting style’ and thus, advising parents to master the authoritative parenting style is therefore just a reflection of a socio-cultural context in which people decide whether certain relations are valued in either positive or negative ways (Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012). Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, and Dornbusch (1994) share the same opinion particularly about the suggestion that assigning a parent to a specific and single style has been criticized extensively.

However, general tendencies in parenting styles have been found across cultures and socioeconomic classes, one of these is that parents in a lower socioeconomic class tend towards an authoritarian style (Hoff, Laursen & Tardif, 2002). When discussing authoritarian parenting, however, it can be observed that the outcomes can display cross-cultural differences (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates & Pettie 1996; Phoenix and Husain, 2007). This can be explained by the fact that certain parenting actions acquire a different meaning in different social circumstances and thus generate diverse effects. Connected to this idea, Chao’s (1994) study into the parenting styles of Asians notes that the concepts of authoritarian and authoritative are somewhat ethnocentric, for example, to Asians the
The connotation of ‘authoritarian parents’ differs from European Americans. Where Asians associate the authoritarian style with concerned parents and define this style as caring, European American parents might consider this parenting style as controlling. In addition, several studies have shown that there are ethnic group differences when it comes to the use of physical punishment, which is a practice linked to the authoritarian parenting style (Bradley, Corwyn, McAdoo & Garcia-Coll, 2001; Kelley, Power & Wimbush, 1992). These researchers have reported a greater use of physical punishment/discipline within the African American culture of parenting than this is the case in other ethnic minority groups in the US.

1.2.2 Cultural influences on parenting

The relevance of understanding upbringing in its ethnic and cultural context has been emphasized more and more by researchers (Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999). The notion of culture “is the expectation that different peoples possess different values, beliefs, and motives and behave in different ways” (Segall, 1986, p.542). These certain values, beliefs and motives are passed on through childrearing practices (Keshavarz and Baharundin 2009). As mentioned by Grusec and Goodnow (1994) parents can apply various childrearing approaches at different times and under specific conditions or circumstances.

In his work, cultural approaches to parenting, Bornstein (2012) cites a key element towards the culture-bound assumptions and generality/universality of parenting of the dominant, nevertheless limited, Western approach towards parenting practices. Therefore, understanding how cultural beliefs, values and norms alter within and across parental environments would be beneficial in explaining the reasons for why parenting styles and parenting practices differ beyond unlike contexts (Coplan, Hastings, Lagacé- Séguin, & Moulton, 2002). Coplan and colleagues (2002) describe parental beliefs as the representation of parents’ patterns of thinking about their children, childrearing in general, and the way they see themselves in fulfilling the role as parents. To conclude, understanding the cultural context of a society is necessary to apprehend the differences in parenting styles and in that way it becomes clear that parenting and therefore parenting styles are socially constructed which simply refutes Baumrind’s (1967) model of universal typologies (Keshavarz and Baharundin 2009).

2 Parenting in context

‘Poor environment’ theories state that parenting practices are not solely affected by the personal beliefs of parents but is influenced by the neighborhood environment as well (Katz, Corlyon, La Placa & Hunter, 2007). In similar lines, Ramaekers and Suissa (2012) find it important to point out that the quality of children’s lives can’t be reduced to the upbringing
skills of the parents, simply because there are many other factors that can exert a major influence, such as the environmental circumstances. The importance of the context itself can be stressed here; parents may have to adapt their parenting style in response to the environment in which they have to raise their children (Kotchick and Forehand, 2002).

To the outside observer these practices seem to be inadequate where as they are in fact the result of a necessary adjustment (Katz, et al., 2007). Fieldwork by Furstenberg (1993) summarizes it shortly, “where parents live affects how they manage their children” (p. 254). Kotchick and Forehand (2002) distinguish three contextual factors that can affect parenting: ethnicity or culture, the socio-economic status of families, and neighborhood or community. Several studies have indicated that the context has an extensive influence on the formation of particular parenting styles, strategies or practices (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002; Lee et al., 2014). Kotchick and Forehand (2002) argued that living in dangerous or impoverished environs can be associated with restrictive parenting practices and due to this context children may experience lower levels of maternal warmth and affection. Kelley, Power and Wimbush (1992) agree on this subject and argue that the social and economic disadvantages create conditions where a more authoritarian style is generally agreed up on in order to conserve children from dangers, which may be present in their neighborhood, and assure their chance of survival and achievement.

Although authoritative parenting has often been assigned as the dominant perspective of ‘effective’ parenting, this perspective, however, does not always prove to have benefits for children from ethnic minority families (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts & Dornbusch, 1994; Chao, 1994). Previous research assumed that certain ways of parenting have been found to be exceptionally adjustable for children growing up in impoverished environments or dangerous neighborhoods, high expectations with regard to obedience and respect for authority, high levels of discipline and parental control are examples of these (Brody & Flor, 1998; Brody, Dorsey, Forehand, & Armistead, 2002). The assumption that authoritative parenting strategies should allocate more autonomy to children has been found to be destructive in such settings, by Lamborn, Dornbusch and Steinberg (1996). Kotchick and Forehand (2002) marked that despite the contributions of several studies, the factors that shape parenting itself are rather unknown, especially factors such as community risks and resources, neighborhood quality, poverty, and cultural or ethnic background. They continue to describe that in that connection, it is important to understand the broader context when one endeavors to measure, classify or modify parenting strategies and parenting behavior, just for this reason that the conditions of the environment can be decisive for the effectiveness of certain parenting practices (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002).
reasoning it could be interesting to create a subdivision between risk- and protective factors that may have their influence on parenting.

2.1 Risk factors in upbringing

A key concept that prevails in the research into parenting and family support has been that of risk and the ‘at-risk’ family. Research has shown that risk factors are variables that are assumed to undermine parenting skills and the ability to cope with the difficulties inherent to upbringing (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Lee et al., 2014). The ‘at-risk’ family refers to parents who experience frank difficulties in their childrearing practices. Harden and Koblinsky (1999) noted that children are at risk psychologically, cognitively and physically when factors on the family, the community or the societal level are stressful or disrupting. For example, Garbarino and Kostelnny (1992) write that living in an impoverished environment characterized by high concentrations of poor families and high levels of social and environmental problems has frequently been cited as a risk factor (Garbarino & Kostelnny, 1992).

Also the absence of social support or a deficit of support is defined as a risk factor for parenting difficulties, including child abuse (Belsky & Vondra, 1989). Parents that live in low-income communities have to deal with poverty, community violence, illicit drug- and alcohol abuse and the consequences of social isolation which increases the chance for parents to experience stress (Brooks-Gunn, Klebanov, & Duncan, 1996). The high rates of environmental risk factors make at-risk families more vulnerable to poor parenting practices and more likely it has a bad influence on the development of the child (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997; Wessel, 2005).

2.2 Protective factors in upbringing

Hermanns (1995), emphasized that being a parent is a condition that will continue to operate under many different circumstances. Parenting will continue under the presence of protective factors such as a supportive relationship with a spouse or partner, help from friends and relatives and a close social network (Ghate & Hazel, 2002), which can all function as buffers so families can achieve psychosocial success, in the end (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993). In addition, social support can act as a ‘stress buffering factor’ as well as a protective or preventive factor that has been linked with greater contributions to parenting (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Osofsky & Thompson, 2000; Belsky & Vondra, 1989). A relatively large body of research has been conducted with regard to the availability of emotional and instrumental support to parents and most of the results concluded that there is a positive correlation between social support and positive parenting (e.g., Burchinal, Foller, & Bryant, 1996; Klein et al., 2000).
2.2.1 Social support

As noted, social support and social networks in particular, have a compelling influence on the parenting style and therefore the presence of social support influences the coping strategies of parents as well (Ghate & Hazel, 2002). Ghate & Hazel (2002) distinguish three types of social support: informal social support, semi-formal social support and formal social support. Informal support arises from pre-existing personal social networks such as family, household, peer group and community (e.g. neighbours, community groups). A lack of support at this level has been associated with poor parenting skills and parenting difficulties (Osofsky & Thompson, 2000). Families of poor environments often appear to suffer from social isolation and therefore lack general community support. Research suggests that this may have a negative impact on childrearing (Vondra, 1990). Semi-formal support can be seen as complementary to informal support and is defined as organized help or support provided for families and children. Formal support on the other hand is provided by large organizations and includes the services arranged by professionals, usually in response to a specific and referable need. To what extent social support in poor environments might have its importance in enhancing parents’ upbringing skills has been sorted out by several researchers (Belsky & Vondra, 1989; Thompson, 1995; Ghate & Hazel, 2002). As argued by Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000), at-risk families are less likely to have access to formal support and other social networks that advice wealthy parents in their parenting practices and skills.

3 Parenting Training Programs

The last decade, as stated by Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001), parenting programs have gained more general interest. According to Furedi (2008) this is due to an increasing trend towards linking social problems to childrearing practices. This ensures that parenting can’t be seen as a solely private concern but instead as a matter that concerns the whole society (De Winter, 2011). This hypothesis led to a progress of early intervention activities, proactive work and prevention interferences (De Mey, Cousséé, Vandenbroeck & Bouverne-De Bie, 2009). Therefore, as mentioned by Richter and Andresen (2012), parenthood has become a focus of political attention throughout our modern welfare-state societies.

Consequently, many programs have been elaborated that are aimed at enhancing parents in their ability to parent, in the hope that outcomes for children may ultimately be improved (Halpenny et al., 2009; Moran et al., 2004; Ghate & Hazel, 2002). Parenting programs are comprehensive for that reason that it includes a widespread variety of underlying philosophies, viewpoints and ideas and various theoretical frameworks with a specific mission and vision (Butler, 2015). If we speak about parenting programs then we refer to the
educational aspect of the training, in which parents receive support and where the program attempts to enhance the parenting skills (Tully, 2009). Wade, Macean, Falkiner, Devine & Mildon (2012) defined the concept of parenting programs as cited in Butler (2015), “Parent or parenting interventions, programs or services in which parents, caregivers or guardians receive direct/targeted education, training or support. The overall objective of the program is to improve child outcomes either by increasing the parent’s knowledge, skills or capacity as a caregiver, or by improving parent-child interactions, parent outcomes such as parent wellbeing, or family outcomes such as family relationships” (p.7).

Based on the substantial body of research, parenting programs have been considered to be the most influential and cost-effective interferences that are present to support parents in improving their parenting skills (Sanders, Calam, Durand, Liversidge & Carmont, 2008). Not only parenting education and parenting classes are aimed to do this, the last decade parenting manuals and parenting guides have been published to support parents in their daily interactions with children (Lee et al., 2014). At this point it is interesting to take note of the increasing dependence of parents towards education experts which has been problematized more and more recently (De Winter, 2011). For example Ramaekers and Suissa (2010) question the professionalization of parenting nowadays. Such an approach may lead to the idea that there is only one correct interpretation of the act of parenting and parents therefore need to be professionalized and learn to act the ‘right way’. Nevertheless, the way that parents perceive the upbringing of their children does not necessarily coincide with how this relationship is regarded by others (EXPOO, 2011).

However, if we look at previous studies in which the several benefits parents experienced from taking part in a parenting training program were documented (e.g. in Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2001; Coren, Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2003), this suggests that parenting programs can create the opportunity to support parents effectively. There is a growing commitment towards the delivery of evidence based parenting programs which are established on empirical statements that prove the effectiveness of a parenting support program (Butler, 2015). Numerous studies exist that reveal positive outcomes for parents in parenting interventions (Moran, Ghate, & van der Merwe, 2004; Buntling, 2004; Coren, Barlow, & Stewart-Brown, 2003).

The study of Coren, Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2003), for example, presented significant evidence that group based parenting programs had a positive impact on the mother’s self-esteem on the long run and ensured a better relationship with her partner on short term basis. Another qualitative study, on the Webster-Stratton parenting program, was discussed by Patterson, Mockford and Stewart-Brown (2005). According to these researchers the
benefits of this parenting program could be found in parents having developed parenting skills which resulted in a more rewarding relationship with their children. Their research also showed that parents profited from social support of other participants that share the same concerns (Patterson, Mockford & Stewart-Brown, 2005). Further, in the study of Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) parents expressed various reasons concerning their attendance, such as the necessity to establish new ways of dealing with the demanding behavior of children and the opportunity to interact with other parents in order to exchange ideas. The latter finding has also been confirmed by Hallam, Rogers and Shaw (2004). In their study eight out of ten parents mentioned they were looking forward to interrelate and share ideas with other parents. Also, the study of Patterson et al., (2005), documented that as a positive consequence of the cooperative support of other group members, parents uttered the wish for the training to continue on a long term basis.

