Grandparents as parents: Skipped-generation households coping with poverty and HIV in rural Zambia
Reijer, D.B.J.

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Children and young people’s stories

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the younger generation in skipped-generation households, using the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological approach to child development. Bronfenbrenner argued that research on child development is better informed when studies take place within natural settings and that theory finds greater practical application when contextually relevant (Bronfenbrenner 1974: 4). In his later work, he revised his ecological systems theory into the PPCT model (Process–Person–Context–Time) (see Bronfenbrenner 1994 & 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998). All four pillars of this model are studied in this chapter in a way that is comparable to Chapter Six, which focused on the older generation in skipped-generation households.

The first aim of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the roles of different people, and the social norms that exist, within the various social settings in which children and young people grow up in Misangwa. The second aim is to shed light on the roles that these children and young people play in their day-to-day lives, in terms of the relationships and interactions that they have with others in their social settings, and the part that these relationships play in shaping their development.

In the following section, the life histories of the members of the younger generation in skipped-generation households reveal the influence of time, the fourth pillar of the PPCT model. The use of life histories allows for an examination of the backgrounds of the respondents, and helps us to understand who these chil-
Children and young people are (personal characteristics), and what events have taken place to shape them (process factors).

Then, in the next two sections, the focus lies on context. The first part examines the various Microsystems that the children and young people belong to. As the home is the most important microsystem, the analysis begins there and then continues to other settings such as school, peer networks and the wider community. The second part examines the mesosystems. These are the contextual layers that consist of interactions between the ‘significant others’ who are part of the children and young people’s Microsystems. An example of mesosystem interactions are those between a child’s parent(s) or guardian(s) and his/her teacher. The analysis of context also deals with many of the interactions that these children and young people have with their guardian(s). In this sense, it is also related to process. The final part of this chapter is dedicated to discussing and summarising the findings.

Children and young people’s life histories

Introduction

Thirty life histories were constructed using data from in-depth interviews with children and young people living in skipped-generation households. The children were asked to identify and describe important changes that had occurred in their lives. Five issues emerged that were common for all, namely the loss of parents, relocation and the associated uncertainties, adjusting to poverty, living with elderly caregivers, and the breakdown of the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and skills. These issues will be discussed in the following sections.

The loss of parents

As was shown in Chapter Four, the majority of the children and young people living in skipped-generation households were (virtual) double orphans, as is reflected in their life histories: of the 30 children and young people who were purposefully sampled, 22 were double orphans and eight were maternal orphans who had lost all contact with their surviving father1.

The respondents described the death of their parent(s) as traumatic, and becoming orphans had had many implications for their lives since. For most children and young people, the loss of their parent(s) was a long-term process that had lasted for several months or in some cases years. They explained that during their parents’ illness they had had little idea of what was in store for them, but some did realise that things were more serious than their parents had told them.

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1 None of these children could say with any degree of certainty whether or not their father was still alive.
I knew my father was not well but I never expected him to die. He was ill quite often, I can say, but he would tell us not to worry saying it was only malaria, or a cough, and so on. When he started to lose weight very quickly I realised things were more serious. He coughed so much that one day he started coughing blood. That is when I knew there was a chance that he would pass on ... Eventually he died ... When my mom also started to be sick the following year I warned myself not to be misled again. I asked her if she was also sick, like our father. She said “No”, but all along, I told myself that this was not true. With pain in my heart, I learned that I was right because in December of that same year, she also died. That is now more than six years ago. (17-year-old male)

You know how it is: when you don’t want something to be true you tell yourself that you are mistaken. All of us at home did this I am sure. But when the illness becomes so severe, with coughing, loss of weight and many open wounds, you have to admit to yourself that things won’t be okay again. But you keep this to yourself as not to break the spirits of the person who is sick ... The death of my parents, when it came, was very painful but no longer unexpected for me. (22-year-old female)

Interviews with the children and young people showed that the experience of parental death can be seen as having two distinct periods. The first period was during the illness, a long period of uncertainty and often denial. Later on, this denial turned to realisation and acceptance. The second period was the time after death. Very few children or young people mentioned the funerals and burials of their parents. The data suggests that they had extremely painful memories of these events and very few of them were involved in the proceedings. The funeral and burials were dominated by the adults and little or no attention was given to the children.

I hear people say it is the time you should say goodbye. But it was not the time to say goodbye for me. I could not even come close to the grave and I couldn’t see what was taking place. There were so many people: the family, the neighbours and many people I didn’t know. As children you have no place there, even if it is your parent who is being buried ...

(17-year-old male)

We, as the children, were with our mother all the time [during her illness]. Our aunt used to come to visit sometimes but every day, it was us who cared for her. We were there with her when she passed on. Suddenly many relatives, neighbours, friends and many others were coming to our house. People were all over and we were told to sleep outside because the houses were occupied by the visitors. No one asked me anything. Everything was decided by others and after the funeral we were told to collect our things. We left the next day and I haven’t been to see that place for five years since she died. (18-year-old female)

As HIV is predominantly spread through heterosexual intercourse, co-infection in couples is common. This means that when one of the partners is HIV positive, the other is also likely to be infected. If ART is not available or is not accessed and thus the infection goes untreated, in time the infected person will most likely fall ill and die. During the period when most of the younger respondents lost their parents, knowledge about HIV was limited and ART was not available. Knowledge has since increased, ART has become available, and this has brought about relevant behaviour change, but there are still many children and young people who have lost both parents to the disease.
Table 7.1 shows that it is unusual for children to live with their father following the death of their mother. Of all OVCs included in the 2009 household survey, only 7.3% (22 of 300) were children whose mother had died and who were living with their father. Following the death of a child’s mother, the father often ‘disappears’. In the case of paternal death, women usually assume the care of the children on their own: 23.7% (71 of 300) of the respondents were children who had lost their father and were living with their mother. Children whose parents were both alive but were living elsewhere, for example if they were working in town, have not been included in this table. The children in the table were either orphans or virtual orphans: children who had lost their parents or could not confirm whether their parents were alive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living situation</th>
<th>Status of Mother</th>
<th>Status of Father</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child not living with</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>either parent</td>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child living with mother</td>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child living with father</td>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lamba people follow matrilineal kinship and matrilocal residence. This kinship system has far reaching consequences for children who lose one or both parents. As mentioned, children who lose their father are likely to remain in the same household as their mother. The situation is very different, however, if the mother dies. After the death of the mother, the maternal family is likely to claim ownership of the surviving children. The widowed husband loses the children and, if his household is in the village of his maternal relatives, will move away and leave the children behind. It is often suggested in Zambia that this is the result of a lack of interest by men in their children. This research found, however, that for many men, lack of power and influence better explains why they no longer lived with and cared for their children following their wife’s death. Lineage structure dictates that they have no ownership over their children and have no rights to claim them. Several widowers interviewed said that they felt saddened.
and powerless after their wives had died, and felt that their children had been taken away from them.

Due to the matrilineal kinship structure and the commonness of co-infection among married couples, it was observed that of the (virtual) double orphans in the study, children who had lost their mother first were, in a sense, less harshly affected than those children who had first lost their father. For those whose father died first, they would have had to help nurse their father during his sickness and death and would have then cared for their mother when she too became ill. Losing contact with a father is traumatic, but one can argue that this is less traumatic than being the primary caregiver of one or two sick and dying parents.

Children and young people who had provided palliative care for their dying parent(s) explained how this had affected them. Their stories show how traumatising these events were for them. Many said that they had emotional and sleep problems, experienced nightmares, and had feelings of deep sadness or depression. The impacts of caring for a dying parent were different among the young respondents, but the following quote captures what many told me.

Those memories are always with me. When I go to fields, I remember the time my mother collapsed and we carried her home. When I see the house where she died, I remember her body, the many wounds she had. I don’t feel like eating meat, even if it is chicken, since that time. When I think of that time, I start to cry and everyone asks “What is wrong?” But it is not possible to explain ... When I sleep, I wake up in the middle of the night feeling bad because I didn’t wash her in the evening. Then I remember she had died ... That was four years ago but in my thoughts it is still like yesterday. (16-year-old male)

The age at which children and young people experienced parental illness and death also explains much about the way in which these events affected them. Children and young people who were older when their parents died had more memories of them and of the events leading to their deaths. Children who were younger at the time were less likely to remember their parents and had less vivid memories of their passing, often basing their stories on what they heard from others.

Relocation and uncertainty

Almost all of the children in skipped-generation households had been relocated after the death of one or both parents. These relocations were full of uncertainty. As described above, for children who had lost their father, they generally remained with their mother; thus relocation usually took place following the death of the mother. Relocation sometimes took place within the same village, within the Misangwa area, or the children and young people moved to very different parts of the country. If the children were living away from their maternal relatives in their father’s region, following the death of their parent(s) they would be sent to their mother’s traditional home. As described in Chapter Six, some wom-
en decide to migrate to their own relatives, together with their children, when they fall sick. This migration is known as the going-home-to-die phenomenon (Foster & Williamson 2000), and is the result of socio-economic problems following the death of husbands or resulting from their own illness.

The children and young people’s experiences of relocation depended on many factors. The changes in surroundings, the number of moves, and the distance (physical and social) that they migrated were all important. These factors also played a role in terms of the way in which they were able to adjust to new caregivers and surroundings. For many children, the period immediately following their relocation was particularly difficult. They had to adjust to a new household, new guardians, and often completely different physical surroundings (especially those who moved to rural areas after having grown up in town). Some children joined households where other children were already present. In such situations, they needed to claim a new position in the social structure of their new home. The children’s stories about this time tell of much uncertainty, and this affected the position they took, or which they were given, by others. Because of their emotional state and uncertainty, many at this time were not assertive and self-conscious enough to fight for their place in their new households.

When I came to this place from Luanshya, it was very difficult for me. You don’t know anything about the place. I didn’t know my aunt and uncle with whom I came to live. I didn’t know their children or whether the children would accept me and I didn’t know village life. I was often mocked. I left behind all my friends and knew no one who could show me around this place. Where is the market? Where is the school? That is what I was asking myself. Rural life as we have here is very different from town and I felt very lost. The only things I did know was that my parents had died and my relatives had decided to send me here. At first, I had to wait to see what was there for me and later, slowly, I learned to know this place. (16-year-old male)

Children and young people’s relationships with their new guardians and the other members of their new household were often difficult. For some, it took time to develop these relationships. The children and young people said that they were certain that the relationships that they forged in these new homes would never be the same as the relationships that they had had in their parental homes. This realisation brought them pain. Another aspect of relocation that some children discussed was the extra pain and difficulties they associated with multiple changes of guardians and households. Just when they felt that they had adjusted to their new lives, their worlds would be turned upside down and they would have to go through the whole adjustment process all over again.

Your life changes and you find yourself in a place you don’t know ... with people you don’t know. But you get used and you get by. Then they [older relatives] decided we could not remain in that place. For me it was my grandfather who came to collect me. I left Ndola with him and left behind my new family. I didn’t know why but I knew I had to get used to a new life all over again. (17-year-old female)
Adjusting to a life of poverty

The older children and young people often mentioned the economic decline that they had experienced. In the timeline of their life histories, the illness of one of their parents was the starting point of this socio-economic decline.

It was a tough time for us when mum was sick. We had no money, there was no food in the home and we stopped going to school. Sometimes relatives would give us something but it was only later, when our mother had died and we came to our grandmother, that it became a bit better. (16-year-old female)

When my father became ill we started to suffer, also in terms of money. There was little food, no money for clothing, we stopped going to school. Sometimes the situation improved, other times it got worse, but the poverty we have seen since that time has never left my side. (21-year-old male)

The negative spiral of poverty that many of the children and young people described began during their parents’ illness and worsened after their parents died. Despite the high levels of poverty in skipped-generation households, few children complained, however. They recognised that poverty and hunger were problems shared by all in such households, and they saw, on a day-to-day basis, that their grandparent(s) were doing what they could for them.

You know problems are plentiful. The only way we can try to manage is to work hard. All of us try our best to contribute to our development. My grandmother is old but she does what she can. For us, what I can say is that we do what we can as people who are in this situation. Life is tough but there is no one to blame for the problems. All we can do is cooperate, avoid conflicts and disagreements and trust in God ... You don’t have to blame anyone for the situation, just have faith that we are all trying and that things will get better. (21-year-old male)

The children and young people who remembered life with their parents remembered that they were much better off in those days. Material support, the quality of housing, the quality and quantity of food, and their educational opportunities were all better. While remembering this, however, they chose not to look back. They explained that they had to accept their fate and work hard to improve their lives. Looking back brought them nothing, is something that they often said.

Loss of intergenerational transfer of knowledge and skills

When their parents died, children and young people lost the most important source of information and skills that they had had in their lives. Indeed, they experienced that the acquisition of knowledge and skills from the older generation(s) reduced or stopped completely. This was not only true for children who had lost both parents, but also for those who had lost only one parent. The remaining parent, usually the mother, became responsible for running the home alone. Even though the children helped, the time she could spend with them was limited and thus she had less time to pass on her knowledge and skills. Children
who had lost both parents also experienced this, as their new caregivers were less likely to have much time for them.

The loss of the transfer of knowledge and skills from the older generation was felt very strongly by children and young people in skipped-generation households. There are several reasons for this. Older guardians had little time to spare, as day-to-day survival consumed all their time and energy. Furthermore, their older guardians’ physical capacities were limited. Many skills are passed on through teaching-by-doing, and the transfer of skills and knowledge ceases once the guardians can no longer ‘do’. Another reason is that the skills and knowledge required by the younger age group were limited among the older generation; older people, for instance, had little or no education and were thus unable to help the children with their school homework. Finally, there are sensitive areas between children and older people in Lamba culture. Some things, such as sexuality or growing up, cannot be discussed between a grandchild and grandparent, as they are traditionally limited to child–parent or child–uncle/aunt interactions.

The age of the children and young people when they lost their parent(s) was found to be relevant for understanding how they were affected by the loss of opportunities for the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. Children who were young when their parents had died experienced few opportunities to gain knowledge and skills from them. Children and young people who were older had already gained some knowledge and skills from their parents. The interviews showed that there was no strict cut-off point in terms of age, but children who were still with their parents between the ages of ten and 12 years were the youngest group to benefit. Children who were younger than ten years did not note any significant learning experiences.

Children and young people’s microsystems

Introduction: Four microsystem settings

To gain insight into the lives of the children and young people and their older guardians living in skipped-generation households, and the contexts in which their lives take place, the younger respondents’ social networks were mapped. I used Bronfenbrenner’s work on the social ecologies of child development, according to which the social ecology is divided into several contextual layers. The most direct is the microsystem. This layer includes the people that the child or young person has direct contact with and encompasses all relationships that he or she has with his or her immediate surroundings. The home setting is the most prominent and important microsystem setting for developing children and young people, as it is the setting where they spend the most time and consists of the people who are closest to them.
The first step in studying the microsystems consisted of free-listing exercises. For this, 60 children and young people were selected randomly from the sample of children drawn from the 2009 household survey. Forty-two of the respondents were individually interviewed, while the other 18 were included in FGDs. Thirty of the 60 respondents were children and young people growing up in skipped-generation households; the other half were living in other types of households. Approximately half of the latter group were living with their parents and included non-orphans as well as single orphans; the others were orphans fostered by non-elderly guardians. This latter group of 30 respondents formed the control group.

During the free-listing exercise, the younger respondents were asked to name the places where, and the people with whom, they had interacted in the previous week. They shared stories of the places where they had met others and described the length of these interactions as well as what these interactions had meant for them. One advantage of using this method over more exhaustive methods is that while not all places and people were mentioned by the respondents, they naturally mentioned those interactions that were important to them. These are what Bronfenbrenner would call interactions with significant others. The results of the free-listing exercise show that four microsystem settings were important for the respondents: the home setting, school setting, peer setting, and community setting. Table 7.2 shows these four settings and the people whom the children and young people reported interacting with in each.

Table 7.2  Microsystem settings and relevant actors for children and young people, found through free-listing (n=60)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home setting, consisting of:</th>
<th>School setting, consisting of:</th>
<th>Peer setting, consisting of:</th>
<th>Community setting, consisting of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guardians or parents</td>
<td>Friends/peers</td>
<td>Friends/peers</td>
<td>Friends/peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Brother/sister of peers</td>
<td>Neighbours</td>
<td>Neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other children</td>
<td>Other relatives</td>
<td>People at common places such as the well</td>
<td>People at the market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relatives</td>
<td>Classmates</td>
<td>Age mates of the opposite sex of peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Parents/guardians of peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the free-listing exercise, the next step was to ask the respondents to keep a diary. In the diary, they recorded every interaction that they had with other people during the course of one week. The people mentioned in these diaries are listed in Table 7.3.
Table 7.3 Number of interactions between children and young people and others in the course of one week, mentioned by respondents in their diaries (n=60)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People with whom children and young people interacted</th>
<th>Children and young people in skipped-generation households (n=30)</th>
<th>Children and young people in control group (n = 30)</th>
<th>2 Sample unpaired T-test significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>P &lt; 0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardians</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>P &lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other children (not siblings) in the household</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>P &lt; 0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents (if not guardians)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>P &lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunts or uncles</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>P &lt; 0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>P &lt; 0.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People at common places (other than neighbours)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market traders</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church leaders</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>P &lt; 0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/guardians of other children</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the differences seen in Table 7.3 above were the direct consequence of the different compositions of the households of the children and young people. The differences in frequency for contact with parents, guardians, and grandparents were relevant to the living arrangements of the children; for instance, when comparing a double orphan living in a skipped-generation household to a child living with both living parents. Other differences between the interactions of children and young people with others, and the nature of these interactions, were less evident. Some of these differences worked positively for those in skipped-generation households, others put them greater at risk of poverty, conflict with guardians, and other problems. These are discussed in the following section.

The home setting

Several issues were found in the home situation of children and young people living in skipped-generation households that were different from the home situation of children and young people in other types of households.
• Discrimination of children and young people

Children and young people living in skipped-generation households did not report segregation or discrimination among the various children living in the home. In the control group, this was different. Fifteen of the 16 respondents who lived in a household where the biological children of the guardians lived alongside orphaned and/or dependent children reported some form of discrimination or segregation. In such households, the non-biological children reported that they felt that they were treated unfairly in comparison to the other children, in terms of receiving less food, attention, love and comfort. Research that I conducted in 2001 showed that in such households, biological children did less work for the household on average than non-biological children, while they received more financial support in the form of school fees and school supplies, including uniforms and books (Reijer 2002).

The children and young people in skipped-generation households and the orphans living with other guardians talked of hunger. In skipped-generation households, this was caused by poverty, while in other households it appeared to be a combination of poverty and discrimination. These children were sometimes made to wait for the biological children to finish eating before they were allowed to eat what was left. Both groups reported hunger, but the care that they received was different. Children and young people in skipped-generation households reported receiving more love, care and comfort from their guardians. Another difference is that in skipped-generation households, all members go hungry when food supplies ran low; in other settings, it is the orphans who go hungry first.

The caring and loving relationship that existed between grandchildren and grandparents and older guardians in skipped-generation households may account for the absence of discrimination in these homes. Another factor is that since there are no children with parents in skipped-generation households, there are no first or second class differentiations, and thus no preferential treatment. Furthermore, grandparents and older guardians, as well as the children and young people in their care, have all suffered from the illness and death of their loved ones. Both seek comfort and love, which the older and younger generation try to provide one another. The biological relationship between the older guardians and the children and young people was therefore found to be less important than their comforting presence.

• Dealing with loss and grief

Both the older and younger generations in skipped-generation households have faced loss and grief, but they did not always find support and consolation in one another, and they sometimes used opposing strategies to deal with their feelings.
Most of the children and young people tried to forget about their parents and their previous lives, and silence was a commonly used strategy to avoid discussing their sadness and grief. The elderly, however, dealt with their emotions and feelings of loss and grief very differently. They felt the urge to talk about their feelings, in particular about the deceased.

The urge for elderly guardians in skipped-generation households to talk of the dead was more than something that they simply felt like doing; they also felt a responsibility to tell their grandchildren about their past. Despite their focus on day-to-day survival, in the evenings many elderly caregivers sought opportunities to talk to their grandchildren, trying to help or push them to discuss their feelings and grief. However, few elderly caregivers had the skills or the knowledge required to help their grandchildren deal with their traumatic experiences, and thus such attempts by guardians to encourage talk often failed. In some instances, they did more harm than good. Some of the children and young people’s reactions to these attempts led them to stay away from home.