In contrast, other studies suggests that when parenting programs are aimed at families with low socioeconomic status these have few positive results (Miller & Prinz, 1990; Tolan & McKay, 1996; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1990), whereas research has shown that similar programs aimed at non at-risk populations do indeed have success. An important thought to take into account is the notion that a large amount of these parenting programs were developed in a certain context and were then implemented in different contexts afterwards (e.g. Triple P in South Africa). Thus, most of the support programs that arose were elaborated by western organizations that carried out a western approach towards parental support or tried to adapt their implementation to the local setting (De Mey & Vandenbroeck, 2014). As Gorman and Balter (1997) point out, research about parenting programs that are conducted in non-western societies is not always representative. In similar lines, Evans et al., (2008) utter their concern about this and state that “[..] too often program developers or funders select a program model that has worked successfully in some other place and set about trying to adapt it to local needs” (p. 269).Also, Kotchick and Forehand (2002) wrote that the comparison of minority and majority ethnic groups entails the risk to portray the latter as the standard against which minority families are, often adversely, correlated.

As a result, culturally sensitive parenting programs became noteworthy (e.g. Gorman & Balter, 1997; Lau, Fung, Ho, Liu, & Gudiño, 2011; Dash, 2012). For example, research has shown that parenting trainings are more efficacious when the facilitators share the same cultural background as the contributors (Gonzalez, Ho, & Fox, 2007). Evans, Matola and Nyeko (2008), therefore, state: “rather than imposing western ideas about childrearing, programs for parents should be developed with parents through a dialogue that respects different views and allows different voices to be heard – valuing diversity and with an
openness to creating new knowledge and new ideas” (p. 277). So, programs with a specific attention for ethnic minority families, therefore, experience the need to meet the needs of these parents by utilizing cultural sensitive elements or inviting volunteers with the same cultural background as paraprofessionals in order to complement the parental needs (De Mey & Vandenbroeck, 2014).

Lastly, it is noteworthy that very few parenting programs are aimed at ethnic minority populations that utilize parenting programs (Cameron, 2007). Also Mejia, Salam and Sanders (2012) state the research on effectiveness of parenting programs in low-income countries are limited. While an extensive body of studies have been published according to the efficacy of parenting programs, effectiveness is repeatedly assessed through the use of quantitative standardized methods (Doubleday & Hey, 2004; Dash, 2012). Therefore, more qualitative research is needed as only few qualitative evaluations were undertaken (Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2001). Yet, as suggested by Barlow & Stewart-Brown, (2001) qualitative evaluations may obtain a deeper understanding of parents’ perceptions toward a parenting skills training. In analyzing the existing literature on parenting programs, I have found that most studies focus on the impact these have had on the child. In addition, there is a shortage of studies that focus primarily on the parents who participate in a parenting program (Cameron, 2007). Therefore this study may be a contribution to that shortage.

4 Summary

This review has highlighted that parents’ coping strategies and attitudes depend on the environmental circumstances in which parents need to raise their children. Accordingly, parenting is a social construction and is broadly determined by contextual factors (Bouverne-De Bie, 2002; Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2013; Osofsky & Thompson, 2000). Parents, therefore, need to be seen as members of a cultural, social and ethnic society, as pointed out by Ramaekers and Suissa (2012). These notions, once again, emphasize that parents reshape their parenting strategies depending on the contextual factors in the interest of maximizing children’s chances of success (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002; Katz et al., 2007). Thus, contextual factors take a pivotal position in the domain of parenting support programs, as stated by Nys and Vandemeulebroecke (2000).

A relatively large amount of research in parenting programs is targeted at ‘at-risk’ families, living in impoverished neighborhoods due to the growing attention for prevention (Ghate & Hazel, 2002). Most of these parenting programs were elaborated by western organizations and attempted to adapt their implementation to the local setting (De Mey & Vandenbroeck, 2014). However, various studies on parenting programs evidenced the positive impact
parents experienced (e.g. Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2001; Coren, Barlow, & Stewart-Brown, 2003; Patterson, Mockford, & Stewart-Brown, 2005). This in contrast with other studies, which suggest that when parenting programs are aimed at families with low socioeconomic status these have few positive results (Miller & Prinz, 1990; Tolan & McKay, 1996; Webster-Stratton, 1990).

Finally, this review indicated that there is a lack of qualitative data about the experiences and perceptions of parents who attended a parenting program (Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2001; Doubleday & Hey, 2004; Dash, 2012), as the evaluations of parenting programs are often addressed on the basis of quantitative data collection.

5 The SCORE Parenting Skills Training

This study is based on exploring parents’ perceptions on the SCORE Parenting Skills Training in Kitgum, Northern Uganda. Therefore, a brief introduction of the SCORE project and its Parenting Skills Training is desirable.

The SCORE program, “Sustainable, COmprehensive REsponses for Vulnerable Children and their Families”, is a five-year USAID-funded project implemented by a consortium of agencies: AVSI, TPO, CARE and FHI360, with AVSI as the main executive partner of the project. AVSI or the Association of Volunteers in International Service (AVSI) is an international non-governmental organization which was founded in 1972 in Italy and has been working in Uganda since 1984. The ultimate goal of AVSI lies in the mission to support global human development. Within AVSI there is special attention for vulnerable children and their families.

Therefore the SCORE program must be outlined. The main goal of the SCORE project is to decrease the vulnerability of critically vulnerable children (VC) and their households. The project aims to reach 25,000 households during the period of implementation. In this project 35 districts in 5 regions of Uganda are involved. To achieve this goal SCORE focuses on four essential objectives. These objectives are: “(1) to improve the socio-economic status of VC households; (2) to improve the food security and nutrition status of VC and their household members; (3) to increase availability of Protection and legal Services for VC and their household members; and (4) to increase capacity of vulnerable women and children and their households to access, acquire or provide critical services” (SCORE, 2013).

Within the SCORE project, the Parenting Skills Training Program provides the ultimate case study to explore parenting in context. The Parenting Skills Training can be placed under objective 4 and refers to the overall objective of SCORE to decrease the vulnerability of
children and their households. The caregivers are experiencing limitations in raising their children such as old age, single parenting, illness, lack in education, etc. In addition, these children are vulnerable because they are exposed to socioeconomic difficulties, the challenges of poverty and HIV/AIDS (AVSI, 2014). In order to build up the capacities of the parents/caregivers/guardians, this training empowers them to provide better care to their children. Therefore, the Parenting Skills Training will support parents by improving their parenting practices, attitude and knowledge. A pre-training parenting assessment is carried out by the facilitators in order to enroll parents into the training. This first acquaintance enables the facilitator to focus on each participant and his or her individual needs during the training.

The overall goal of the Parenting Skills Training is that, through increased parenting knowledge, parents have improved their attitude and skills which inevitably will lead to improved child wellbeing. The program aims “to equip parents with parenting skills in order to help them understand who they are, appreciate their children as they are, together with the challenges they will face and consequently how to adopt good parenting behavior, values, skills and attitudes that will enable them to accompany their children to maturity” (AVSI, 2014, p. 12). To pursue this objective, a Parenting Skills Manual was constructed in order to support and train the staff of SCORE and community volunteers. This manual consists of five modules: 1) Appreciating the parenting responsibility, 2) Appreciating your child, 3) Parent-child relationship, 4) Raising your children with positive discipline, and 5) Authoritative parenting; A positive approach. Each module takes about eight hours and focusses on specific aspects which are inherent to parenting. The entire training takes about forty hours and would take about eight weeks on average. The methodology that is spread in the sessions makes use of various “Active Learning Methods such as role-plays, discussions, surveys, games, quizzes, movies and other activities” (AVSI, p. 14-15). An emphasis of the manual refers to the formation of parenting groups that enables the participants to interact freely with other individuals who share the same fundamental concerns. Usually, these parenting groups consist of 25 to 30 parents. The staff uses a multi-sectoral, family-centered approach in order to reach several members of the household and beyond. The manual also suggests that the sessions must be modified to suit potential changing needs of parents. At the completion of the training, a post-training assessment is administered in order to evaluate the impact (AVSI, 2014).

6 Context of the study

This study took place in Kitgum, a district in the Northern Region of Uganda. As suggested by Evans, Matola, & Nyeko (2008) it is of great value to recognize the long term impact of the
political instability and wars in creating parenting programs in Uganda since family structures were negatively affected by it. Therefore the historical and political context of (Northern) Uganda will be outlined since it had an important influence on the current availability of humanitarian or development aid and social services.

6.1 Introduction of the historical and political context of Northern Uganda

The current conflict in Northern Uganda can be seen as a product of the colonial era in the 19th and 20th century (Kisekke-Ntale, 2007). In 1894, the British protectorate constructed a military and socio-economic division between the Northern region of Uganda and the Southern region of Uganda (Pham, Vinck, & Stover, 2009; Lindemann, 2011). In that way a conflictive relationship arose and escalated between two ethnic groups, namely the Bantu-speakers from the South and the Nilotic-language speakers from the North (Kisekke-Ntale, 2007). This discrepancy forced the Northern region into a position of marginalization, as the South profited much more access to a better organized political and economic system. These conditions created a context of continuous inconstancy in Uganda and confirmed a never ending sense of insecurity among its people (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999).

After Uganda gained its independence in 1962, both government as opposition coalitions followed in quick succession (De Temmerman, 2009; Finnström, 2008; Kisekka-N’Tale, 2007; Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999). The regimes of Milton Obote I (1966-1971), Idi Amin (1971-1979), Milton Obote II (1980-1985) and Okello (1985-1986) can be cited as the onset of the conflict, which to this day is palpable (Kisekke-Ntale, 2007). The conflict heated up when in 1986 the current president Museveni seized power in the Southern region and his National Resistance Army (NRA) targeted the Acholi tribe without remorse. From then on a new rebellious force, The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony, became increasingly important (Kisekke-Ntale, 2007). Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army began their struggle against Museveni with the support of the Northern Ugandan population, but lost this battle. This meant that few people voluntarily joined the rebel movement, which the LRA started in 1994 with several war strategies towards the population, including the violent abduction of people and children. Children were abducted and recruited massively in Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (De Temmerman, 2009). The attacks of the LRA caused a mass fied from the population to the Internally Displaced People's Camps however, this must be put into perspective since this is not always done on a voluntary basis. In 1999, to prevent the

---

1 The Acholi people reside in the districts Kitgum, Pader and Gulu, based in Northern Uganda. They are Nilotic-language speakers and are traditionally farmers (World Directory of Minority and Indigenous Peoples, 2005).

2 Protected refugee camps that were established in 1996 by the government to protect the population against the Ugandan LRA attacks (http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/Uganda).
situation from hitting crisis point again, the Ugandan government offered amnesty to all rebels who surrendered. Kony, however, refused this offer and the LRA continued their atrocities (De Temmerman, 2009). For over more than two decades, disputes between the government and rebel forces got out of hand, which led to the decease of over more than 300 000 people and up to two million people got internally displaced (Pham, Vinck, & Stover, 2009), which led to disrupted family structures. Also, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS has ensured that communities, and on the household-level, elderly and female-headed households are caring for orphans who have lost parents due to HIV/AIDS (Gelsdorf, Maxwell & Mazurana, 2012).

6.2 Social context in Uganda

6.2.1 Relationship between humanitarian and development aid

Jonathan Ernst (2013) writes that Uganda experienced an extreme expansion of international aid which formed a valuable contributor to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). He notes that “the ratio of aid-to-GDP increased from 1 per cent in 1980 to an average of 11 per cent revising 1990-2006, peaking at 19 per cent in 1992” (Ernst, 2013). According to Hinds (2015), the relationship between humanitarian and development aid is subject to various approaches. She mentions that in some literature reference is made to a specific time period where they perceive humanitarian aid as a time-based intervention in times of crisis and development aid has been seen as a reconstruction project that makes its entrance when times of crisis loses its impact.

6.2.2 Role of the NGO’s

In the past decades, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) played a significant role and started to have a compelling character in Uganda (Makara, sd). From the beginning of the colonial era up to the beginning of the 80’s there were few NGO’s that provided humanitarian aid in Uganda. Most of the NGO’s were dominated by local organizations that were often church related (Makara, sd). The preceding regimes before the victory of Museveni victory ensured that the possibility to organize freely without restriction was limited because the freedom of association was severely curtailed (Dicklitch & Lwanga, 2003). As a result of this restriction NGO’s could not conveniently be developed and those that could organize themselves were briefly held by the hand of the state (Makara, sd). With the arrival of power of Museveni and his National Resistance Movement in 1986 the NGO sector and civil society organizations expanded tremendously (Oloka-Onyango & Barya, 1997; Dicklitch & Lwanga,
This, after all, should be viewed from a critical stance as the NRM exclusively tolerates NGO’s with a focus on politically neutral projects.