[It is] at night when we sit around the fire that my grandfather starts talking about my parents and the olden days. He talks about when he was young and when my parents were still alive. Those are all the things I don’t want to hear. I don’t want to remember my parents because it only makes me sad to know they are gone and I will not return to that way of life. To avoid hearing these stories I pretend to sleep or I go away. (13-year-old boy)

My grandmother always tells me how beautiful my mother was and that I am like her. But to me it is only painful and sad. This is because I can’t remember what she looked like ... So I say to my grandmother I still have some job to do such as collecting a bit of water, or that I am tired. (9-year-old girl)

As the quotes above indicate, the children’s reactions to such attempts by their elderly guardians to discuss their parents and the past were often negative. Some children and young people stayed away from home, others made up excuses, and in so doing they avoided having to listen to their guardians talk about their parents and the past. The consequences of this were painful for all involved. The gap between the two generations would widen and in some instances irritation would mount, leading to intergenerational conflict. In other households, the elderly were without people to talk to since the children had fallen silent.

The children and young people indicated that their siblings were the only people with whom they felt comfortable discussing the illness and loss of their parents and their relocations. Despite living with their siblings, however, some felt that the home was not a setting where they could talk freely. One reason for this was that their guardians were usually present. If they did not have opportunities to talk privately to their siblings about their grief, they would rather not discuss their feelings at all.

Despite intergenerational conflicts, older children and young people expressed a degree of understanding of their guardians' grief. Since they consciously expe-
rienced grief and loss themselves, they were more perceptive of what their guardians were going through. They realised in many cases that their guardian did not have other people to talk to as he or she had little contact outside of the home. They told of how they tried to avoid conflicts and tensions in the home, for example by listening to their guardian even if they did not feel like doing so.

I always tell myself that my grandmother is missing my parents just like I miss them. But my mother was her child so the way she remembers my mother is different from how I remember. She knew my mother when she was young, even before I was born. I know my mother from when I was young and we didn’t live with my grandmother. We remember the same person but still it is different. So I understand that her memories and stories are different from my stories. So I listen to my grandmother and share my own memories with her. (16-year-old female)

When my grandmother cries I go to sit with her. She complains that all her children have died and that she is living a life that she does not deserve. I remember my parents and even some of the aunts and uncles that she mourns. It helps her when I also share some of my stories about these people and we help each other to feel better. (18-year-old male)

If it was only me, I wouldn’t talk about those who are no longer here with us. I prefer to forget about the past and instead focus on the future and my development. But my grandparents are very sad ... They have lost many of their children. For them it is important to talk about them, and about the past. So I try and sit down with them when I feel they need someone to listen. It is difficult for me but I feel that responsibility to them. (19-year-old female)

Younger children did not tend to show such consideration for their grandparents and they avoided having to talk about these issues. In households where there were only younger children, the chances of stress and conflict were therefore greater; but in households with more varied age distribution among the younger generation, the older children supported their grandparents and conflicts were less likely to occur.

• Other causes of stress between children and young people and their guardians

Dealing with loss and grief was one of a number of reasons for stress and conflict between the older and younger generations in skipped-generation households. Other reasons were related to the generational gap.

Decision making about income generation, particularly farming, caused problems. The older members of skipped-generation households had stopped farming years earlier, when their children and other middle-aged relatives had taken over from them. When they became the heads of skipped-generation households, they had to start again. Some grandchildren had learned to farm from their parents and what they had learned was different from what their grandparents had practiced. Examples of such differences include the fact that the older generation did not use fertiliser, they used traditional maize varieties, and they burned their fields rather than composting residual plants. Some members of the younger generation, on the other hand, knew that the modern techniques were better than the old
ways. They felt that they had the knowledge, skills and energy to improve their family’s harvest. Furthermore, they were the ones doing most of the work in the fields, and they felt this entitled them to have some say in how it was done. Nevertheless, they had little power to make decisions, and this situation frustrated many of the respondents.

When I was living with my parents I used to work with them on the fields ... We used to save money and invest into the cooperative. Since my father is no longer around it is not his way of farming anymore. My grandfather refuses to invest. We have seen our harvest become small. I tell my grandfather often that he should invest in the cooperative. But to him this is strange and he thinks I am just causing problems ... I told him again last year and he said, “When I was young we never used fertilisers, it is because of the poor rains that cause the plants to be small”. I have seen for myself what fertiliser can do but I cannot influence my grandfather. It makes me feel sad and angry to know we could have enough food. Instead we work hard and go hungry. (19-year-old male)

When I was with my parents I used to work with them on the fields. After I wrote my exams I was on their fields full-time. These are the same fields I work on today, since we remained in the same village after they died. We used to buy a lot of fertiliser and some seeds through the cooperatives. I tell my grandmother I know how we can improve and develop ourselves. She gets angry at me when I say these things ... This makes me sad. Even if we work harder than our neighbour we still have a smaller harvest. (19-year-old female)

Not being listened to or consulted by their older guardians was painful for the younger generation, especially when they felt that their households were going hungry as a result. The respondents said that they felt that this was unnecessary. Several young people in this situation saw this as a reason to leave the household in which they lived.

I lived with my grandmother and grandfather since 2002 when both of my parents died. They were the ones who would tell us how to work on the fields and when to sell the harvest ... But they were never seen on the fields because they were too old. For me it was not possible to remain there because I saw the hunger my siblings were facing. I learned what farming today is like from my mother. But old people don’t know how it is. For me there was no choice and despite the pain I felt for my brothers and sisters I left that place in 2007. My older brother lives in Mpongwe and he agreed to give me some land to farm on. Now I have a wife and a child and we are in a better place. (23-year-old male)

Many of the younger respondents voiced their frustrations, but only a handful of them actually went against their older guardians’ wishes. Rather than argue, most kept quiet. Some deviated from their guardian’s wishes, but kept this a secret: some respondents, for instance, invested in seeds and fertiliser for the fields, others had alternative income generating strategies besides the work they had been told to do. The lack of parenting in their households and their guardians’ limited physical mobility allowed them to do such things unnoticed. One of the activities engaged in by the children and young people, without the knowledge and approval of their guardians, was growing vegetables.

I knew there was money in relish [vegetables] since very few people grow them. My father had shown me how to grow some vegetables so to me it was a good idea. I told her we
should use the land next to the river to grow vegetables. But she always refused. So with the money that I made from fishing we started to save a small amount every time. When I had enough I went to buy seeds at the Mission. I went to collect seeds for rape, cabbage, and tomatoes. Now we have more food for the family. What we do is that when our grandmother sends the young ones to the market to buy something we go to our farm. There we pick the vegetables and we keep the money. Sometimes she finds out we didn’t go to the market and she will ask us where we got the relish. We tell her we bought them from that person, or that person, who has a garden. She cannot check these things and she forgets quickly. In this way we manage to eat, to buy seeds for the garden, and use the money for other food or for school uniforms. (19-year-old male)

The above quote shows the strong will and personality exhibited by some of the younger respondents. However, this sense of action, determination and planning was not very common. More common were stories of children and young people who lied about their incomes to their guardians. Though most said that they did try to save money for their household, some admitted to using the money that they withheld to pursue their own interests.

Decision making about work and income generation was not the only issue that was a potential source of stress and conflict. A second issue was related to the changing roles and responsibilities of members of both the younger and older generations in the home. In the skipped-generation households studied, the generation gap between the children and young people and their older caregivers forced both groups into roles normally played by middle-aged adults. This was a source of stress.

Many children and young people expressed disappointment and frustration about the roles played by their older guardians. When they had relocated, they had expected grandparents, but had instead found guardians acting like parents.

I used to visit my grandmother often when I was still living with my parents. She lived close to our house. She was always very nice to me. After my parents died I hoped my grandmother would take us into her home. Eventually it was decided we were to move to her house. At first I was very happy. But I soon found out she was very different. She acted differently to me than she did before. She became like an aunt to me rather than my grandmother. Sometimes I think she is like a parent. I thought life would be better but sometimes I feel it makes no difference if you are with your granny or with another relative. (13-year-old female)

I used to live in Nkana [an urban settlement close to Kitwe]. When it was decided that I would go to live with them [grandparents] after my parents died I did not know what I would find. My friends told me I would enjoy spending time with my Shikulus [elders] and that I would enjoy it ... I had many expectations but I found it to be very different. For me they are like parents and not like the stories I heard from my friends. (14-year-old male)

It is like they are different people. It takes long to get used to the difference between grandparents who you visit as a child and the people who are now trying to raise you. I have heard from my friends who live with other relatives that life for them is very tough. When I compare this to my own life I know I should not complain. It was just a shock to me that my grandmother was suddenly the one who was responsible for me. (16-year-old female)

The disappointment and the unmet expectations expressed by the younger respondents living in skipped-generation households were not found among or-
phans and dependent children who lived with other guardians. This difference is best explained through the types of relationships between these different children and their guardians. Children have a certain type of relationship with aunts, uncles and other middle-aged relatives. These people are, even in a normal situation, more involved in their parenting. As a result, those children and young people who had moved in with an aunt or uncle did not have a sense of disappointment about the role that their guardian(s) played. For children who had moved in with their grandparents, however, they found in this new situation the loss of a former relationship.

A third source of stress and conflict were the unrealistic expectations that older guardians had of the younger people in their care. These expectations manifested prominently in relation to the perceived value of education. The older generation had rarely enjoyed more than two years of schooling, if that. Despite this, they had been able to find work. They felt that a child with a primary school diploma, who had more years of education than they had ever had, should have no problems finding work. The reality is, however, very different. The older generation had no understanding of the employment situation in Misangwa, or in Zambia as a whole. Children with grade seven, grade nine or even grade 12 diplomas have difficulty finding jobs, especially in rural areas. Instead, many of the children worked around the house or on the farm after completing school, and very few were able to find paid work.

When I finished grade seven exams I had good grades and hoped to continue my schooling. My grandparents did not allow this. My grandfather told me I had many more years of education than he had ever had. He said, “I only had standard 1 and 2, only two years, and I had enough food for my wife and all of my children. You can do the same and look after me and your grandmother now”. Up to today they have not allowed me to go back to school. When I explain I cannot find a job like this they get angry and tell me I am lazy. (16-year-old male)

When their expectations were not met, the older guardian blamed the children and young people. As was seen in the above quote, they felt that the children were lazy and were not trying hard enough to find work. Their frustration was reflected in the way that they behaved towards the young people in their care, which in turn caused the young people to feel frustrated and pressured. The latter also felt that their guardians had no understanding of the current labour market and saw their expectations as unfair and unrealistic. This dynamic led to a lot of stress in several of the households studied. Some of the young people mentioned how they had decided to leave the household because of this situation. Some who had moved on shared that they had stopped visiting their former home altogether, because they felt that they were not able to meet their grandparents’ expectations of them and pleas for more support.