Over the past few years, the attitude of state policy makers has changed into a more open-minded vision towards foreign aid and donors (Makara, sd). As a result of this evolved attitude, the appearance of NGO’s in public policy has inflated incredibly and whereby most forms of project-and program aid have been absorbed into the development sphere of the country (Riddell, 2008). However, domestic response is crucial for the overall effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in Uganda and has a significant role to play in a number of different situations, particularly when the presence of international organizations is relatively low. A record of the local NGO’s were entirely supported by international funds as their local resources of proceeds were nearly non-existent (Global Humanitarian Assistance, sd). Since international humanitarian aid has often been described as project-based, the central government wishes to improve its systems, structures and funds with regard to local community support. Therefore “the involvement of domestic actors should occur from the outset, rather than during the recovery phase when international agencies begin to leave” (Global Humanitarian Assistance, sd, p.8). Therefore, the PRDP and other initiatives of the government have been established.

6.2.3 Role of the Government

The Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP), is a comprehensive development plan with the purpose of recovery, reconstruction and development for Northern Uganda whereas two decades of conflict between the LRA and the Ugandan government left a great impact on many lives (Bertasi, 2013). The primary aim of the PRDP I (2009-2012) was the stabilization of the northern regions by focusing on four objectives in order to fight poverty and improve their welfare: 1) Consolidation of State Authority, 2) Rebuilding and Empowering Communities, 3) Revitalization of the Economy and 4) Peace Building and Reconciliation. A second PRDP Plan (2012-2015) was conducted to build on the comprehensive framework established under the first phase of PRDP (Bigirimana, 2012). According to Gelsdorf, Maxwell and Mazurana (2012), “a good deal of data exists on the problems facing the Greater North, but little on what works to build resilient households and communities”. This study suggests that reference could be made to objectives 2 and 3 as many NGO’s linger here and therefore the SCORE Parenting Skills Training is a reflection of an initiative that focuses on the strengthening of communities by bringing them together.

The Northern Uganda Social Action Fund Project (NUSAF) is an example initiative of the government under the PRDP in order to empower communities in Northern Uganda. The
project consist of four components that enables the implementation of sustainable development initiatives and enhances plans for communities and their needs since socio-economic services and opportunities need to be improved. The aim of NUSAF was to fight poverty through four approaches. The vulnerable group support approach, which focusses on vulnerable groups and NGO’s (The World Bank Group, 2016), is designed to provide support for those who are affected by conflict the most, for example, female headed households, children and youth, people who are infected with HIV/AIDS, foster parents, persons with disabilities (Robinson, 2005). Activities that can be accommodated in this approach are the expansion of training facilities, services that provide support for female headed households, the intention of strengthening the capacities of NGO’s (Robinson, 2005).
Chapter 2: Methodology

1 Research statement

Despite the proven significant evidence regarding parent training programs, researchers have addressed a gap in the existing literature in which they noted several limitations (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson & Brotman, 2004). One of those restrictions is that the development and valuation of parenting programs were initially based on white middle-class parents and families (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson & Brotman, 2004). Thus, as stated by De Mey and Vandenbroeck (2014), most of the support programs that arose were elaborated by western organizations that carried out a western approach towards parenting/parental support or tried to adapt their implementation to the local setting. On a small scale, research paid limited attention to the evaluation of parenting programs in a broader context in which parents from a diverse cultural background participated. Nevertheless, several researchers indicated that parenting is a social construction and that contextual factors take a pivotal position in the domain of parenting support (Kotchick and Forehand, 2002; Lee et al., 2014; Nys & Vandemeulebroecke, 2000). While there is available research referring to the positive impact of parenting programs, data is frequently measured in a quantitative way. Consequently, research that embraces a qualitative evaluation approach towards parenting programs is scarce. In that way that there is a lack of information on the experiences of how parents truly feel about attending definite parenting programs and whether these parents experience any changes or benefits from their participation.

This study will consider parenting or a parenting program in its specific cultural context, in this case in rural Northern Uganda. Further, this study intends to obtain a deeper understanding of parents’ perceptions following attendance in a parenting training program. In addition, this study explores the impact a parenting intervention has on Ugandan caregivers and their families. Literature has proved the importance of the context in which parenting occurs, therefore the SCORE Parenting Skills Training provides an interesting case study.

1.1 Research question(s)

The proposed research question of this study is; how did parents perceive the SCORE Parenting Skills Training? This question is examined through four more specific questions: 1) What motivates parents to participate? 2) What benefits or thresholds did parents experience during the program or after completing the program? 3) What is the degree of
impact of the project on the level of the community, family and child? 4) Does the project have an impact on the broader social context in which the community takes place?

2 Research procedure

Organizations who provide the parenting skills training in Kitgum are Aid Care Education and Training (ACET), Kitgum Concerned Women Association (KICWA), Kitgum Women Peace Initiative (KIWEPI) and Meeting Point. After consultation with partners from AVSI, I decided to partner with community workers of Meeting Point in order to get in touch with the parenting skills training and the involved parents. Meeting Point Kitgum is an organization that initially provided emotional and psychological support for those affected by HIV-AIDS. Later on, the organization expanded its services and began to express their concerns towards orphans and vulnerable children (OVC’s) and their households. This was the beginning of SCORE, Sustainable Comprehensive Response to OVC’s and their households, a program that provides counseling and offers projects in order to decrease the vulnerability of those households. One of those projects is the SCORE Parenting Skills Training.

2.1 Participants

2.1.1 Sample characteristics

I was introduced in two different parenting groups by one of the male facilitators of the Parenting Skills Training. Fifteen to twenty parents in each group were present at that moment and attended the program and all those parents were willing to cooperate. My obligation was that the participants should have had completed the Parenting Skills Training within the last year. After my introduction, the facilitator gave me about 25 names of the willing parents which were randomly chosen out of those parenting groups I met earlier that day. The next step entailed individual house-visits of the potential participants together with the interpreter. Those individual house-visits gave the researcher and the interpreter the opportunity to meet the parent in person, introduce themselves and outline the characteristics of the study. Overall, we were able to connect with 21 of the parents of which 20 were willing to cooperate. One parent was not keen to participate because her time was limited. Unfortunately, we were incapable of reaching the other four parents. The reason for this was that we could never meet these participants at home.

2.1.2 Participants’ characteristics

The twenty (n=20) participants who contributed in this study were aged between 23 and 72 years (M = 44.25; SD = 11.18). Out of the twenty participants that joined this study, eighteen were female and two were male. The most common professions among the women is either
farming, being in business (market seller), plaiting hair or brewing the local beverage. They all claimed this is their way to earn money without being employed anywhere. Both of the men are employed at a company where they fulfill a specific role; one male participant is a driver and one a casual worker. Twelve participants are raising their children as a single parent, and eight are still married. All the participants are taking care of their biological children, as well as they are taking care of other dependents, and that marks that they have on average 6 to 7 children each.Most of these dependents are family related (sister passed away or daughter passed away) but in four cases they are taking care of children who initially were not part of the family or not even from a friend. The participants reside in four sub counties of Kitgum and relate to the two parenting groups parents were randomly chosen from: Ginnery (n=2), Corner Alango (n=9), East Warel Quarters (n=5) and Gangdyang (n=4).Currently, all the participants join other group projects of the SCORE program but they completed the Parenting Skills Training this year (n=17), in 2014 (n=2) and in 2013 (n=1). There were no major variances explored between these three.

2.2 Method of data collection

With the aim to explore parenting and parenting programs in a broader context and specifically parent’s experiences with regard to the SCORE Parenting Skills Training based in Kitgum, the research questions of this study were addressed through qualitative methods. Primarily semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted in September and October of 2015. All the participants were interviewed individually which often is “appropriate for exploring sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about such issues in a group environment”(Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008, p. 292). In addition, I obtained participant observations during and after the interview “as it can help in data analysis process” (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008, p. 293). The interviews were conducted by a Belgian student, the main interviewer, and by an interpreter who operated as a second interviewer. Aware of the positions the interviewers were in, a visit at the participants’ home was essential and moreover an opportunity to create familiarity among everyone. By taking an ’emic’ perspective, in other words, by exploring the perceptions of participants being studied by implementing ‘their frames of meaning’, the researchers should sustain “[…] empathic neutrality whereby the researcher uses personal insight while taking a non-judgemental stance” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 4). To assure the participants’ free will of participation the purpose of the study was delineated once again, and (in most cases) confirmed the voluntary choice of the participant to be a contribution to the research. Those confirmations led to actual interview appointments wherein the participants were the directors of their own timetable.Although, I have encountered difficulties as a researcher in this regard
since participants often forgot the appointment for the interview or other matters had surfaced. So, as a reminder and reconfirmation of their engagement, participants were phoned a day ahead in order to increase the accessibility, compliance with the interview and to prevent disappointment. In addition, we left the respondents the choice where they wanted the interview to take place which creates a context of familiarity and may result in a relaxed atmosphere and consequently leads to a more fruitful interview (Gill et al., 2001). Most interviews took place at the participants' home (N= 17), others preferred to be interviewed at their workspace (market, N=2; factory, N=1). Practical issues were experienced here as well as a number of occasions such as, background noise from children and quarrel between people during the interview became a challenge as it impeded me in my concentration. Finally, all participants were informed about the practical facets of the interview, such as the availability of an interpreter which increases their ability to express themselves in any way they prefer, and the potentiality of audio taping the entire interview.

2.2.1 Design of the interview protocol

The design of the interview protocol was reviewed by two Belgian researchers. The resulting comments and instructions were taken into account and adjustments were processed afterwards. Before the actual interviews took place I took the time to delineate the guide together with the interpreter in order to prevent misunderstandings in connotations. Eventually, misunderstandings were transformed into clarifications. As Gill and colleagues (2001) put it "it is prudent for the interviewer to familiarise themselves with the interview schedule" (p. 293). Therefore, the first interview functioned as a (potential) pilot test in order to determine whether there were flaws, limitations, or other imperfections within the interview protocol (Turner, 2010). This test allowed both interviewers to make necessary alterations prior to conduct of the study (Turner, 2010). Few changes were made in terms of wording as well as in the reconstruction of questions and by utilizing Creswell’s (2007) suggestion, I was able to create follow up questions in order to extract more valuable information I needed from the interview.

In the first and introductory phase, both interviewers introduced themselves briefly, shared the purpose of this study and delineated how the interview would proceed. To guarantee the participants’ confidentiality, the interviewers also outlined how the collected data would be processed and analyzed. On the basis of this preliminary phase, the participant was given another chance to give his/her consent and agreement to participate in this study. Following his or her permission the informed consent was explained where more attention was given.

---

3 The Interview Protocol can be found in content of appendices, B.
4 The informed consent can be found in content of appendices, A.
about confidentiality and the existing possibility to audio tape the entire interview. After addressing that profound information, the actual interview commenced with some relevant notes about the socio-demographic background of the participant such as; sex, age, profession, current (marital) status, number of children the participant is taking care of and his or her kinship towards all household- members and when they finished the Parenting Skills Training. How parents believe their childhood history affected them as a parent and how they raise their children now, was a preparation for continuing with other connecting themes throughout the interview. In total, seven themes were identified, including; (1) the participants’ definition and meaning of being a parent (2) attendance in the parenting skills training (3) experienced advantages/ disadvantages (4) the new parenting style (5) the training and its impact on group/ community level (6) the training and its impact on the personal level, and last but not least (7) recommendations for further improvement. We ended the interview with the interest in how the participant experienced the interview and whether he or she wanted to share ideas with us or wanted to add anything else.

2.3 Method of analysis

2.3.1 Data transcription

Each interview was recorded and transcribed in its entirety by the main interviewer. As noted by McLellan, MacQueen and Neidig (2003) all transcriptions should consider omissions, mispronunciations, slang words, grammatical errors and should take into account nonverbal communication and background noises. In the current study both interviewers attempted to pay attention to all these issues. During or after each interview observations and remarks were written down to regulate this process slightly more. Overlapping speech, incomplete sentences and poor audiotape quality due to loud background noises were one of the challenges the main interviewer had to face during the transcription of the interviews (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). In order to resolve gaps in the transcripts, they were reviewed together with the second interviewer and complemented or edited where needed. This provides the study with a more accurate account of each interview.

2.3.2 Data analysis

A thematic analysis was used as a qualitative approach to analyze the data in this study. First, the twenty interviews conducted were transcribed into written form, word for word. The interviews were conducted by the researcher herself which led to a first initial familiarity with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Second, on the basis of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) directions on carrying out a thematic analysis, following steps were taken into account: 1) Familiarizing oneself with the data, 2) Generating initial codes, 3) Searching for themes, 4)
Reviewing themes and 5) Defining and naming themes. By the use of a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), particularly the software package NVivo, interesting aspects in the data or common patterns were coded. Following the initial coding potential themes were formed. The collection of these potential themes systematically were refined and altered into official main themes and sub-themes.