My grandmother had heard I was driving a minibus. She thinks every person to drive a car is the owner of that car. When I had my first salary I went back to her home and gave her
something. She took the money, K. 50,000, but was angry with me. She expected more and said I didn’t care about her. The next time the same thing happened. My salary as a driver is not much and renting a home in Luanshya is very expensive for me. My wife has no job and we have three children. Also, we look after two children from her sister. The next time I came to my grandmother she was again shouting at me and insulting me. I explained we were also suffering and that this was what I could share. She just shouted at me telling me it was me who was in town and who was rich. “You don’t care about your grandmother!” she said ... Nowadays I just stop visiting her place and instead I meet my younger brother. I give him something to take home. (22-year-old male)

The children and young people, especially the younger ones, found these arguments and conflicts with their grandparents difficult to deal with. Several discussed how they found themselves forced to choose sides. The younger ones, especially those younger than ten years, often chose the side of their guardian over their older siblings; they also complained that they did not understand why their older siblings were angry with them when they did so. Many of these younger children said that they chose their guardian’s side because they felt sorry for them; others said that they did not understand the conflict, or that they felt compelled to stick with their guardian simply because of their love and loyalty to them. Some comments made by the younger children (aged eight to 11) during FGDs reveal such feelings.

When there are misunderstandings at home I feel sorry for my grandmother. When things go wrong some of my brothers will be angry with her. I feel sorry for her and try to comfort her. When the others make fun of me, or when they beat me, it is my grandmother who comforts me and protects me. I have to do the same for her. (9 year-old female)

I try to stay away from the words, but when I am forced to choose I will go for my grandmother. She is the one who I trust to protect me and tell me what is right. (10 year-old male)

The one who protects and comforts me is the one that I trust. When there is a problem I comfort my grandmother. The older children get angry with me ... But she is the one who can assist me in life so I need to stay with her. (9 year-old female)

You cannot choose properly when these situations take place. I just sit and say nothing and afterwards I will go to help my grandfather with cooking or sweeping so that he does not feel alone. (11 year-old male)

It was once when we had many problems at home. For me it was simple, I went to my friend’s place. That night the other children didn’t come back to the home and I was the only one who slept in the house. When they came back the next day they were angry because I didn’t go with them but I told them, “This is my home, there is no other place where I can sleep”. (10 year-old male)

The older children and young people dealt with the conflicts differently. They carried their frustration with them but rarely voiced this to their guardians. During conflicts, they said that they would try to convey what it was that they wanted to say without losing their patience or raising their voice. Dealing with criticism from the younger generation was difficult for the older guardians. In some cases, they became angry and scolded their grandchildren for trying to interfere with the way the household was run. Not being able to change anything prompt-
ed some young people to leave home, though most tried to restore the peace and move on. In some cases, they simply did what they were told by their grandparent.

- Changing relationships among the younger generation

In skipped-generation households, children and young people must assume adults roles early in life. However, when some of them took on parenting responsibilities for the younger children in the household, this often caused conflicts among the younger generation. Children who had once played together found themselves in a situation where the older ones began acting more like parents and less like siblings. This transition sometimes happened without problems; though when older siblings felt the need to verbally or physically punish the younger children, this could lead to problems. This FGD excerpt illustrates how children and young people struggled to deal with this.

Moderator: You have mentioned you have fights with the older children in your home because you feel they treat you wrongly. Can someone explain what you mean by this?

A: Yes, I can explain this. There was once when I took some relish from the pots. The food had been prepared by my older sister and we were just waiting for someone to come home before we could eat. So when she saw me eating some relish she started shouting and took me outside. There she beat me with the spoon that she used to make nshima. I started crying and my grandmother came to comfort me. My sister didn’t accept this and said she had told me not to touch the pots. And then my grandmother agreed that I had been wrong.

Moderator: And how did you feel?

A: I was very angry with my sister, we are all the same. She should not act like she is my parent.

Moderator: And how did you feel about what your grandmother had said?

A: I don’t understand why she allows my sister to control me like that. If it was something my grandmother had told I would understand, but not this way.

B: I have experienced the same ... If you go out of the home when you were told to remain at home my brother can shout at me. I knew he had told me to remain there but he always goes out and does what he wants. Since he is not my father or grandfather I remember that we used to get money from our grandmother and we used to walk to the market together. Even then we sometimes used to make mistakes so I don’t understand why he gets angry now if he did the same when we went together.

Interviews with other younger respondents suggest that in households where middle-aged adults were present, such problems among the younger generation were less common. The middle-aged adults took on the parenting roles and the older children did not. Especially when it came to handing out punishment in these households, the older children were less likely to assume such roles; when

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2 Corporal punishment is a very common practice in Misangwa and is not frowned upon by adults or children.
they did so, it was only when they were much older, and the age difference be-
tween the children was such that the younger ones accepted the older one’s au-
thority.

In skipped-generation households, the elderly guardians were not always able
to maintain their authority over the younger members, and thus often depended
on the older children to discipline the younger ones. As seen above, the younger
children talked resentfully about being punished by their older siblings. Despite
the stories, however, it would be incorrect to assume that parenting by older
children consisted only of punishments. The findings show that it entailed much
more, such as caring, comforting, and helping and supporting younger siblings.
Indeed, many of the older young people interviewed felt that it was not up to
them to punish the younger children, and as the following quotes show, they
were reluctant to use their parenting powers.

Yes, we say she [grandmother] is the one who decides. In reality the children often work to-
gether for our development. This means I am now much more like the parent for the young
ones. I don’t tell them this because I want to be a friend and brother, like it was in the past. I
just tell them what is to be done and I don’t shout at them ... If they need to be punished then
that is not up to me to do. (18-year-old male)

When I have a problem in controlling the young ones I will not be the judge but I tell our
grandmother. She is the one to decide on what will happen to them. For me I want to work
hard for the family but I am not the parent even if I am older. I can warn the young ones but
in the end I leave it to my grandmother to decide what to do when there are problems. (16-
year-old female)

The transfer of parenting roles to the older members of the younger generation
in skipped-generation households did not occur in all households. Some older
guardians were able to parent the children themselves. In these households, it
was common for older children to stand up for and protect their younger siblings
during times of intergenerational conflict. Not only did they protect them, but
they sometimes took the blame when things went wrong knowing that, as adoles-
cents, they would not be punished. They would also do this when they felt that
their guardian was behaving inappropriately or badly, for instance as a result of
frustration, depression or alcohol abuse.

There was an issue at our house last night. When our grandmother returned to the home she
found that someone had gone into her house. I know it was my little brother [aged ten years]
because he told me he found some food in her house. I told him we would prepare something
for him but he was too hungry to wait for us and he entered her house. When our grandmoth-
er starting asking us who had been there I said it was me. I told her I was looking for a pot
that was missing. It was a good thing to do because she doesn’t beat me these days. If she
had heard it was Fred it would have been war! (19-year-old male)

This type of protection was found to be common, particularly when the age
difference between the children was large. Many of the young people commented
upon how their own roles had changed over time; they carried various responsi-
bilities for their guardians, sometimes taking on adult roles, but at the same time they were loyal to their younger siblings. In most households, the members of the younger generation worked together and generally got along. Despite the efforts of all, however, intra-generational conflicts within households still occurred. The trusting relationships between children came under pressure as young children felt betrayed and older children and young people felt unappreciated and frustrated.

The school setting

The school setting was another important social setting. Not all of the children and young people living in skipped-generation households went to school, though the majority did. While they attended classes only for a short time each day, they nevertheless spent a lot of time at school and socialised around the school premises.

Much of their contact with other children and young people occurred during the walk to and from school. For some, this walk could be up to two or even three hours. These walks thus constituted well-established microsystems, as the children and young people would meet friends and other people along the way. During classes there was little room for interaction, as children’s input or discussion is not accepted. Sports and drama activities were not included on the timetable, but most schools did have sports fields, so after school hours many of the boys played football while the girls played netball or other games.

As seen in Table 7.3 above, there was no difference between children and young people living in skipped-generation households and those in the control group in terms of the number of reported interactions between children and teachers. Furthermore, both groups of younger people said that they experienced difficult relationships with their teachers, describing them as unfavourable and yet unavoidable. Few children or young people reported having strong or positive relationships with their teachers. They gave two reasons for this. The first was that teachers were not accessible. The teachers in Misangwa face high workloads and must teach several classes per day. Children spend no more than two hours a day in class and the average size of a class is 40 pupils, so the amount of contact between individual pupils and their teacher is limited. The second reason given was that the children and young people actually tried to minimise the contact between themselves and their teachers, as they were afraid that their teachers might contact their parent or guardian.

As is probably the case everywhere, children also mentioned teasing and fighting at school. The data suggest that poverty was the cause of some of the problems and stigma facing some children at school. When households failed to meet the financial and material demands associated with school, the children
faced difficulties. Non- or late payment of contributions, the wearing of worn out uniforms, and lack of grooming were all reasons for discrimination.

I conducted several sit-in observations at schools, where I witnessed teachers singling out specific children whose parents or guardians had not paid their contributions on time. I observed these children being summoned to the front of the class on several occasions, where the teachers made it clear that they were tired of “poor orphans”. All of the children pulled up to the front of class for late payments were called orphans, whether they lived with their parents or not. One illustration of this is the story of a 12-year-old girl who lived with her parents. Her family was poor, and her parents had difficulties paying the PTA contributions. She told how she had been shouted at by the teachers for this, and recalled her teacher saying: “It is always orphans causing problems here. No money and you are dirty ... Go home and bathe before you come back!” When the girl arrived home she got into more trouble: “My parents got angry for me because they did not believe I got sent out of school for being an orphan ...” This example reveals a generalisation that was common in the area, namely that poverty and orphanhood were associated with one another.

When my grandmother was late paying the fees the teacher started questioning me. At first this was in the office when she would ask where the money was. Later on the teacher would call me to the front of the classroom. She called me an orphan ... From that day things were different ... Some children stopped playing with me because they said I had killed my parents. It is just with special friends that I can play now. (12-year-old female)

In general terms, the teachers did appear to care about the children. But at the same time, they felt stressed and frustrated about their status as poorly paid civil servants. All of the teachers whom I spoke to in Misangwa were from outside the area and had been relocated there by the Ministry of Education. During interviews, they said that it was difficult for them to make ends meet and that the demands on them were huge. The school facilities were inadequate, there were not enough classrooms, teaching materials were unavailable, and staff housing was insufficient and in poor condition. Some teachers said that they taught over 150 pupils per day. While their socio-economic situation was better than most people in the area, they still needed to pursue other income generating activities in order to live.

The reality for the teachers was that they worked for institutions that were seriously underfunded and they were pressurised by their colleagues and management to push those who failed to pay on time. They were aware of the potential damage in terms of stigmatisation and discrimination that such pressure – especially when delivered publicly in front of a child’s peers – could cause, yet they singled out such children nevertheless. I argue that despite their frustration and lack of skills and resources, these are nevertheless no excuse for the public shaming of children.
The peer setting

All of the younger respondents mentioned friends as important people in their lives. Twenty-nine of the 30 younger respondents in skipped-generation households documented in their diaries having had interactions with friends and peers. For the control group respondents, this number was 24 out of 30. Friends meant a lot to the younger respondents in skipped-generation households. Friends were considered fun, but they were also the people with whom they could consult in case of questions, difficulties or worries. The numerous activities which the younger respondents undertook with friends included doing chores together, walking to school, working on the fields, playing together and simply hanging around. The respondents had many friends, whom they categorised according to the level of trust that they felt with them. Almost all of the children and young people had one best friend.

Despite the warm relationships that many children had with their peers, these relationships were not always positive. Orphaned children and those from very poor homes were teased, bullied, segregated or abused by other children. As was explained in the previous section, teachers were the source of some of these problems. Peers, however, picked up on what teachers said and continued the teasing. The children called this joking (milangwe), though sometimes it was more serious and conflicts could occur as a result. Another source of teasing among children was when punishments at home became a public affair, and this was picked up on by their peers.

If your grandmother is angry this will be taken over by the community. People may start to joke about you saying you are misbehaving or you are a bad person for upsetting your grandmother. If she calls you stupid they will remember. After my grandmother called me stupid the children at our neighbour’s village started joking about this and called me stupid. I felt very bad and stopped visiting them because of that. (11-year-old male)

It is very painful to me that what happened to me is repeated by other children. My father died and the people say he was bewitched when he was walking to his field. People sometimes avoid me and they say I am now the one who is bewitched. I don’t know but it gives me doubts and sometimes I fear I can also die from the spell. Other times they say I was the witch who killed my father. I don’t want to remember those times but other children hear these stories from their parents and they like to talk about it. I pray that one day they will forget what people have said. (11-year-old female)

The older children and young people in particular spent a lot of time with their peers. During this time they had the opportunity to discuss their situation at home, their future and ambitions, members of the opposite sex, music, sports and religion. Young people were very interested in news and current affairs. Newspapers were rare, but when someone had one it was shared, and groups of young people gathered to read together. The few radios and televisions in Misangwa were also popular among these younger respondents, and whenever possible they gathered together to enjoy the broadcasts.
On the BBC radio there is one programme that my friends and I enjoy very much! It is about music. Young people from all over the world can ask for a song to be played. The only thing you have to do is to explain how your life is and where you listen to the programme. It is very nice to hear people from other countries and to find out about their lives ... I listen at my friend’s house. (17-year-old female)

Programmes on music and science were popular among girls, while sport programmes, especially about football, were preferred by the boys. Gaining access to media was difficult. None of the skipped-generation households possessed televisions and only six of the 65 households owned a radio. Most respondents who did not have access to a television or radio went to a friend’s home or to public places such as bars.

Many adolescents admitted that they did not only visit the drinking places to listen to the radio or watch television. Both girls and boys went drinking if they had the money, while the boys also smoked ganja or fiamba (local names for marijuana). This they did with friends, they said, and never alone. Young people also said that they had sex. Based on their answers to specific questions, they demonstrated that they were well informed about HIV and STIs. Because of fear of gossip and stigma, however, they encountered problems in accessing condoms and birth control.

I used to attend a youth club where we were told about AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. I can name many for you. The problem is not that I don’t know how to protect myself but that it is difficult to buy condoms in this place. I know where they are found. If I go there I am afraid many people you know will be found there. You can’t buy these things without people talking about you. (19-year-old female)

Part of life in skipped-generation households is that the younger generation have to assume more responsibilities at an earlier age. As has been demonstrated above, this can lead to conflicts between members of the two generations, and among members of the younger generation. It also has consequences for the social standing of the respondents, especially the older boys and young men. In some homes, they have had to assume responsibilities that are considered woman’s work and were thus seen to be feminine. These respondents reported that this caused them to lose their social standing and made them the victims of name calling and ridicule by their peers.

I am the oldest of the children living here ... My grandmother does not leave her bed often these days. This means I have to do all the work around the house. The people who see me cooking, washing or cleaning the house often laugh at me ... Our neighbour always laughs at me. He tells his friends, “You will see a woman from far, but when she comes close you see it is a man”. It hurts me that people question my manhood and say I can’t be a real man doing these jobs. I often hear people saying, “There are problems in that home; there is not even a woman to do the cooking”. They have no idea why there is no woman in our household. There is no defence when people say that in our home, “The woman has been replaced by a man”. (21-year-old male)
When males did female jobs, this sometimes even led to the breakup of friendships.

Some of the boys and girls who live close to our home had seen me by the river washing the clothes of my younger brother and sister. I was also washing some of the clothes, including the underwear, even those of my grandfather. When they saw this they began to laugh. When I came to school I heard that they had told others. My friends say I should stop doing those things, they said they did not want to know me if I continued. They told me to stop coming to their homes. One of my closest friends told me, “I do not want to be seen with you if you continue to behave like a woman. People might think that we are sodomists”.

(17-year-old male)

Other respondents explained how they had also lost friends because of their chores. For young men, the consequences reached further, as the girls or women whom they were dating would end the relationship upon finding out what they did at home. The young men explained that their girlfriends questioned their masculinity, and believed that it was often the friends of these girls who pushed them to do so.

I was seeing a girl who I met at school. You might call this having a girlfriend. Here that is difficult so I will just call her my female friend. One day she told me that her friends had been asking her about me. She said they were asking if I was a real man and if she was sure I was good for marriage. She asked me, “You carry the water like a woman, you cook like a woman and you look after the small children like a mother. How can I be sure you will be able to give me children when we get married?” I told her that these two things were not the same. But she couldn’t understand and said she didn’t want to meet anymore. Even to this day I have not seen her, she is “looking for a real man”.

(21-year-old male)

Experiences like this one are things that these young people could hardly share with others. Often, the people with whom they would like to talk about such matters were the same people who had gossiped about them. For the older boys and young men, it was difficult to choose between the needs at home and their own social standing in the community.

What I can do about these issues? For me that is a tough question. The easiest thing is to ignore those people and trust the Lord knows you are doing [the] right thing. But everyone wants friends, I want to marry a nice girl and one day start a family. Everyone needs respect. So sometimes I find myself thinking I should leave this place and build a house for my own ... But then I remember my role here ... God would not want me to abandon them even if it is tough. But doubts are there.

(21-year-old male)

The problems stemming from doing tasks associated with the opposite sex primarily impacted the boys and young men rather than the girls and young women. In cases where girls reported similar situations, these appeared to have less impact. Some older girls and young women had to assume men’s roles, including ploughing, harvesting and thatching. Some of them reported that people would laugh at them and say that they should find a man to help them. Neverthe-
less, in Misangwa women doing men’s work seemed to be more acceptable than when males did female jobs.

The community setting

Neighbours were important people in the lives of the younger respondents. Twenty-seven of the 30 younger people living in skipped-generation households mentioned interactions with neighbours, compared to 21 of 30 from the control group. This difference was found to be statistically significant (P < 0.056), which shows that young people in skipped-generation households were more likely to engage with their neighbours than others in the community were.

Many of the younger respondents in skipped-generation households said that they felt comfortable with people who were the same age as their parents would have been. Most of the neighbours that the children and young people mentioned spending time with were middle-aged adults. These neighbours were important when they had problems or questions, and they were the people that the younger respondents said that they trusted. They explained that they felt that the neighbours understood them better than their guardians, and this led many children to go to their neighbours when intergenerational stress or conflicts occurred in their households.

Often I will talk to my neighbour when I have done something wrong. The neighbour will listen to my whole story and only judge when I have finished. My grandmother will start to shout and beat me before I have explained everything. The neighbour will listen to me and she will talk to my grandmother. My grandmother will not beat the neighbour and will often forgive me when she knows the whole story. (12-year-old female)

Not all experiences with neighbours were positive, however. Sometimes the neighbours were involved in the ridiculing and name calling of children and young people (gossipping about boys and men who undertook feminine tasks in their households is one example). Other negative interactions that the younger respondents talked about included drunken neighbours, and disputes and lack of general cooperation between their household and their neighbours, which led to hostility and fighting in the community.

Some skipped-generation households made beer as an income generating activity. In cases when their homes served as a drinking place, the neighbours and other community members would spend a lot of time, sometimes whole days, sitting around and drinking. This caused the older children in particular to feel vulnerable.

I don’t drink. Despite that many of my friends drink, I feel it is a waste of money. Also, God does not approve and I want to be a good Christian. Sometimes I do feel pressured. Our grandmother brews beer and sometimes people will come to our house to drink. My friends do respect my choices. But people who come to our house, especially the neighbours, will joke. They ask, “Why don’t you have a small cup? You are a man ... or do you still want to be a boy? Or say, “Real men are supposed to drink ... just go and play with your friends! You
Mwaiche [young boy]!” Often I find it easiest to get a small cup and pretend to be a drinker than to refuse! (18-year-old male)

The times when our neighbour has people who come to his place to drink I hesitate to leave the house. Some of the men know I live here and they will send the young ones here to call me. I know that when they get drunk they become interested in touching me and asking to dance with them ... They refuse to listen when I say no. Then they start singing about me and the things they want to do ... it is difficult, and sometimes afterwards I will hear children singing the songs they hear about me. (19-year-old female)

Problems associated with alcohol have been discussed in detail in Chapter Six. Suffice it to say here that misfortune, ill health, hunger and grief were all reasons (or excuses) for people to drink. Skipped-generation households were among the poorest in Misangwa, and the older generation were often lonely and bereaved. The children and young people in these households were thus at a greater risk of living with an intoxicated guardian, and experiencing the negative impacts that this may bring.