The method of analysis chosen for this study incorporated an inductive or a ‘bottom up’ approach which is being used to link themes strongly to the research data itself (Patton, 2002). Braun and Clarke (2006) utter a note of criticism towards this approaches “[…] this form of thematic analysis is data-driven. However, it is important to note […] that researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (p. 13).

2.3.3 Social constructionist approach and concept of reflexivity

When one wants to evaluate parenting programs, too often their effectiveness is emphasized from an empirical and positivist perspective. This study focusses on the exploration of opinions of parents after they have attended a parenting program, and therefore the researcher’s qualitative approach is based on the epistemological position of social constructionism.

Burr (2015) suggests that ways of understanding and meaning are historically and culturally relative. For instance, notions of parenting of what is right and wrong have been subject to change and can differ among cultures. Therefore, we should not assume that one way of understanding is better than another. Then, she continues with the assumption that “[…] it is through daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated”, which indicates that knowledge is formed by social interaction (Burr, 2015, p. 4). This may mean that, for example, parents’ perceptions of parenting programs, to a great extent, may be influenced by people, communities and the broader society around them. To finish, the relationship between knowledge and social action refers to the assumption that each social construction invites various ways of action from individuals (Burr, 2015). So by way of example, with reference to this study, the constructions made by parents about parenting and parenting programs will inevitably influence their response to them.

This social constructionist framework enables the researcher to adopt a reflexive attitude whereby reflexivity refers to “an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the

---

5Epistemology refers to what constitutes valid knowledge and how we can obtain it (Van Niekerk, 2005)
construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining ‘outside of’ one’s subject matter while conducting research” (Willig, 2008, p. 10). I was not only a researcher, but also a student from Belgium and not yet a parent. This could have influenced the research data, not only in terms of the interpretations but also in the type of relationship that developed between the parents and myself. Most parents saw me as a student, a young woman, who has the goal of completing her studies with this research. One parent explicitly commented “you are a student… that is why we want to help you because you need that education”. Aware of the position I was in, I was concerned that these confidential relations may have influenced their responses during the interview. However, I saw this as a positive aspect as parents felt more at ease when they knew I did not have any professional bond with the organization of the Parenting Skills Training. So, when carrying out the results, I tried to be aware of my beliefs and my perception of things in life and by entering into a dialogue with others about this, I tried to provide a more trustworthy account of parents’ perceptions on the parenting program.

2.4 Ethical considerations

In the postmodern context, several disciplines have developed codes of ethics since “researchers are challenged with how to conduct and disseminate research in an ethical manner” (Marshall & Batten, 2003, p. 139). As noted by Flick (2009) those ethical considerations should not result in avoiding your research, but instead it should support you to do it “in a more reflective way and to take your participants’ perspective on a different level” (p. 43). Also, the researcher should be very much aware of his approach towards his participants when doing research across cultures, which implies the awareness of more ethically appropriate attitudes such as, acknowledging and integrating practices relevant to the participants’ culture and the connected community (Marshall & Batten, 2003). Flick (2009) refers to Murphy and Dingwall (2001) who discuss four subjects when it comes to ethical issues, namely:

- **Non-maleficence/beneficence**, stands for securing the participants’ well-being and producing positive and identifiable benefits for the participant and more the researcher should avoid harming the participants (Flick, 2009; Townsend, Cox & Li, 2010).

  Secondly, **autonomy or self-determination** as an ethical principle includes unconditional respect towards the values and decisions of the participant in the study (Flick, 2009). Respect for autonomy is conceptualized as informed consent. In this regard, Hewitt (2007) specified, “In the context of research, informed consent is an explicit agreement by participants to participate in the research after receiving and comprehending information regarding the nature of the research. Such consent is given without threat or inducement and
requires that participants have the mental capacity to give consent and voluntariness” (p. 1152). This study endeavored to outline the informed consent more than once to assure their complete voluntariness. By way of an example, in practice, there was a participant who decided not to join the study anymore after hearing the informed consent for the second time and became self-doubting. The decision was made to terminate the contact at that very moment and by expressing our gratitude for her time we left behind our contacts in case she would have changed her mind. The other willing participants were brought to knowledge concerning the structure of the interview with the assistance of the interpreter.

The last principle, Justice, comprises that everyone should be treated equally in research by providing participants a fair and unbiased dispersal of burdens and benefits (Flick, 2009; Hewitt, 2007; Townsend et al., 2010). According to Townsend and colleagues (2010) justice can be uttered by giving participants the opportunity to express their experiences and beliefs as in-depth interviews contribute to our understanding of particular meanings. In this regard, “dissemination of the qualitative findings also can be framed as a justice concern if participants give their time and share their experiences (which may be burdensome), with the understanding that they are contributing to a knowledge base to improve practice (which they may perceive as a benefit)” (p. 623). This study esteemed this principle by acknowledging the voices of the participants. For example and as clarified above, all participants had the opportunity to choose their own timetable out of respect for their daily routine. Also, toward the end of the interview, participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity and seemed to be aware of the potential benefits they could encounter with the help of their input.

Marshall and Batten (2003) discuss ethical issues in cross-cultural research and state that “Researchers need to be aware that there can be incongruence between their own views or theoretical frameworks and those of the group or culture in the research project. Where differences exist between researcher and participant, they must be respected, and care must be exercised to not project one’s own values onto the research process, nor judge a participant’s behavior that varies from one’s own culturally sanctioned standards (p. 142)

They continue with the recognition that it is of critical importance to be aware of the impact that cultural influences have on morals and values, opinions, believes and certain behaviors which must always be related to the context in which the participants are located (Marshall & Batten, 2003). This study honored this commentary by recognizing the probability for alterations in perceptions. Thus, respect for differing interpretations of the world are
noticeable matters for researchers working with participants from diverse cultural backgrounds (Marshall & Batten, 2003).

3 Quality in qualitative research

Over decades, the debate about quantitative and qualitative research in the social sciences was about judging the quality and meaning of both styles of inquiry (Bryman, 2003). The quantitative or positivist paradigm is a movement whereby researchers seek for causal determinism, prediction and generalization of outcomes, but that is not the case with the qualitative or interpretative paradigm (Golafshani, 2003). Qualitative research on the other hand “uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). Providing a precise definition for qualitative inquiry and its practice is not an easy task (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). For that reason that “a variety of conceptions of qualitative research exist, with competing claims as to what counts as good quality work” (Seale, 1999, p. 465). According to several scientists “better quality work is produced if a range of approaches and methods are considered and choices made according to the aims and context of the research” (Patton, 2002; Seale, 1999 as cited in Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013, p.2). Another concept of what constitutes quality in qualitative research, has to do with the attempt of the researcher to embrace his or her involvement and role within the research (Golafshani, 2003). In other words, the researcher should be the instrument, unlike the credibility in quantitative studies rely on instrument construction (Golafshani, 2003).

Seale (1999) explains that negotiations of quality in social research “began from concerns designated with words such as validity and reliability, developed within the quantitative or scientific tradition, and then moved on under the pressure of critique from the qualitative research community” (p. 465). In many articles, the issue of rigor or trustworthiness in relation to qualitative inquiry has been discussed throughout as it initially was a concept in quantitative inquiry (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Koch, 2006). With regard to the concept of rigor, a large part of the textbooks refer to the model of Lincoln and Guba (1985) which I will outline and discuss below.

3.1 Rigor

The above mentioned views set the tone, nonetheless it became clear that “the issues at stake in qualitative research are fundamentally different from those in quantitative research and require alternative terminology to describe different concepts” (Rolfe, 2006, p. 305). According to Sandelowski (1993) as cited in Rolfe (2006) “[…] the validity in qualitative studies should be linked not to ‘truth’ or ‘value’ as they are for positivists, but rather to
‘trustworthiness’ [...]” (p. 305). Subsequently, trustworthiness had been divided into four subdivisions by Lincoln and Guba (1985) namely: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability and (4) confirmability. To begin with, **credibility** refers to the self-awareness of the researcher instead of truth value and internal validity. Self-awareness could be improved when the researcher feels the desire to interpret his or her experience as a scholar (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Koch, 2006). **Transferability** refers to “the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings” (Trochim, 2006, Transferability, para.2), which, according to Guba and Lincoln, “depends on the degree of congruence between the ‘sending context’ within which research is conducted, and the ‘receiving context’ to which it is to be applied” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 268). **Dependability**, on the other hand, guarantees that the research outcomes are consistent and could be repeated repetitively (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To end with, **confirmability** questions to what extent the results could be established or validated by others (Trochim, 2006). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) confirmability, as one of the four aspects, is proven when credibility, transferability and dependability are reached (Koch, 2006).

Another concept within qualitative research is a generally accepted way to increase quality of a study, that is triangulation. Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) acknowledged four categories of triangulation: (1) methods triangulation, (2) triangulation of sources, (3) analyst triangulation and (4) theory/perspective triangulation. In this study, analyst triangulation was used to review findings by multiple observers in order to eliminate selective perception or appreciating various perspectives on the data which provides the researcher with more extensive and profound insights.
Chapter 3: Results

This chapter provides a presentation of the results found on the basis of the analysis of the data. The research findings that are drawn here provide a comprehension of parents’ interpretations and perceptions of their participation in the SCORE Parenting Skills Training. These new findings are necessary as they may give us clarity on the why-question of parents’ participation in the program but equally well what parents felt they got out of their contribution. Both main themes as sub themes are presented below and were formed on the basis of the interview protocol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Being a parent: What does it mean?</td>
<td>1.1 I want to be a role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Potential dangers: I am responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Who's responsible in the upbringing?</td>
<td>2.1 Two heads are better than one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 Mother plays key role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 Father?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Motives for getting involved</td>
<td>3.1 Willingness: I want to go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Knowledge: I want to know more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Get together: meeting new people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Experienced advantages or disappointments</td>
<td>4.1 Knowledge: I know more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.2 Contact with others: I can share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.3 What about sponsorship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The authoritative parenting style: how do I deal with it?</td>
<td>5.1 I am optimistic about the style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 Corporal punishment: I feel remorse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3 Advising others: a necessity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Togetherness: the strength of new relationships</td>
<td>6.1 Sharing, caring and loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2 Supportive friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.3 Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What impact did it have on me?</td>
<td>7.1 I feel more confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.2 Challenges: it hinders me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.3 I’ve seen my child change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Future program recommendations</td>
<td>8.1 The power of togetherness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.2 Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.3 The need for extension</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Being a parent: What does it mean?

Outgoing previous literature, parent’s personal perspectives on parenting seemed to be an interesting angle to start with. A wide range of meanings were given to the concept of parenting. Despite this variety of connotations, two concepts were frequently mentioned by parents as a starting point in the upbringing of children.

1.1 I want to be a role model

The first concept ‘being an exemplary’ was addressed by sixteen parents and for that reason a valuable finding. According to most parents, being an exemplary role model, is about giving good advice to the children by presenting good examples but also about caring and loving. Children are able to develop the knowledge between right and wrong by giving them directives throughout the process of parenting. These directives contain educational lessons, good information by handing out facts and examples drawn from life.

“Parenting is being a parent who can be an example for the children and do the right things. By giving them lessons and educating them by being respectful in life, caring and loving…to be good persons in life” (Female, 34 years)

“Me, I talk to my children by telling them not to do the wrong things. For example, I tell them not to steal, to avoid fornication, not commit adultery because they are mainly boys I am taking care of. So, if somebody is doing something wrong, I remember them all the time which things are wrong. That gives the child fear of committing the same behavior (Female, 63 years)

Further, four parents mentioned that a parent should not only be a role model to the young ones but to the entire community as well.

“You have to be tolerant in life, you should not go around when the husband died, like not hanging around with other men, or hanging around and go drinking. So parenting is being an exemplary to the young out there and the community at large” (Female, 45 years)

1.2 Potential dangers: I am responsible

Protecting children from violence and danger seemed to be another relevant theme, as eleven participants addressed this concern. Most parents feel completely responsible to keep their children away from danger. As mentioned by most parents, a first step in preventing this should be raising children in an environment that is free from domestic violence. Then again, results indicate that parents attribute the danger outside themselves because they refer to the potential threat in some neighborhoods and the potential to meet peers who can transmit a bad influence on the child.
“Me as a parent I share ideas with my children to not make them go in the neighborhoods. We stay together at home. By taking them to the garden they are busy and then they cannot meet the peers that can have a bad influence, like taking drugs and go to bars and watch videos among others” (Female, 38 years)

One participant described parenting as a person who has given birth to a child and again another parent made reference to parenthood as what god had planned somebody to be.

2 Who’s responsible in the upbringing?

2.1 Two heads are better than one

Opinions are divided when it comes to who is perceived as the most important caregiver in the upbringing. Thirteen participants seem to agree that both parents play a vital role in raising children. As reported by the parents, the advantages of having both a mother and a father include the fact that both caregivers can base their parenting on one common perspective, the sharing of responsibilities, the possibility of handling issues together, being able to give the child consistent information and doing things together as one family.