In Misangwa, social groups were found to be important in people’s lives. They constituted a large part of people’s social capital and were important for social standing. As was explained in Chapter Six, the members of the older generation in skipped-generation households were found to be less likely to be part of social groups than other people in the community. This meant that the younger people in these households were also less likely to be part of social groups. For example, children and young people living in skipped-generation households were less likely to attend church or be a member of a church group than their peers in other types of households – as illustrated in Table 7.3, which shows that interactions with church members and leaders were not mentioned as often as by younger people in the control group. The difference between the two groups was statistically significant (P < 0.039).

Given their limited participation in social groups, the children and young people in skipped-generation households lacked many social connections that were found to be common for others. They often realised that they were missing out, but did not feel that they could do anything to change this.

I used to attend the Church of Zambia together with my parents. My grandmother is also a religious person but the church is too far for her. It is at the other side of the Mission and it can take us more than two hours to reach. Since we have no bicycle we cannot manage. Most of my friends go to church but for us it is difficult because we cannot leave our grandmother alone with the young ones. It is just not possible now. I want to go there together with my friends but at the moment we just remain at home. (18-year-old male)

Not being part of community groups meant that some of the more general social control that is exercised over children was absent for those growing up in skipped-generation households. It meant that these younger people enjoyed more freedom and less interference in their lives, but there was in turn less community
protection and guidance. It also meant that they were more vulnerable to risky
behaviour and abuse by others. This will be discussed in the following section.

Mesosystems that hardly exist

Introduction

Bronfenbrenner defined the mesosystem as “a set of interrelations between two
or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (e.g., for a
child, the relations among home, school, and neighbourhood peer group; for an
adult, among family, work, and social life” (Bronfenbrenner 1979: 25). According
to Bronfenbrenner, the most basic form of a mesosystem is created “when the
developing person first enters a new setting” (ibid.: 210). For instance, when a
child starts his/her educational career, s/he becomes the primary link between the
microsystem of the school and the microsystem of the home. Primary links are
the reason why mesosystems exist, yet in order to study mesosystems the focus
must also be on the participation of significant others. These may be parents,
guardians, other adults, siblings and peers, all of whom have contact with one
another; contact in which the developing child plays no direct part but is the
focus of attention. Put more simply, mesosystems are the relations that exist
between the significant others found in the different microsystems that a develop-
ing child operates in. Examples are the linkages between a child’s parents or
guardians and their teachers or friends (or the parents of their friends). Strong
mesosystem linkages work to inform important people in the lives of children
about their whereabouts and actions when they are in other microsystem settings.

To study the mesosystems of children and young people, both those living in
skipped-generation households and those in the control group, I collected data
about the microsystems of the children and those of their parent(s) or guardian(s).
For the purpose of comparison, the microsystems of parents/guardians living in
other types of households were also collected. This data was recorded in Chapter
Six, where the contact between guardians in skipped-generation households with
outside others were examined and compared to those of guardians in other
households (the control group).

Figure 7.1 shows the microsystem settings of two respondents in a skipped-
generation household: a granddaughter (12 years) and her grandfather (74 years).
The figure shows in which settings, and with which actors, they reportedly inter-
acted. The data was based on both respondents’ diary entries kept over one week.
They shared a few contacts: people in the home setting, neighbours, friends of
the girl, extended family members and people in the community. The girl, how-
ever, had two important microsystems that her grandfather played no part in: the
income generation setting and the school setting. In turn, her grandfather was the only one to have interactions with his church.

Apart from sharing a home and a family, these two people interacted with different significant others in different social arenas. This meant that few people in the girl’s microsystems outside of the home – such as her school and peer settings – had contact with her grandfather. Indeed, the girl’s microsystems were diverse and it seems unlikely that people in any one of them interacted with people in the others.

This lack of contact is illustrative of weak mesosystem level exchange. Without any relations between the people in the girl’s different microsystems, especially the lack of connections between her grandfather and others, her mesosystem is underdeveloped, if not almost non-existent. No communication structures linked the various social settings that the girl was part of, or the significant people who are found in these settings. In practice, this means that if something were to happen to the girl at school or at the market, her grandfather would be unlikely to know about it unless she told him what had happened. The girl was thus responsible for communication between the various settings and people in her life. This is not necessarily problematic, but one could imagine that she would be less inclined to tell her grandfather or others around her when she has misbehaved or has failed to live up to what is expected of her, for example at school.

The situation demonstrated in Figure 7.1 is comparable to that found in many of the skipped-generation households. The data suggest that the mesosystems around children in Misangwa in general were weak. Across the 65 skipped-generation households studied, however, the mesosystems of the children were even weaker. Some of the findings related to mesosystems are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first finding relates to neighbours. We saw that these people were important in the lives of children and young people in skipped-generation households. Here, we see that they were sometimes the most important supplementary links in younger people’s microsystems, and were often the only people with whom the older guardians interacted frequently.

Another finding is that in skipped-generation households guardians’ involvement in their grandchildren’s education was limited. None of the 30 guardians studied had frequent contact with their grandchildren’s teachers and most of them had never visited the school. The teachers in turn were overburdened and sometimes had other (income-related) priorities, thus had little time for such interactions. Children and young people also contributed to this, mentioning several reasons why they tried to avoid contact between themselves or their guardians and their teachers. These included that some of them were scared of the teachers and they were afraid that teachers might inform guardians of things that happen
at school, such as the actual length of time children spend at school. This lead to a situation where there was limited interaction between teachers and pupils and between teachers and guardians, and very few teachers were part of the children and young people’s mesosystems.

**Figure 7.1** Personal and shared microsystem settings and actors for a granddaughter (12 years) and her grandfather (74 years) living in a skipped-generation household

In fact, it was found that there were few community members, besides neighbours, who served as the so-called supplementary links that constitute mesosystems of all the children and young people’s developmental contexts. Because of the older guardian’s limited mobility, and the reduced number of (reciprocal) relationships that they engaged in, this was particularly true for younger people living in skipped-generation households. The consequence of this was that older guardians had little idea of what the younger people in their care did when they were away from home, teachers had little idea of the situation in their homes, and other people in the community did not know their guardians (and even if they did know the guardians, they had no contact with them).

A fourth finding is that the role of peers as mesosystem linkages was generally very limited. Friends of the children and young people living in skipped-generation households did interact with these children’s guardians, and several of the older guardians mentioned that the friends of the children in their care pro-
vided a source of joy, but few of the children appreciated their friends sharing information about them with their guardians. Most children thus practiced restraint when visiting their friends’ homes and did not talk freely to the guardians. Several respondents explained that they preferred to play away from home so that their guardians could not ask their friends questions.

I prefer to play with my friend at his home or anywhere away from my home. My grandfather is always at home. He will ask us to do this or to do that. Sometimes he questions my friends where I have been and who I was talking to. So we prefer to meet each other somewhere else. (13-year-old male)

Many of the adult–child interactions were formal. This is part of a cultural behavioural pattern, where an older person cannot be looked at directly, and the younger person must always show deference. Children cannot talk freely and openly because of the age difference, and need to show respect towards adults, especially the elderly. For older children and young people, it was observed that this relationship often played out differently, as they were less shy than their younger siblings. They all said, however, that they did not have open and free interactions with the parents or guardians of their friends. Overall, therefore, the role of younger people of all ages in mesosystems appeared to be limited: because of the nature of adult–child interactions but also because they protected one another.

The fifth finding relates to another difference found between skipped-generation households and other households, namely participation in church. Most of the older guardians no longer attended church, since many of them were not able to walk the long distances. The following two quotes are from church leaders who commented on this.

I have been the priest-in-charge here since 2002. Over the years I have seen the number of old people who are in church during the Mass decline. The number of these people who are registered as being members of the congregation is stable. There are more and more people who send us a message requesting we visit them at their homes because they are not able to visit the church because of their frail state and the long distances that they need to travel. (Fr. Mumbi, priest-in-charge at St. Anthony’s Catholic Mission)

It is a real problem for the senior members of our church. People are old, their physical condition is poor and distances are great. I realise I would not notice if there were less children present but it is very obvious older people have difficulties attending church. Some do still come every Sunday, but those are the people who live close to the church. Many old people who live further away are not able to travel the distance. I try to visit them, but even for me transport is a problem. (Rev. Mfulwe, reverend at the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) at Mfulabunga)

The descriptions provided by the church leaders reflect the data collected from older guardians. A third (33.3%) of the older guardians in skipped-generation households reported having interactions with people they knew from church (see Table 6.5 in the previous chapter). For respondents from other types of house-
holds, this was 60%. Further questioning showed that of the 15 heads of skipped-generation households whose interactions with others outside of the household in the past week were investigated, only three had attended church in the previous week, compared to nine out of 10 respondents in the control group. Children, particularly the younger ones, whose guardians did not go to church, were unlikely to attend church themselves. Thus a lower proportion of children and young people in skipped-generation households attended church compared to those in other households. Given that most Zambians are very religious and almost all people of Misangwa count themselves as followers of one of the many churches in the area this has a great impact on them. Not being able to go to the church that you say you belong to led to even more social anonymity and isolation.

It seems that the children and young people growing up in skipped-generation households were not handed opportunities by their guardians or other adults, but needed to seize opportunities themselves. In Misangwa, the community was generally unaware of which households were in greatest need – as seen from the underdeveloped mesosystems – and thus the children and young people in skipped-generation households themselves needed to know how to look for help and support. This is one of the most important conclusions to be drawn from the microsystem and mesosystem analyses presented in this chapter. Children and young people needed to be the messengers of their own development. This is explained further in the conclusion to this chapter.

To illustrate how the factors explained above contribute to the limited development of children and young people’s mesosystems, it is functional to provide an example.

**A mesosystem example: The case of Maxwell**

This section provides an example of the mesosystem around Maxwell, a 16-year-old double orphan living with his 76-year-old grandmother and four siblings (two girls and two boys). The analysis reveals that Maxwell had links with the people in his home setting (his guardian and siblings), with the people he interacted with when he worked on the field in his income generation setting, with peers and friends, with people at school, and with community members. In Figure 7.2, all of these microsystem links to Maxwell are shown. There were also several links between the different microsystem actors, providing the supplementary links that constitute the mesosystem. Strong links are shown using solid lines, while the weaker links that were the product of chance and were not specifically for or about Maxwell are indicated using dotted lines.
The figure shows that there were few strong supplementary links to create Maxwell’s mesosystem. At home, Maxwell’s grandmother and siblings had strong relationships. His grandmother had regular contact with the neighbours and at times she talked about Maxwell with them. The other strong supplementary link that existed was between people in the school setting and his peers and friends. For example, teachers mentioned talking to siblings and friends of Maxwell to find out how things were at his home. In many cases, Maxwell’s peers and friends were also part of the school setting, but they have been indicated separately because not all interactions took place at, or were about, school.