“Both the mother and the father because you have to have both hands in order to raise the child and so she or he can succeed in life” (Female, 37 years)

“Two heads are better than one….so both parents are responsible. They should have one goal, one way of raising. When I am gone, he is with the children and when he is away I’m in charge” (Female, 35 years)

Of which thirteen parents, five mothers have expressed how difficult they find it to make a run for the education of their children. They uttered their grief over the loss of their husband. According to those mothers, this loss is associated with negative aspects in the raising of children such as not being able to share ideas, experienced financial difficulties, the lack of love from both parents for the child.

“If both parents are there…there can be so many issues…but you can share it with each other. Now for me I am a single parent now… I lost my husband, so I have the responsibility to teach my children on all the aspects of life” (Female, 23 years)

Both of the parents are important, but I am alone now…so I try to manage. It is so difficult…I miss my husband. It is good to counsel within the house…because now I have to depend on the neighbors…they can even give the wrong information (Female, 49 years)

2.2 Mother plays key role

Although it is clear that most participants preferred both parents as most important caregivers, various reasons were addressed by six mothers, some of whom are single (N=5)
and married (N=1), why the **mother** should be seen as the key figure in the upbringing. The main reasons relate to the fact that the husband is often not at home due to his work commitments (N=2) or because the mother is the one in charge of the domestic affairs (N=2) and other causes such as the death of the father (N=4).

“It is the mother, because the husband is always up and down. He is never at home. It is me who spends most of the time with the children at home so it is very easy for a mother to know what a child is doing because she can easily monitor, here and there, and like the father he is never at home. He decides to leave early in the morning for work and comes back late at night when children are asleep.

So it is definitely the mother. Father cannot beat the level of the mother” (Female, 51 years)

“Definitely the mother…if I was the one who died and my husband was still living…my children would suffer more than they do now. He would not care for them, instead he would bring another woman for his pleasure” (Female, 46 years)

2.3 Father?

In contrast with the above, one participant (male) mentioned that the **father**, in his own way, also plays an important role in the raising of children.

“It is mainly the father because like for the boys, they are very stubborn and they need a man to handle them. Women can sympathize… so sometimes they are too kind to the children. On the other hand, their mother was a very tuff woman, she could beat seriously” (Male, 49 years)

3 Motives for getting involved

The thematic analysis regarding the motives of parent’s participation in the Parenting Skills Training Program can be distinguished in a number of themes.

3.1 Willingness: I want to go

As carried out by most participants (N=18) there is an overall feeling of appreciation for the opportunity to attend the training. Most of the participants were encouraged by facilitators who they had contact with in other programs of the SCORE initiative. Notions of **willingness** to participate such as, being able to join the training on a voluntary basis and a pronounced sense of happiness to be chosen for the program, were referred to by eighteen parents.

“It was God and an opportunity that came, so I am happy that I was chosen out of the many. We as parents have to give the best to our children. The spirit of willingness made me to go” (Female, 38 years)
“It is important for me to get the knowledge because it is important I am also human I need to understand how things are and I want more information to handle my children in a certain way” (Female, 23 years)

3.2 Knowledge: I want to go

Second, since ten participants indicated this subject, the chance of gaining new knowledge seemed to be the main motivation to partake. This implies pivotal new information on parenting skills and delineates how to handle the children. Further, obtaining new knowledge was a necessity, as five parents uttered their concern towards this matter.

“It is necessary because they give us new information and new ideas on how to handle our children. There are other mothers who don’t even know how to handle our children, or they handle them in a very rare way, like beating. It was necessary for us. I felt good because I personally I wanted it and love to work with children. I will be the first to attend so I like it” (Female, 36 years)

“I felt so good, because it has increased on my knowledge. People outside they give you wrong advice by saying your child is stubborn so you have to handle him or her in a very harsh way. But the way I compare it with the training, there they teach us to be humble, you have to handle that child in a humble way not in a rude way, like beating” (Female, 64 years)

3.3 Get together: meeting other people

Lastly, sixteen participants talked about the opportunity of connect with others and the benefits to share ideas with other members.

“It felt so good. Because I was going through other members and meeting other people I would get other ideas. I got happiness from the training, I shared ideas and they give me new knowledge about how to raise your children” (Female, 23)

In contrast, two participants expressed their skepticism about attending the parenting skills training.

“It does not feel good. It shows weakness in me. Show that I am a poor teacher and that’s why I don’t feel good about it” (Female, 38 years)

4 Experienced advantages or disadvantages

In this section, we will focus on the advantages or disadvantages experienced by the involved parents concerning the parenting skills training. First, the benefits will be outlined and logically the disadvantages will be discussed.
4.1 Knowledge: I know more

First, seventeen participants expressed their appreciation for the acquired new knowledge. Six parents mentioned that it is beneficial to obtain new information in order to increase parental skills such as, knowing how to talk to your child in a certain way, become more aware of which parenting style to use, paying attention to the different developmental stages a child is in and in that way to be able to mold the child's behavior.

“One benefit I got was… I have children in my home and before I was not an easy woman. I was tuff in making decisions. Now I know how to talk to my children because the training provided me with new knowledge on how to teach and talk to a child. In every child’s growth there are stages, the child has to go from one stage to another. The training provided me with new information on how to handle a child’s behavior” (Female, 36 years)

“The program has given us new knowledge. We do not fight in the house…it is not good. We know that we do not have to be brutal in order to improve a child’s behavior” (Female, 35 years)

4.2 Contact with others: I can share

Second, the opportunity to share ideas with their offspring, family, other group members, and neighbors is of great value as fifteen participants addressed this topic. Sharing ideas is about feeling free to address issues with other people about parenting or other challenges they face during parenthood.

“.The ideas we share is about education, the peer groups that can influence the children. We also share that information with the children” (Female, 72 years)

Further, sharing advice and ideas is seen as beneficial as it is not only experienced as supportive (N=8) but relieves parents from stress (N=12) as well. Most parents talked about the impact others had on releasing them from stresses through support and encouragement.

“It is supportive to us and to me as a parent. There are advices that the group can give. Sometimes you are stressed but if you can tell all those problems to group members, we can see a way forward together and we counsel. The challenges we are facing, the group can help to relieve from that stress” (Female, 36 years)

“The training relieves me from stress. That is one of the most important benefits for me. Also encouragement from others who also attend the training, we share ideas and we counsel and they support whenever you need” (Female, 72 years)
4.3 What about sponsorship?

With regard to the disadvantages, there are three participants that uttered their disappointment toward the program as it did not involve sponsorship which they nevertheless expected. They talked about sponsorship which could be a way of paying school fees for the children as this is also a part of parenting. This highlights the importance of not only transfer of knowledge, but also a need for material support.

“[…]but sponsorship is one of the things we thought they were going to consider because of the problem with paying school fees and with attending the program we thought they would consider it. Knowledge for the children, school fees are needed for the children. I expected some money in exchange for attending the training because it is also a part of parenting”(Female, 49 years)

5 The authoritative parenting style: how I deal with it?

This section contains the exploration of the diverse interpretations of parents concerning the authoritative style. In a first part we will explore how parents feel about the style and how they deal with it. Then, we will talk about changes parents could notice in their parenting. In general, the authoritative parenting style can count on a lot of appreciation as most parents explicitly mentioned that there is a noticeable difference between their initial style and the authoritative style.

5.1 I am optimistic about the style

To start with, seventeen participants appeared to have optimistic feelings towards the authoritative style and pointed out that it is a good style that has a great contribution because of the new imported knowledge which creates a form of knowhow (N= 8).

“Children have funny characters, that style anyway is very good because it helps you to handle so many issues. Sometimes you find your child quarreling with a fellow, maybe abusing and beating. Then it is not your job as a parent to shout at the child and beat him… no… you should put them down, both of them and intervene… ask them why they are doing what they are doing… and see the response. Then you solve their problems accordingly”(Female, 23)

Also aspects of love, respect and being close were mentioned by four parents as positive features of the authoritative style. Participants talked about the importance of staying together, respecting each other and taking responsibility.

“Once a child has done something wrong there is no need to be very rude to the child. You call the child and ask the child if she knows what she has done wrong. Wait for the answer. Then you give advice. It is important to still be close to the child. Because if you just beat and shout but don’t explain
why you are shouting then the child will not learn from its mistakes and he or she will run away”
(Female, 35 years)

A minority of the participants (N=3) uttered their disbelief in the authoritative parenting style.

“You can’t just stare at your child… you have to beat a bit… so the child listens… We were taught not to beat but children are very stubborn, so at least you have to beat little, as much as they do not want it, you don’t beat to kill but you beat to teach! The style…but it is difficult to adapt to… because I still think you first have to beat… it is a necessity… no child can go without beating” (Female, 35 years)

“I might think twice and say I am not going to beat… but it is on me whether to decide I will beat or not. The style is not really difficult but you have to beat a bit… I have tried to change my style… now I don’t beat that much… there is development” (Female, 34 years)

5.2 Corporal punishment: I feel remorse

Further, sixteen parents share the opinion that their former parenting style differs from the authoritative style. All of them make reference to the way they used to use some forms of corporal punishment.

“It has very big change on me as a parent. I was not an easy woman, I was tuff and hard and I would just shout on my children and beating was the order of the day but now when I attended the training it has changed my behaviors and character towards children because now I can call them and we talk out issues but not in the way I used to, not shouting, beating and sometimes abusing. So I felt good they advised me to attend” (Female, 38 years)

Seven participants referred to aspects of culture as an influencing factor of the usage of physical punishment.

“I always talk to the children first and point them to their boundaries. It has improved the way we handled the children. Because our culture it is not good. Their ears are in their buttocks. You have to beat the buttocks before it gets in the mind” (Male, 55 years).

“The style was very simple to adapt and the relationships it creates with the child. In our culture we shout a lot, so it is a good and embracing style for the child. The style is not brutal or hard. I like the style. Sometimes our style was really funny. Because you shout on the child but the child did not understood and if you talk peacefully the child will listen and in the future they will be good” (Female, 35 years)

The reduction of any form of corporal punishment seemed to be the most noticeable difference, as this was addressed by fourteen participants. This includes talking instead of shouting, negotiating instead of disagreement, intervention instead of ignorance. Two themes sprung up while talking about this subject. First, aspects of regret were mentioned by eight parents.
“Before if the children annoyed me, I picked a stick and I beat. Now, because of the new knowledge and the ideas I only talk to my children. I used to think after beating up my child, I began recalling and started to feel that sympathy for the children. I felt guilty but I didn’t want to give in to those feelings. I would pray to god so he would forgive me” (Female, 46)

Second, awareness of and attention for Children’s’ Rights is of relevance as well as five participants addressed this issue.

“There are changes. Long time ago the styles were different. This time children’s claim for their rights and that is why that parents have to change their ways as well. In respect of the rights of the child. Much as there are children rights, but that does not stop me from educating my child. I still have the right to do what I want as a parent. But I know that beating is not good” (Female, 37)

5.3 Advising others: a necessity

Third, a noteworthy finding can be outlined when it comes to the need to advise others in their parenting, as all participants brought up this concern. They talked about the necessity to transfer knowledge from the training on others in the community.

“We often involve ourselves in situations, like when a person is beating a child seriously it is my responsibility and the responsibility of other to go and intervene and help that child and also talk to that parent to understand the concept of parenting. Let them know it is better to talk than to beat” (Female, 49 years)

Also, eighteen participants mentioned that they would share ideas with other caregivers and intervene in situations in which they find destructive for the child.

“I discuss issues with my neighbors. I have the feeling that I have to because of the knowledge I acquired I am able to give lessons and intervene with my neighbors and friends. Like, we have a neighbor who beats the child in a very brutal way. Her child received maize from other people and when she realized that the child accepted the maize without permission, she beat the child seriously…and then the next punishments was to take the hands of the child and push the hands where the fire was…she wanted to burn that child for accepting the maize. Because of the training I could intervene and safe that child. It was my effort” (Female, 49)

6 Togetherness: the strength of new relationships

6.1 Sharing, caring and loving

The formation of good relationships has emerged as most important, as nineteen participants addressed this. Twelve parents referred to themes such as sharing, caring and loving. They mentioned that sharing difficulties with others, being there for someone, to be
able to count on someone and feel loved are vital, relieves them from stress and makes them more secure in handling issues.

“We see each other a lot and it gives us the chance to exchange ideas. Before we did not know each other but now… it is like we are brothers and sisters. I made new friends which is so interesting. We share ideas, if I have a problem I discuss it with them. We have to meet at least once so we can see what new things had happened. In this world you cannot stand alone. You need other people, you can’t raise your children alone” (Female, 45)

6.2 Supportive friendships

Fifteen parents acknowledged that those friendships are supportive, whether it be financial or emotional support.

“Because of groups we share so many things which are common or are happening. We save some money and then we use it for some matters that can happen. We share ideas which are developmental and helpful for the family. Sometimes in one year nobody dies but we keep continuing to save some money and save it for something urgent. We as a group are really strong” (Female, 39 years)

All participants mentioned that they feel sympathy for the facilitator since there is still good contact. They talked about, worthy communications, continuous monitoring, which is truly valued by most parents, and the possibility to be able to be supported even outside the professional context can count on a lot of thankfulness.

“We respect her so much because she gave us new knowledge. She still comes for house visits. When we see her outside the group than she is very happy and waves enthusiastically and we are also happy for her. There is very good contact between us and if there is a problem they can come and counsel” (Female, 45 years)

6.3 Unity

Finally, ten parents talked about the aspect of unity among parents and the broader community. They mentioned that the feeling of being one relieves them from burdens as they discuss issues as a group. According to some parents this is encouraging in times of hardship because it has created a larger network they can fall back on.

“There is a high level of unity among us. The heart of togetherness. For example, if one of us has fallen into trouble, not only that person but also for the group… like one time our friend fell into trouble… the husband fell in love with another woman, the husband was stressing our friend so much. So, we decided to bring that in the group. We supported her with advice and we talked and counseled her until she was relieved with all the stress. She settles and she continued her business. So amusing
that the husband after that realized the problem and now they are together. So it was because of the group that the husband and our friend got back together” (Female, 39)

“They help me where there is need, like at the moment my husband is sick and he is clustered to the bed. Because of the group they came and help me with my peanuts, they went to my garden and harvested it. That was all because of those new people I met” (Female, 64)

7 What impact did it have on me?

In this section we will talk about the impact the Parenting Skills Training had on the personal life of the participants and how they perceived the support from the program. We will also discuss those elements that most participants described as making parenthood in Kitgum more challenging. Lastly, we will address the comparison parents made between then (before the training) and now (after training) and the changes they have noticed since.

7.1 I feel more confident

Aspects of confidence in parenting seemed important as sixteen participants made reference to this. This theme can be divided into three key subthemes. First, parents talked about becoming a stronger person in decision making since the completion of the program. They mentioned that to become a confident parent this includes, believing in yourself, find a way to cope with stress, taking responsibility, finding ways to manage and being independent.

“One good thing I got from the training is about my husband. When I was still with him he did not help me, he sometimes refused to give me money to buy food, to pay school fees for the children, to pay the rent…I also refused to do it because that was the responsibility of a man, but later on, when I started the training, I started to get the information and I understood the point…it relieved me from the stress I encountered every day and people counseled me…after that I started paying school fees. I didn’t mind him anymore, I can do it on my own” (Female, 23 years)

Second, eleven parents mentioned that they feel the responsibility to intervene in situations where children’s rights are violated. Six parents feel obliged to counsel neighbors and friends who did not have the chance to participate in the training.

“Once a neighbor is beating a child it is my responsibility to stop them and talk. If they do not stop at that time, after a while that person will start thinking about what I have told him and he will also change. I do not stop with only the few parents. I also talk to stubborn children who are in the neighborhood” (Female, 46 years)

“There are so many things that I acquired. In my house, me as a parent, I speak to my children and they listen. Even to the youth and neighbors who are indiscipline. I counsel and give warnings. I don’t tolerate nonsense. I speak the truth and I rely on the truth” (Female, 49 years)
Third, five participants mentioned they believe in a promising future thanks to the support of the program.

“My eyes have opened, I can now see the future. It has created good relationships where I share my problems. With aspect of life it is not really easy but because of what knowledge I have received I can now do it on my own. I can raise money and can support my children better than before, pay the fees and buy clothes and feed them” (Male, 49 years)

7.2 Challenges: it hinders me

Another relevant theme is about the challenges parents face in their daily lives with strong reference to the context of Kitgum and how this influences their parenting. Again, three subjects can be related to this theme. First, fifteen parents made reference to the fact that poverty is one of the main factors that complicates parenting.

“Poverty is mean…people are poor…it is a factor that is very challenging in the upbringing. Like when you are poor, how are you going to provide for your child? Do you have to steal? No! So…it is a challenge” (Female, 51 years)

Six parents make reference to the awareness they have of the differences in parenting between parents that reside in western countries and themselves who reside in risk environments.

“Here parents are very sharp. Here we believe that the ears of the children are in the buttocks, so once you want a child to listen you have to slap that buttocks…you might have two minds at the same time…one is people from Europe, the way they live and the way they parent is different and better than ours here…but it is because of the conditions and the hardships we get here we parent in that way, in Europe, I understand, you talk to a child and don’t beat but here it is the contrary…people who are educate…they think they are the dullest class of people but that is not true…we keep quiet and we see how things are, we analyze and then you make conclusions. It could be because of poverty that you can’t go to school. Those people who can read and write tend to overlook at us…they think we are not bright…” (Female, 23)

“Other people they don’t experience challenges like we do here in Africa. There is high level of poverty. Even bringing up a child is a problem. You can talk of insecurity which is also a problem. Sometimes it interferes a lot with the child’s growth and the development of the brain. The style from the whites is better than ours. I am saying so because our children…we didn’t value them so much. We used to give him hard work, child labor which was not right. That is not the case where you [the main interviewer] live, things are going to be okay because we are trying to adopt slowly slowly” (Female, 36 years)

Second, financial difficulties were mentioned by ten participants.
“Being a parent in Kitgum is not easy because there are so many things that are missing. Like school fees for the children. You feel like sending that child to school and that child goes but at the end of the day you have to raise that money so the child can continue going to school. And that is a problem. So it is challenging…” (Female, 64)

The potential bad influence of peer groups was third most mentioned, as seven participants referred to this issue.

“We have to protect them from bad groups and peers, but even the parent can be a wrong example for the child…a child can easily escape from home and go to a bar and get wasted” (Female, 34 years)

7.3 I’ve seen my child change

Despite the many problems most participants are facing, all parents have uttered that the training brought many changes, not only among themselves but also the children seemed to be subject to change.

A first noteworthy subject is about the positive change in the child’s behavior, as sixteen parents noticed this alteration gradually. They mentioned how children are following up directives more consistently, changed their attitude and show more respect and that they take responsibility for their chores at home.

“She was very indiscipline. When she wanted to fetch water she did not know who the elder ones were and who the younger. She could just abuse and decide to fight. She wanted to be number one always and she did not wanted to wait in the queue. She just fetched water in her container without waiting. I talked to her that it is wrong. She has to wait for her turn and she changed” (Female, 49 years)

“The child's behavior is changed. Before they were difficult to work with. I don’t want to eat this, that… but now after the death of the father and attending the group that knowledge gave me the strength to talk in a different way and now they understand” (Female, 49 years)

Also, fourteen participants noted that communication between them and their children evolved in a positive way as both parties feel confident to talk to each other and discuss problems at any time. Hereby, showing more love and affection was noted as well.

“Yes there is big change. For example, in my house, my child was very stubborn and I used not to listen or understand my child. What the problem was, was that I would talk to the child, like, why have you done this and then I resolve without getting the view of the child. But now after the training I started sharing important issues with the child. Now I table the matter with my children then we discuss and sometimes we can come to the conclusion where the child says; oh mommy, I'm sorry, I did this because of you doing this and that’s why I had to react in that way… but also the child came to learn how I am. They have realized that I as a parent also have my weaknesses and as a child also. So we can compromise…” (Female, 36 years)
Eleven participants acknowledged hesitantly that they feel *remorse* on how they handled misbehavior or how they have addressed issues in their household. Parents mentioned that they have changed their behavior into a more thoughtful way with less shouting and less quarreling (N=7), more commitment towards the children (N= 9) and providing them with more guidance (N=4).

“The training learned me the right ways and I could correct my wrong ways. I used to do other things but not anymore. You did not know that it was bad. It was bad, because I did not know it was bad, I thought it was good. I used to quarrel a lot and even sometimes take a big stick and feel like beating. Or I could bring my children early to the garden the whole day without giving them food. I starved them…” (Female, 45 years)

### 8 Future program recommendations

This last part of the results covers the strengths and needs of the SCORE parenting skills training that were recommended by the participants. Overall, all participants seemed to be consentient when we talked about the assets of this program. We can divide the strengths into three main topics that arose during discussion with the participants.

#### 8.1 The power of togetherness

**Togetherness**, as in bringing people together, seemed to be most important as sixteen participants made reference to this as one of the strengths of the parenting skills training. They mentioned that, with the help of the training, they were able to expand their network which means they could build *new friendships* (N=9), *exchange ideas* with others (N=4) and continue to *transfer* the imported *knowledge* on others which brings the community together (N=3).

“Bringing different groups together. We all have the same information so we can help each other in future. One strength is that it has built a very good relationship with everyone. They united parents and children. It brings the community together. Also the coordination among the members of the group. Like you go for house visit or groups visit. There you coordinate and exchange ideas” (Female, 38 years)

#### 8.2 Education

Secondly, **education** is also seen as significant as twelve participants addressed this matter. This includes absorbing knowledge from the training and put that into practice. Participants were keen about a number of activities that took place during training.
When we talked about what they considered to be a supportive and insightful activity, then we could detect three most mentioned activities. First, music and drama was mentioned by half of the participants for that reason that it relieves them from stress, distracts them from concerns, unites them with other members and gives them the feeling they have something in common which is not related to difficulties in parenthood.

“The dance, the drama was very educative. It is a fun way to learn things. Through music, singing and drama…it bringing us even money, sometimes people in the district asked us to come and sing” (Female, 35 years)

The formation of groups and group discussion was second most mentioned as nine participants referred to this as another supportive activity. This is about being able to create constructive relations with others from different areas which creates the opportunity to enter into discussions and ways of creating trust among everyone.

“One activity was group discussion and we were exchanging ideas and we could laugh and smile because it was interesting to hear all the different views. Most of the activities are illustrated, they talk about a real person they don’t imagine. It is good because everybody has the same thinking and you can use the same language and words because everybody understands” (Female, 49 years)

“In fact, one activity I’d liked so much was the formation of groups, people were brought from different parts of the places, for example, Gangdyang, Corner Alango and Ginnery or Quarters. Those people came all together. And out of such gathering and togetherness, we created friendships” (Female, 51 years)

Lastly, the illustration of pictures seemed another relevant and interesting activity as this was addressed by seven participants. Pictures are illustrated whereby information is shared on how to handle in that certain situation as a parent. Participants, on the one hand, talked about the relevance of using such illustration as some parents still perform certain practices that are destructive for the child and on the other hand this is an opportunity to expose various opinions between parents.

“There is one activity I saw… an illustration of a stepmother who was burning a child’s hand. Such illustration taught us how to respect the children’s rights. That activity was really meaningful because those practices are really happening” (Male, 49 years)

“I liked that program. One activity amused me and made me very happy. And illustration of pictures of children in a family, where one child is very stubborn and likes fighting, another child is humble, another child is not bothered. Giving those pictures we were supposed to talk about it. That activity reflected exactly what was happening at my home. Like, the girl here she was very stubborn, the boy is very humble and the other one was also a different character. So, it was an example of my household. Because of that activity I could resolve problems. Now I know how to bring them at the same level” (Female, 64 years)
However, five participants mentioned that they encountered difficulties with some activities. Especially with the hand-outs in written form that were handed out by the facilitators, so parents could take certain information home.

“I am not educated, they gave us these hand-outs or papers alright… but somebody had to interpret because I don’t know how to read and write. So somebody had to interpret what was in the paper. But it was all okay, I was helped and I understood the concept. But it is bad…” (Female, 35 years)

“The issue of giving papers to people is a very serious thing because they always interpret what the paper says. I, unfortunately, don’t know how to read or write. It is always interpreted for me but even the people who know how to read or write in the end they will fail when we have been asked some questions. Because they gave us some assessment we were supposed to answer and also they failed. People who know how to read and write think they know everything and they think that they are the fastest learners but it is not true. Some people are quiet, like me, we sit and we observe and analyze the situation… we also have our ways of understanding. So even we can be better than those who were educated…” (Female, 23 years)

Finally, eight participants stated that changes in parent and child behavior at short notice, should also be seen as a strength of the parenting skills training.

“This program has been very important for us, the parents and the children. It has given new information to guide our children and see how the child grows. On the other hand, the child is also seen as somebody who is very important. At meeting point they have quick appointment with the child and there they learn a lot as well and I can see them change. They find it interesting and amusing. So I think the strengths is mainly based on the impact it has on the children. And of course the parents” (Female, 36 years)

8.3 The need for extension

When it comes to the needs of the program, participants seem to unanimously agree with each other. Namely, all participants advocate for an extension of a parenting skills training program, not only for the selected people but for others as well.