One can argue that in terms of Maxwell’s development, three important supplementary links were missing: those between his grandmother and his school, between the grandmother and the income generation setting to which he belonged, and between the grandmother and his friends/peers. Links between his home and these three settings could facilitate the exchange of information which could foster his development. This dialogue could be used by Maxwell’s grandmother and the people in his microsystems to better support him and indentify the problems he faced, and could even help to prevent problems occurring in his life. The lack of these linkages implies that it was up to Maxwell to communicate his progress or problems to others. He was the one who had to update his grandmother on how he was managing his life. At the same time, Maxwell also had to inform his teachers if there were problems at home, such as
those that might lead to him being absent from school or late with the payment of school fees. He had to act as his own link in these areas.

What the absence of these linkages means for the children and young people in skipped-generation households is discussed in the following section.

The implications of poor mesosystems

Many of the children and young people in a skipped-generation households said that while they had more work to do for their household compared to other younger people, one of the advantages of living in such a household was that they had more freedom. This freedom was the result of weak mesosystem linkages, the absence of which has two explanations. The first is the age and lack of mobility and physical well-being of the older guardians, which meant that they were unable to control the younger people in their care, or go into the community to find out where they were and what they were doing. The second is the social isolation that was common to many of these households, meaning that they had less social capital and fewer relationships.

With weak mesosystems and guardians too old to check up on or punish them, the younger people living in skipped-generation households had the freedom to stay away from home longer than they should. In some cases, this meant that their older guardians were unnecessarily burdened with chores that the younger people could have done. The older children and young people in particular spent much time away from home, either socialising with friends (thus investing in social capital) or in the pursuit of food or money. The fact that these children and young people were able to make money, grow vegetables (without the knowledge of their guardians), and support their younger siblings was not only possible because of the limited mobility of the older generation. These activities were also possible because no one in the community mentioned them to their guardians. Had they had stronger meso-level linkages around them, someone would have likely informed their guardians about their activities.

Many of the younger children who attended school said that they were not honest about the time that they were in class. Several examples were found of children who spent much more time away from home than they needed to. Sam, a 12-year-old boy, stayed away for more than six hours every school day. His grandmother thought that he was at school, but in fact he was actually spending time at his friend’s home. His siblings knew about this and when I asked them why they did not talk to their grandmother about Sam’s behaviour, they had a logical explanation: they too lied about time and distances in order to be able to stay longer with their friends.

The young people’s contributions in terms of money and food, secured when they were absent from home, were vital for many of the households. Neverthe-
less, the potential problems related to weak mesosystems were also present, namely that guardians had no way of verifying whether the children were away from home for ‘good’ or ‘bad’ reasons. This caused them great concern. Playing football and walking longer routes to spend time with friends, as Sam did, is not dangerous. But for adolescents, this lack of guardian (and community) control enabled them to engage in risky behaviour that was potentially harmful to them. Some of the older children and young people, for example, had good excuses to be away from home, but in fact used these opportunities to spend time at drinking places listening to music, using drugs and alcohol, or for amorous meetings.

Most of the parents I spoke to in non-skipped-generation households would not allow their children to frequent drinking places. In fact, children were severely punished if their parents found out that they had been to one. This was different for children in skipped-generation households. Their guardians were unaware of their whereabouts and were unlikely to find out from others where they had been. Furthermore, even if they did find out that the children had been doing things that they were not allowed to do, they had no control over this since they were unable to punish the children and thus fulfil their roles as guardians.

Several adolescent boys and girls in Misangwa spoke of going to drink beer when they had the money, and some of the older boys smoked ganja or fiamo. Drinking places were also the best places to meet the opposite sex.

When I go drinking I drink at places that are some distance away from the home. My grandmother doesn’t know the places or the people where we go so we don’t risk her finding out where we go. (19-year-old male)

Because my grandfather is old he sleeps early in the evenings. Some days he gets tired by 20 hours so there is still time to go out of the house to see my friend [boyfriend]... for him it is not possible to stay away from home for long in the evening so we meet close to his place ... (15-year-old female)

The children and young people with whom I spoke were aware that those living in skipped-generation households had more freedom and ran a lower risk of getting caught than those living in other types of households, when they did things they were not supposed to do.

Those things like drinking and smoking are not for me ... But my friends are always encouraging me to join them. My friend always tells me, “For you it is easy, there is no control at your home since your grandmother is too old to know what you are doing”. I think he is right because I see that his mother is much stricter and that she would tell his uncle to beat him if he is caught. (22-year-old male)

Having a weak mesosystem provided opportunities for children and young people to do things that they were not supposed to do. In some cases this also meant that they were able to deviate from the wishes of their guardians in order to improve their lives. For example, if a guardian was too old to come to the fields, the younger people could decide on their own which farming activities to
undertake and how. Lack of control and feedback due to missing mesosystem links also meant that they had more freedom to manage any money made from activities such as fishing and trading.

When I have sold the fish I caught I start to divide the money. I will give some to our grandmother. Some I will keep to buy some sweets or a soft drink for my little brother. The rest we, as older children, keep for when the household runs out of food. Or for when the PTA funds for schooling of the young ones needs to be paid. No one will tell our grandmother. And she has no way of knowing. (16-year-old male)

As can be seen in the quote above, some children and young people used the freedom of weak mesosystem linkages to go behind their guardian’s backs in order to improve their own situation and that of their household in general. Rather than giving his grandmother the money he made through his income generation activities away from the home, which he feared would be misused by her, this 16-year-old boy chose instead to invest most of the money he raised into his own and his siblings’ development, and the well-being of the household in general. Indeed, a few of the younger respondents said that they saved money secretly, which they invested in their own or the other children’s education, or used to buy food for their household in times of hunger.

Another way of using the relative freedom that children in skipped-generation households experienced was to seek support or advice from people outside of the household. Some guardians did not approve of children consulting others, because they feared that this could erode their authority. The underdeveloped mesosystems, however, meant that the children were free to consult people of their choice, who they felt could be helpful to them.

One example of the use of deviant yet positive strategies was seen in the case of 19-year-old Albert, who was living with his grandmother Bana Ebenah(this household is one of the case studies discussed in Chapter Four). Albert had tried several times to convince his grandmother that he could improve their situation by growing vegetables, but she had forbidden him to do so. Despite her clear orders, he started a small vegetable garden which he and the other children attended to, and which they kept secret from their grandmother. When he failed to successfully grow tomatoes, he decided to go to the Agricultural Centre at St. Anthony’s Mission and consult a local agricultural officer4, who could advise and teach him how best to go about his work.

When we started the vegetable garden I didn’t know how to grow tomatoes. I didn’t know what was wrong but I knew that Mr Kalesha, who works at the Mission, might be able to help me. When I asked him he showed me how to keep the plants. I have visited him many times to ask for help. Since he showed me it is easy for me and I am able to grow many tomatoes.

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4 Agricultural Extension Officers are seconded by the government to support people in a given geographic zone with their agricultural activities.
The situation in Albert’s home was difficult. When the household was short on food, his grandmother would often tell him to skip school and go and make some money through fishing. Albert explained that he felt forced to choose between his own goals (going to school) and his grandmother’s orders (to make money). In order to be able to continue doing both, he came up with a plan, which turned out rather well for him. To deal with his absence from school and the questions his teachers asked about this, he went back to his friend the agricultural officer.

You see I was working often and my teachers started asking questions. At some point they got angry and I was confronted with the registers that showed I was absent often. I tried to explain why I was absent but my teachers warned me to stop being absent, or they would be forced to expel me and talk to my grandmother. This scared me and I went to ask Mr Kalesha what to do. After some days he called me and said he had decided to talk to the headmaster to explain the problems. They agreed that if I was able to copy the notes from friends the teacher would accept me to miss some few days and this is what happened! I now copy notes from my friends when I am absent and I show my teachers the book afterwards so they see that I have done the work.

What Albert actually did, without knowing, was to create mesosystem linkages between important adults in his life. The fact that he chose to exclude his grandmother was related to her alcoholism and her lack of support for his own ideas and goals.

It is important to stress that only a few examples of the positive use of the children and younger people’s freedom, due to weak mesosystems, came to light in the research. In the few cases where such strategies were found, the outcomes were always positive; though it is of course likely that the respondents were more willing to share their successes than their failures. What these examples show is that children and young people in skipped-generation households experienced more opportunities to deviate from their guardians’ wishes than those in other types of households. Furthermore, some of these children and young people used such opportunities to follow paths that they believed would improve their situation. In the following section, the most important findings of this chapter are addressed and conclusions are drawn.

Discussion

Before addressing the two aims of this chapter, I will present two important findings that shed more light on the different roles that older guardians, children and young people, and community members were found to play in the lives of the younger generation living in skipped-generation households.

Keepers and messengers of development

The findings presented in this chapter have shown that children and young people in skipped-generation households grow up in contexts that differ from those
of other children and young people. They face material constraints and social and familial responsibilities that are deemed ‘not normal’ by most people in Misangwa, and in many ways these constraints and responsibilities make their lives more difficult.

One such constraint is poverty, which is in turn linked to intergenerational stress and conflict. Another is that children need to assume adult roles for their households at an earlier age than their peers in other types of households where the middle generation is present. A final aspect that makes their lives more difficult is the limited involvement of others in their lives, well-being and development. This means that these children and young people must often bear the responsibility for their own development. This latter characteristic of their lives, which differs from existing norms, is discussed below.

Why is the influence of other people on the lives of children and young people in skipped-generation households more limited than for most other children in Misangwa? One reason is the behaviour of the children and young people themselves. They try to keep certain people – teachers, for example – at a distance. Another reason is the limited social capital of their older guardians, which diminishes further as they become older and their physical mobility decreases. As a result, fewer people outside of their household are involved in their lives.

According to existing norms in Misangwa, children are raised both by their (extended) families as well as by the community. Many of the children and young people in skipped-generation households, however, grow up in relative anonymity in their own community, which means that, more than other children, they have relative freedom of movement in the community and limited social control over their actions. How these children and young people use (or abuse) this freedom and lack of social control is up to them and their (older) siblings. As such, they are the keepers of their own development.