“The program has been so good. It provided with a lot of knowledge and skills on how to raise our children. It should be extended, also to the people deep in the village who didn’t have the information. Therefore, if such can be organized that would be good so that every parent can get the knowledge. More problems reside in the villages. In town parents can understand their children, in the village they over punish, so they have to extend that service” (Female, 38 years)

According to twelve participants, the reasoning for this is the fact that people start to exchange ideas and opinions in the community and others feel left out from that interaction.
“Another reason is the knowledge that we get from the training, we were supposed to share that knowledge with other people in the community by doing house visits. You teach other parents who did not have the chance to attend the group. And you teach them how to raise a child. So transfer of knowledge because it was only for few people. It was our responsibility to transfer the lessons to the community. I don’t know how they feel but what they always ask is; why am I not being disturbed? Much as I have so many problems, how should I manage my problems? They are questioning themselves why I am changed. They feel so bad because they might think we only go there for money or for other material things. So they feel not so good about it, maybe jealous. They ask if they also can join” (Female, 45 years)

“The neighbors they always tell us… if only meeting point could extend the service to other who have not got the knowledge… it would be better, because the problem is still there. It was only given to the few. Children’s rights are still being dishonored, they still beat them seriously and then they get injured. The majority did not get the knowledge. For us in the group we are okay, because now we know the concept of parenting and we know how to talk to our children” (Female, 49 years)

In addition, all participants opt for a long term based variant of this parenting skills training.

“The only need is that they should keep on lecturing us…they should teach people so they understand the concept of parenting. The second thing is it should be a constant follow up because some of the parents we forget so quickly, you tell us now and tomorrow it is gone, we also need to be followed up on how we are parenting our children. Even if they only visit once a year, I believe it can make a big difference” (Female, 35 years)

Finally, five participants referred to the need of financial support, for example, financial assistance in paying school fees. Their motivation for this is that a parent should be able to send his child to school in order to promise the child a promising future.

9 Summary

This section outlined the eight main themes and related sub themes, that emerged from the analysis of the interview data. Theme one delineated the various perceptions of parents on parenting whereby ‘being an exemplary’ and protecting children from violence were most mentioned by the participants. Theme two was about who is seen as the key figure in the upbringing in which it became clear that both parents fulfill important roles in the upbringing. However, according to more than half of the participants, the mother is considered to be the most important caregiver. Theme three highlighted the motives parents cited for attending the parenting training. These include willingness to partake into the program, feeling the desire to increase their knowledge on parenting skills and the existing occasion to meet new people which created an opportunity for starting new friendships and socialize and interact with others. Theme four throws a glimpse at the advantages and disadvantages expressed
by the parents. The improved knowledge and the relationships with other parents proved to be the greatest benefits. On the other hand some parents questioned the material aspect of the training as in financial support to pay school fees for the children in return for their participation. Further, the authoritative parenting style as perceived by the participants was discussed in theme five. In general, most participants developed a positive approach toward the style and most parents were confronted with their initial style whereby feelings of remorse came up. In addition, parents uttered the need to educate others in their parenting as destructive parenting styles are still present in some households. Theme six emphasized participants’ expanded social network due to the training and the support they got out of it. Concepts such as sharing, caring, loving and unity were many recurring notions. In theme seven parents reported how and in what way the training had an impact on them. Most of the changes parents perceived were linked in their own behavior and their children’s behavior as well. Parents testified a growing awareness and understanding of the importance of quality communication between parent and child. Although unintentionally, there are still some challenges parents have to take into account that hinder parenthood. Poverty and a lack of financial resources were examples of these. The final theme summed up the recommendations parents had in mind to improve the parenting skills training. The power of bringing people together and the newly introduced knowledge were mentioned as the main strengths of the program. Everyone agreed upon the need for extension to the people who did not have the chance to partake into training and they want to strive for a long term based project instead of short term.
Chapter 4: Discussion

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of parents who participated in the SCORE Parenting Skills Training, with a closer view at how this parenting intervention has had an impact on different levels of their social life.

1 Concept of parenting

In analyzing the data, it became clear that the notion of parenting consisted out of a variety of connotations which differed from parent to parent. This variety of definitions and connotations can be fed back to the existing literature as Hoghugi and Speight (1998) refer to the fact that there can be no clear description of what constitutes the concept of parenting. In this study, being an exemplary for the children and protecting them from violence and danger seemed to be the two most mentioned themes in describing parenting. However, the latter finding does not entirely coincide with the literature as many definitions do not focus on the safety aspect but rather on the psychological aspect, for example, accompanying children to maturity. This finding may point indirectly to the assumption that the context has its influence on parenting practices and someone’s idea of parenting (e.g. Katz, Corlyon, La Placa, & Hunter, 2007; Furstenberg, 1993). From personal experience, it is difficult for parents to describe the concept of parenthood as this is a complex concept which also confirms Hoghugi and Speight’s (1998) statement about this.

When considering who bears the greatest responsibility in the upbringing, then opinions between the participants were divided to a lesser extent. According to prevailing literature, the biological parents are viewed as the most common caregivers, where a family with both a mother and a father is considered the standard (Davis Martin, 2000). The presumption that a child benefits from having both a mother and a father is widespread, and to some extent, is confirmed with the statement “two heads are better than one” by the majority of the participants cited under 2.1. Parents cited this because being a parent is a tough job and when problems have emerged then you can at least bear the responsibility together. However, in the African context single- and female- headed households have become dominant (Evans, Matola & Nyeko, 2008). This was the case at many homes I visited. More than half of the participants were raising their children by themselves due to the loss of their partner. The biggest cause of this was HIV. In absence of either one of the two parents then there was a preference for the mother as the most important figure in the upbringing according to the participants. There should be placed a nuance here, since eighteen out of twenty participants were women.
2 Parenting programs

2.1 Motives for enrollment

An interesting part of the results refers to parents’ motivations to enroll in the parenting skills training. The majority of the participants talked about their eagerness and willingness to participate after they were encouraged by facilitators whom they are familiar with thanks to other projects of SCORE. Although parents may feel they have been stimulated or advised to partake in the parenting training, the choice was up to them to decide whether they wanted to participate or not. They voiced that they saw the training as an opportunity to learn more and to meet new people. In this respect, we can make reference to the study of Coren, Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2003) which clarifies that parents identify personal gains as a motive for attending a parenting program.

The first reason parents brought up for their enrollment was the desire to know more and to enhance their parenting practices. Noteworthy is that two participants admitted that they were somewhat doubtful to take part in the training, for the reason that they felt they were confronted with a shortfall in their upbringing, even more, they felt invalidated as a parent. This is in line with Furedi (2001), Ramaekers (2009) and Schaubroeck (2010), who recognized the fact that parents, nowadays, encounter feelings of guilt and insecurity when professionals come to the fore and start interfering in the private sphere. From this we can conclude, and this is in line with Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001), that more understanding for parents’ insecurities is needed and this should be taken into account by parenting program developers. Furthermore, one of the concerns of parenting programs should be questioning whether this is the feeling they want to convey to parents who want to participate in a parenting program. One parent said, “I did not know that it was bad. It was bad, but I did not know it was bad, I thought it was good. I used to quarrel a lot and even sometimes take a big stick and feel like beating. Or I could bring my children early to the garden the whole day without giving them food”. So, in a context where ‘high levels of social and environmental problems’ (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1992) are integrally present, such as those in Northern Uganda, it should be made possible for parents to assist them in understanding their own social and cultural background. This will help parents to place their own behavior in time and context, which will enable them to realize that they should not feel guilty.

For the reason that parenting programs are so focused on increasing knowledge and parental attitudes, this may declare that parents may feel that they do need a parenting training in order to be a better parent. This is in line with what Ramaekers and Suissa (2012) mentioned about the feeling of parental responsibility, which means parents will do whatever
it takes to ensure their children are able to expand their competences, capabilities, talents, etc. in order to develop the best outcomes for their children.

2.2 The predominant focus on the educational aspect

Perhaps, parenting programs are focusing too much on the educational aspect of the program with a specific focus on improvement of the child’s behavior, and to a lesser extent, pay attention to the parents themselves and the emotional roller-coaster they are going through. A link can be made to the fact that many programs have been designed that are aimed at enhancing parents in their ability to parent, in the hope that outcomes for children may ultimately be improved (Halpenny et al., 2009, Moran et al., 2004 & Ghate and Hazel, 2002; Tully, 2009). If we look at the existing research on parenting programs, then these often examined what impact they have on the children, which is the general focus in parenting programs. The overall objective of a parenting program is to improve child outcomes especially by increasing the parent’s knowledge or skills as described by Butler (2015). This is also the case in the Parenting Skills Training of SCORE, in which the focus is on how to adopt good parenting behavior, values, skills and attitudes that will enable parents to accompany their children to maturity (AVSI, 2014). In other words, this program too focuses on child outcome with less attention to the potential psychological issues of parents.

An extensive part of existing parenting programs often introduce and refer to the authoritative parenting style, since this style has been recognized as a predictor of positive child behavior outcomes (Jackson, Brook-Gunn, Huang & Glassman, 2000; Roberts, 1989; Baumrind, Larzelere & Owens, 2010). The SCORE Parenting Skills Training promotes the authoritative style as well in order to teach parents valuable parenting concepts. When I asked parents about their perception on the authoritative style, then most parents associated it with the fact that one should not use physical punishment or dishonor the Rights of the Child. Likewise, SCORE’s Parenting Skills Training often makes explicit reference to the Children’s Rights. This was new knowledge to quite few parents, and as some of them mentioned this was an incentive for changing their parenting style. This could be motivated by some researchers (e.g. Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994), who suggest that advising parents to master a certain parenting style is a reflection of a socio-cultural context in which people decide whether certain actions are valued in either positive or negative ways. For example, with the implementation of the Children’s Rights, the utilization of corporal punishment is valued in a negative way. Most parents have indicated that they have reduced their use of physical punishment. After the completion of the training, parents experience feelings of remorse when they look back at the parenting practices they used to use on their children. We do need to recon the fact that in some parents’ experience
these feelings are present. So, in what way parenting programs can be adapted to take this in to account, can be stated with reference to Barlow & Stewart-Brown (2001), who found that parents prefer not being taught how to parent, but rather being supported in being a parent and see ways forward without judging the parenting practices of parents in the past.

3 Socioeconomic context

3.1 Importance of social interaction

Although parents indeed gave credit to the acquired new knowledge and skills, they appeared to be more keen about the opportunity to meet new people and in this way extend their social network. This affirms the importance of the social context and the supportive cohesion that may arise between groups. This finding concurs with the ones cited in Borden, Schultz, Herman & Brooks (2010). They found that group parenting programs can be seen as constructive in that way that it enables parents to form groups and build friendships which must be seen as a contributing factor to the success of a parenting training. Parents appeared to have found their participation in this parenting skills training beneficial in that way that it created a path for them to interact with other group members with comparable concerns, which is in line with the research of Hallam, et al., (2004) and Patterson et al., (2005). Parents referred to the supportive non-judgmental nature of the group, the sharing and caring aspect of the group, which empowered parents to be oneself in an accepting setting.

According to most parents, the supportive relationships do not only refer to relationships within the group context but to parents’ broader social context as well. This suggests that the way in which others had perceived parents who participated in the program, can be an interesting angle to discuss. For that reason that it can explore the impact the training has had on the extensive social support system of the participants. A remarkable finding in this regard relates to the feeling of recognition that parents received from people in the community. Sharing advice with others in the community was an aspect of the training that parents particularly valued. One parent said: “Now I am a woman counselor for this area. I counsel the people and I give them the right information of what they should do and not do. Also how to protect a child’s rights.” Parents have indicated that they feel more confident to help and share advice with other parents in order to improve their parenting. For example, most parents felt the obligation to interfere when children’s rights were dishonored.

However, it is worth mentioning that some parents had mixed feelings about the fact that they could participate in the training while others did not have the chance. Some parents said that people in the community were jealous and felt left out. One parent described that mixed
feeling in a powerful way “the people who attended the training, they are considered as being special and the other ones who did not attend are not special. The community would feel happy if they also received that information, ‘cause now some people are informed, others are not”. Therefore, parenting programs that are only focusing on a selective group of people are suggested that they are subject to criticism since the context of Northern Uganda, with its social challenges (e.g. poverty, etc.), affects every household, and makes families more vulnerable to poor parenting practices (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997; Wessel, 2005). Parents, therefore, have expressed the wish that the program should be extended to others. One parent explicitly mentioned that it should be a program that is neutral, not selective towards people, but widespread. With this statement there can be a link with what has been argued by Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000). Namely, families that reside in impoverished environments are less likely to have access to formal support (i.e. support arranged by professionals) and other social networks that advice parents in their parenting practices and skills than those who reside in wealthy societies. This suggests that parents living in unfortunate circumstances already experience difficulties to have access to formal support, and the ones who gained access must praise themselves lucky at the expense of others who don’t.

Parents also indicated that, thanks to these contacts, they experienced less stress. This finding is supported by Belsky & Vondra (1989) and Brooks-Gunn, Klebanov & Duncan (1996), who pinpointed that parents living in impoverished environments are likely to experience levels of stress due to poverty, community violence and, more important, social isolation. In other words, the absence of social support or a deficit of support is a factor that may cause stress. Supportive relationships, however, can function as a buffer against stress, which relates to the studies of Belsky & Vondra (1989), Ghate & Hazel (2002), Osofsky & Thompson (2002), and also to certain utterences of parents described under 4.2. Also, most parents have referred to the supportive relationships with other parents and the facilitators which acted as a kind of therapeutic environment. For the reason that through sharing experiences with a group and the exchange of ideas with others, parents could ventilate and in that way it relieved them from stress. Therefore, parents voiced the wish for the training to continue for a longer period of time because of the support from other group members which they have experienced as beneficial. These findings are mirrored in the study of Patterson et al. (2005). The beneficial nature of the group was acknowledged by many as a substantial factor in what made them return to the training every time. In addition, these supportive relationships were cited by many parents as the most rewarding benefit they have gained form the training.
3.2 Importance of other kinds of support

As mentioned by most parents, poverty has its influence on parenting as well which is consistent with the studies of Furstenberg (1993), Kotchick and Forehand (2002) and Ramaekers and Suissa (2012). Overall, parents appreciated the supportive aspect of the training the most, however, a few parents referred to a lack of providing material support as some sort of compensation for their participation. They thought school fees would be paid, since this is one of the biggest challenges for parents in Kitgum. So, besides the importance of the social context, participants referred to the importance of material support as well. This finding suggests that providing material support as criteria in the Parenting Skills Training could be seen as a contribution for many parents. Consequently, from parents’ perspective not all expectations of the Parenting Skills Training are met. This may indicate that some expectations of program developers and facilitators are not consistent with the expectations parents have concerning a parenting skills training. According to Gonzalez et al., (2007), too often the project of a program is predetermined rather than that it has emerged through family and community input. An interesting view is put forward by Evans et al., (2008), who suggest that one should develop a parenting program with parents themselves through a dialogue that respects different perspectives and take those into account in order to improve that program.

With regard to this suggestion, there is something that can be taken into account which had been indicated by some parents. It concerns the hand-outs in written form that were distributed to the parents. Parents voiced the difficulties they experienced at this level of the program. Due to illiteracy, some parents were not able to read the assessments and hand-outs from the training. As previously reported in the literature, some researchers (Gorman & Balter, 1997; Evans et al., 2008; Kotchick and Forehand, 2002) uttered their concern about the assumption that program developers often implement a program model that has worked fruitfully in one place, but found that when these programs are conducted in non-western societies this is not always representative. As suggested by De Mey and Vandenbroeck (2014), programs should meet the needs of parents by utilizing cultural sensitive elements. At this point, we can make the interpretation that there is a need for recognizing illiteracy in parenting programs which are carried out in a context where illiteracy remains a concern.

Furthermore, another concern parents consistently referred to is about the need for ongoing professional support following the completion of the program. For some parents this meant a desire to be monitored on a regular basis with the opportunity to continue learning as children grow older and contextual factors may change. To put it in their words, the parenting skills training should be on a long term basis instead of a short term project.
Conclusion

Overall, the qualitative data obtained in this study suggest that for these parents attending the Parenting Skills Training provided them with significant benefits. The opportunities to develop various skills supported parents to alter the initial approaches they have passed on to their children. Parents have re-established a sense of control in their parenting role, partly through improved communication with their household, and for most parents this also meant a way to explore a self-confidence in themselves which enabled them to discuss and exchange ideas with others that share the same concerns. The latter seemed to have a great impact on every involved parent, as they cited this as the most valuable advantage of the Parenting Skills Training. In addition to this, parents referred to the aspects of sharing, caring and loving, unity in the community and the supportive relationships, which all had a positive impact on relieving their stress. Thus, where a parenting program is likely to have the intention to improve the parenting skills among the participants, it appears that in a non-Western context this is not seen as the only priority only because relationships with others in the community are considered more important. The eagerness of parents to continue to learn about parenting and the sense of responsibility to transfer that knowledge to others, seems to be an incentive for the extension of the Parenting Skills Training. Not merely an extension of the program in the literal sense of the word, namely, not for a selective group but widespread, but also an extension of the program itself in which more attention for parents’ insecurities, their experienced lack of material wellbeing and the need for supportive relationships are taken into account.

1 Limitations of the study

While the results in this study do reveal some relevant findings regarding the impact of the Parenting Skills Training of SCORE, several limitations of the study must be taken into account. It is noteworthy that when a parenting program is focused on a specific population such as the poor, rural, northern Ugandan population that was the target audience of this study, program developers should be careful in generalizing the findings to all populations. This is because the social and contextual factors of a society can have an influence on the operation of a parenting program (De Mey & Vandenbroeck, 2014; Evans et al., 2008). Throughout this dissertation reference was made to the term ‘parent’. However, the majority of parents in parenting programs and the parents who participated in this study were mothers. The parents in this study were completely free to participate, which suggests that these participants were motivated to begin with. In addition, there is a possibility that
participants gave socially desirable answers on their parenting practices, the use of physical punishment and perhaps about their appreciation for the program.

The interpretation and analysis of the qualitative data could be influenced by cultural bias. The interview protocol was reviewed together with the interpreter and two Belgian researchers, which made final alterations possible. Furthermore, the interpreter was able to give additional information on some culturally sensitive subjects in order to diminish cultural bias. Furthermore, it is very likely that information got lost during the interviews since this was a process of continuous interpretation between Acholi and English. For example, the questions of the main researcher were interpreted by the interpreter. In order to avoid misinterpretations at this stage, the whole interview protocol was reviewed step by step with the interpreter so that a common understanding could be developed. However, the interpreter had to interpret their answers at once, what inevitably should have led to a loss of data. Again, the main interviewer interpreted the collected data.

Theoretical saturation was reached after interviewing twenty participants, although a larger sample size would have permitted to detect significant changes or even common views between parents. Due to a limited time table and for practical reasons, parents were interviewed close to where the interviewer’s residence was. This means that most participants knew each other because they came from the same parenting group, which directly or indirectly can have its influence on opinions that parents established on certain themes.

2 Recommendations for future research

On the basis of what was suggested or described above, recommendations could be formed for future research. The existing literature on parenting programs proves that only few studies focus on ethnic minority populations (Cameron, 2007; Mejia et al., 2012). Therefore, more research is needed that explores the impact of a parenting program in a different context than that in which the parenting program originally was developed, and which also puts its focus on minority populations. This study suggests that the Parenting Skills Training has significant benefits for the involved parents. However, it would be interesting to obtain qualitative data of other parenting groups in Uganda, as northern Uganda has its own historical and political context which differs from other parts in the country.

Furthermore, most of the parenting programs are interested in the positive outcomes they have on children’s behavior. To a lesser extent, research focusses on parents’ perceptions

---

6 The SCORE project has its presence in 5 regions in Uganda (AVSI), retrieved from http://www.avsi-usa.org/education.html
and views. Taking this into account, parents’ perceptions should be the subject of research on parenting programs more often.

In addition, further research should focus on fathers that partake in a parenting program since most of the existing data is drawn from a mother’s perspective. A father’s perspective on to what extent they are satisfied with the participation in a program could provide more valuable insights from a different angle. Equally interesting would be assessing fathers’ motives for not taking part in a parenting program. Both of these suggestions could contribute in a positive way on the trustworthiness and veracity of a program.

An interesting angle in future studies could be interrogating drop-outs, these are parents who did not complete the program (Hallam, Rogers, & Shaw, 2004). The exploration of their motives for dropping out might be relevant for improving parenting programs.

Lastly, this study indicates that other parents in the community felt left out, thus, questioning these parents about their concerns could be a contributive insight for parenting programs to take this into account, so that feelings of jealousy and displeasure can be reduced in a cohesive community.
References


57


64
McLellan, E., MacQueen, K., & Neidig, J. (2003). Beyond the Qualitative Interview: Data Preparation and Transcription. *Field Methods, 15*(1), 63-84. doi: 10.1177/1525822X02239573


Dear sir/madam,

I, Fien Vandendriessche, a student at the University of Ghent (Belgium) will conduct an interview with you in the context of my dissertation about the SCORE parenting skills program. During this interview I would like to ask you some questions about how you experienced the program, to what extent this program had an impact on your perspective on parenting and how it has influenced your daily life as a parent. The aim of this study is to explore themes or stories that parents share towards the program, in order to improve further implementation.

An interpreter will be present to translate and interpret between Acholi and English. This interview will take about one hour.

Your participation in this research should be completely voluntary. For this reason, you can end your participation at any time. Everything you say during this interview is confidential and will not be shared with other participants or with any other person. The data from the interview will be saved, processed and reported in a confidential way. This means that your name will not be mentioned at any time or used in any document.

For practical reasons this interview will be taped. However, it is your choice if you want this or not. The tape is for personal use only and will not be shared with anyone.

If you have questions, you can interrupt the interview at any time. You can always ask for clarifications even if we finished the interview. Therefore you can always contact me on my phone number: 0779364353. Thank you for your cooperation in advance.

With kind regards,

Fien Vandendriessche (Master’s student in Social Work at the University of Ghent, Belgium),

Irene Labul (Interpreter),

Signature of respondent,
B. Interview Protocol

Interview protocol: Guidance for the researcher

Introduction

In this first phase the researcher a) introduces herself briefly (name and profession). Thereby, the researcher shares b) the purpose of the study with the interviewee and explains that this interview means a great contribution to the research. Then, the researcher c) delineates what will be done with the collected data. Also d) in what conditions the interview will be conducted, transcribed and analyzed to guarantee the interviewee’s confidentiality. Therefore the informed consent will be outlined. The interview e) will take approximately 1 hour.

Background information

Sex: male/female

Profession:

☐ Student:
☐ Work:
☐ Other:

Age:

Current status:

☐ Married
☐ Single parent
☐ Cohabiting
☐ Other:

How many children do you have (+ age)? …

Kinship towards household members:

☐ Mother
☐ Father
☐ Guardian
☐ Sibling (brother/sister)
☐ Other:

Start date of the parenting training: …

Finish date of the parenting training: …
Childhood history of the respondent

Would you allow me to ask you some things about your own childhood? How do you think this influenced the way you raise your children?

1) What is parenting for you?
   a) What is parenting for you? (defining your perspective on parenting)
   b) How would you describe your parenting style / the way you raise your children?
   c) Who do you consider to be responsible in the upbringing of your children?
   d) How come you mentioned ….as the (most) responsible caregiver in the upbringing of your children?
   e) How come you did not mention… as a responsible caregiver in the upbringing?

2) Attendance
   a) How or where did you first hear about the SCORE Parenting Skills Training?
   b) In what way do you find it necessary to require a parenting training in order to raise your children?
   c) What made you consider to attend the program? Can you elaborate on that idea?
   d) What made you attend the training each week?

3) Advantages/ Thresholds
   a) Having attended and completed the Parenting Skills Training what benefits did you encounter?
   b) Having attended and completed the Parenting Skills Training what do you consider to be the disadvantages? Did you experience any disadvantages?
   c) What strategies, interventions, tools, etc., would you recommend to be continued?
   d) How did the activities provide new insights for you as a parent? Would you give me an example?

4) The parenting training and its corresponding parenting style
   a) How would you define the authoritative parenting style (which was a key concept in the training)?
   b) How do you feel about this parenting style?

5) Group impact
Would you tell me something about the other parents who shared this program with you?

a) What kinds of contact, with the other involved parents or facilitators, did remain after the training?

b) How was your relationship with the facilitator? Is there still any contact?

c) To what extent these contacts/friendships are supportive to you? In what way you find it supportive/helpful?

d) I would like you to think about the people that are close to you (for example, family members or neighbors), how do you think they feel about (perceived) the fact that you participated in this program?

e) In what way did the training create open doors to discuss several concepts with family members, neighbors?

6) Personal impact

a) What does the support of the program meant for you as a parent?

b) How did the training provide you with valuable insights to parent in a context like this (the context of Kitgum)

c) Do you feel that you comprehend your child’s behavior in a different way than before you attended the training?

d) How have you changed the way you manage your children’s behavior since you have completed the program?

e) Do you think this program had any impact on your children as well? For example, in what way could your children experience any changes and how did they sensed the impact?

a) Future program recommendations

a) What do you consider to be the strengths of the program?

b) What do you consider to be the needs with regard to future improvement for the program?

Closing stage

How do you feel about this interview? Is there anything else you want to share with us?