The limited development of these children and young people’s mesosystems means that there are fewer people looking out for them or monitoring their progress or development. If they have difficulties, few people will know about it and there is little chance that someone will alert their guardian. The children and young people must, therefore, not only be the keepers of their own development but also the primary messengers of their achievements and setbacks. Education is one example of this. If a child is experiencing problems at school, no one (other than the child, if he or she decides to) will alert the child’s guardian. At the same time, if there are problems at home, no one (other than the child) will inform the teachers. The only link between these two important settings is the child, who can choose to pass on messages or to remain silent.

Isolated microsystems and underdeveloped mesosystems place a heavy burden on children and young people. Some can deal with this and are able to utilise the
opportunities that arise and thus develop into healthy adults. For others, the burden may be too heavy. The difference in terms of these children and young people’s outcomes can be explained by their own capacity to carry the burden and their ability to communicate about their development and well-being. Children and young people who were found to be responsible, daring, outgoing and adventurous seemed to do better than those who were more timid and introverted.

While children and young people’s behaviour is linked to their individual characteristics – what Bronfenbrenner implies by ‘Person’ in the PPCT model – there is more to it. Their life histories have also shaped and changed their personal characteristics. The past experiences of children might have the potential to motivate them, in the sense that they might have learned that they need to fend for themselves and that they alone can improve their situation and life course. At the same time, those who exhibit timid and reserved behaviour may be responding to the trauma that they have experienced, such as the death and/or loss of both parents and (multiple) relocations. How such factors influence children is likely to vary between individuals, but what is clear is that the behaviours and personalities of the younger generation in skipped-generation households are the ‘product’ of who they are biologically, what they have experienced over time, and their ecological contexts. Isolated microsystems and underdeveloped mesosystems are also a result of the relationships with their older guardians, and as such it is clear that all four aspects of Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT model – process, person, context and time – shape their development.

What the findings in this study have also shown is that the children and young people in skipped-generation households needed to seek the support, help, advice or intervention from others outside of their home. When they did so, it was found that others, especially adults, could have a very positive influence on their lives. The following paragraphs present this influence graphically using the transactional model of child development, as developed by Sameroff (1975) and others.

Figure 7.3 shows two hypothetical examples of the influence of interactions with others on child development. The first child displayed in the figure grew up with his parents and worked on the fields with them. The parents passed on their knowledge about farming, which the boy carried with him to his new life in a skipped-generation household. The second is the path of a child who did not work with his parents. The figures show how the well-being outcomes of these two children are not so much dependent on knowledge but rather on their interactions with others.

Equipped with knowledge and skills, the first child ran into difficulties because his new guardian did not agree with him about the way he felt that they should be farming. The outcome was stress in the home and frustration on both
Figure 7.3  Intergenerational transfers and the transactional model of child development: Two hypothetical examples of farming knowledge passed down (or not) by parents

Child 1

Parental home

Positive temperament

Intergenerational transmission of farming skills

Knowledgeable about farming and able to produce food

Skipped-generation household

Trusting attitude to change

No recognition of child's farming skills

Poor farming output and frustration and conflict

Child 2

Parental home

Positive temperament

No transmission of farming skills

Little knowledge of farming

Skipped-generation household

Trusting attitude to change

Assists grandfather with farming

Poor farming output but no frustration and conflict

Time

sides. The second boy had no prior knowledge about farming, and as a result followed the methods that his grandfather proposed. While the effectiveness of their farming might be less than if they used modern methods, the work was done harmoniously and there were no conflicts.

From this example, the point is not to conclude that children without skills are better off. Later on in life, when the children become responsible for farming and income generation, they are likely to profit from the knowledge and skills that they acquired from their parents earlier on, while those who have no such skills or knowledge are more likely to suffer because of this. However, what the example does show is that in the short-term, what is important regarding the children’s well-being is that while both households were unproductive, the difference was that there was frustration and conflict in one house, and harmony in the other.

The transactional model sheds light on many of the interactions between the younger generation in skipped-generation households and those around them.
When Albert, the young man living with Bana Ebenah (discussed above and in Chapter Four) sought the help of one of the agricultural officers in the Mission, his own development outcomes, as well as those of the other children in his household, improved substantially. Through his own initiative, he forged a connection with a significant other, and in so doing gained knowledge, skills and confidence to undertake an endeavour that changed his and his siblings’ lives.

Children and young people who seek the support of others may get help, and when this happens they often benefit from this. Much depends, however on two factors: the first is whether the children seek the support of people around them; the second is whether the people that they ask for help, support or advice are willing to assist them. The hypothetical examples in Figure 7.4 show two children who both seek support from a neighbour, but only one child is assisted. The outcomes are seen to be very different.
Changing roles and dependencies

In addition to the significance of the interactions – or lack thereof – with others in the various contexts of the younger generation in skipped-generation households, it has also been demonstrated that in such households there is no ‘conventional’ child–guardian relationship. The interdependence between the two groups changes over time and is linked to the ages of both groups, as well as to their physical and psychosocial well-being. Members of the younger generation are often the ones caring for their guardians as well as those children younger than themselves. Three different stages of interdependence between children, young people and their older guardians were identified.

During the first stage, the relationship between very young children and their older guardians is ‘conventional’; the young are cared for by the older generation and depend on them for most of their needs such as food, nurturing, protection, attachment and learning. During this stage, the role of the guardian is most important for the survival and successful development of the young child.

During the second stage, children become less dependent on their guardians. Not only does the dependence of the children decrease, but the care offered to them also decreases. Guardians grow older and are less able to parent or support the children. These children assume more responsibility by caring for their guardians, and also take on adult roles as their guardians struggle to carry out these responsibilities. Middle childhood is the only stage where it is most likely to find the young and the old caring for and supporting one another.

The third stage, when the children become adolescents, shows a reversal of the initial child–guardian relationship. The children and young people have become stronger and wiser. At the same time, their guardians have grown older, physically weaker, and less aware of their grandchildren’s day-to-day lives and activities. The differences between the two generations at this stage can lead to conflict. This is also a time when the adolescents take on more caring responsibilities for the younger children, and become increasingly responsible for the household and income. Often, they also have to look after their guardians and it falls on them to maintain peace in the home as they mediate between the old and the young.

As time passes, all members of the household grow older and the relationships change further. The question is whether this evolving interdependence can be related to a ‘normal’ trajectory of child development. I think not. The changing and evolving roles within skipped-generation households often deviate from existing norms, and are not found in other households. One phrase often heard in Zambia is: “I know a grandmother who is caring for several grandchildren”. The findings from this study show that this comment does not reflect the reality in many homes. It is not just grandmothers (or grandfathers) who care for grandchildren in skipped-generation households; rather, members of these households
look after each other. Indeed, as the grandparents grow older, this phrase becomes less true. In the majority of the skipped-generation households that I studied, I found the reverse was more correct; namely, that older children and young people in skipped-generation households were the ones caring for their elderly guardians and younger siblings.

It is important to note that as children and young people grow up and approach the age of the missing middle generation, they assume many of the roles of that generation. These children and young people were found to be caring for their older guardian(s) and the younger children in their household, just as their parents or aunts/uncles would have been expected to do. This means that the general changes observed in terms of age distribution in Misangwa (as mentioned in Chapter Three and represented by the population chimney or ‘violin’) actually have positive impacts on the members of skipped-generation households. As there are more children in the higher age groups, there is less pressure on the older generation, more of the younger people can engage in income generation and farming activities, and more care can be provided for the younger children. All of these factors mean that such households are likely to fare better.

Revisiting the objectives of the this chapter

In the introduction to this chapter, two aims were stated. The first was to provide an understanding of the roles of other people and the existing social norms in the various microsystems of children and young people growing up in skipped-generation households. The second aim was to shed light on the contribution of children and young people to their own development.

In relation to the first aim, two conclusions can be drawn. The first is that people in the community are valuable for the younger generation growing up in skipped-generation households. The central people in their lives are their guardians and the other children and young people in their home, since these are the people with whom they share their most focal microsystem (the home). People outside of the home who are important to these children and young people are scarce. One group in this category are neighbours. Their impact on children and young people is related to their age (they are often the same age as the children’s deceased parents), and they are often the only people who have contact with both of the generations in skipped-generation households. Knowing both the younger and older generations gives them a unique opportunity to mediate between the two, and this means that neighbours can be an important supplementary link in children and young people’s mesosystems. This is very important because, as we have seen in this chapter, conflicts often occur between the two generations.

As a result of several different factors, which have been raised in this chapter, there is little contact between children and young people’s various other mi-
crosystem actors and their guardians. A weak mesosystem means that they have more freedom. It also means that other people, including their guardians, have less knowledge about them and less control over them. In many ways this is a problem, as it means that these children also have fewer people who care for them, support and guide them, or keep them in line. This is a great loss for these children and young people, and it increases their vulnerability and makes their lives particularly difficult. Living in skipped-generation households already increases the risk of growing up in poverty; the limited development of mesosystems further means that children have limited guidance, support and care outside of their homes.

Since children and young people in skipped-generation households are less likely to have linkages with adults outside of the home setting, the few relationships that some of them do have are extremely important. These younger people need to invest more and take more initiative than their peers do in terms of their interactions with others. Subsequently, when they do invest in relationships with others, they are more likely to need them and therefore more likely to benefit from them. These relationships are thus extremely important for their developmental outcomes.

A neighbour who comforts a child living in a skipped-generation household during a time of conflict, a headmaster who understands the late payment of fees, or a community member who provides advice, can make a huge difference. Those children and young people who had contact with people outside of their home benefited from such contact, in terms of socialisation, feelings of self-worth, self-efficacy and overall psychosocial well-being. These positive influences in turn affect their physical well-being, which then has a positive influence on the farming and income generating activities of their household. As a result, their poverty can decrease and the amount of food available to the household can increase.

In relation to the second aim of this chapter, it is clear that children’s own roles are crucial. As messengers of their own development and as people with fewer than average significant others in their networks, they need to manifest themselves powerfully. They must identify the help or support that they need and identify who might be able to provide it. They then need to make contact with these people and maintain the contact once established. Determination, persistence and a certain boldness are thus all vital personal characteristics for these children and young people. The following quote is exemplary of how the respondents talk of these qualities:
When you realise that you need help to do something, and you realise that you will not get that help from people at home, or other people that you know, you are left with no choice. For me it is easy to decide, not easy to do. But I have no choice. So I decide who I will ask for help and I will go to that person and ask for the help I need. You have to know what you will say, and you have to know it is serious, but I have found that mostly the people I ask for help will guide me. (17-year-old female)