Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour
Of Urban Homeless Youth

by

Evelyn D. Markwei

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Library, Archival and Information Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

March, 2013

© Evelyn D. Markwei, 2013
Abstract

Youth homelessness, or the issue of street children, is a growing phenomenon in cities across the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa. Homeless youth, like all adolescents, deserve relevant information for successful transition to adulthood and for mastery of the challenges of homelessness. The pre-requisite for efficient provision of quality information services to any group is knowledge and understanding of their everyday life information seeking (ELIS) behaviour.

The main objectives of this study of homeless youth in the market area of Accra, Ghana are to investigate their information needs, sources of information, patterns and problems encountered in information seeking and to determine how libraries and other stakeholders can meet their information needs. The study adopted the interpretive tradition and the ethnographic methodology. The field activities involved recruitment of 41 homeless youth, comprising 22 males and 19 females, ages 15 to 18 years using a snowball sampling procedure, collection of data using the critical incident technique and in-depth interviews, transcription of recorded interviews, and identification of categories and themes from participant interviews through content analysis using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

The findings revealed eleven categories of needs comprising physiological, safety, esteem and self-actualization needs. Preferred sources of information are primarily interpersonal. Other sources are television, radio, print media and libraries. Information seeking patterns include active and passive searching, passive attention, and a heavy reliance on a social network of friends. Barriers to meeting information needs include cost, lack of education, lack of time, lack of access to relevant information and educational infrastructure, information poverty, powerlessness, and lack of confidence.
The study is significant in many ways. It is the first study of ELIS behaviour of homeless youth in Africa. It makes a new proposition that, in an environment of limited information resources, people rely on their social networks to meet their information needs. The findings of the study add to knowledge and understanding of youth information seeking behaviour and ELIS of youth, especially homeless youth. They have implications for information dissemination and public library after-school programs and policies to facilitate provision of services and information resources for homeless youth in Ghana.
Preface

This study was conducted as a requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Library, Archival, and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia.

The objectives of the study were to investigate the information needs, sources of information, information seeking behaviour, and barriers to everyday life information seeking behaviour of urban homeless youth.

The author was responsible for the research design, data collection and analysis, and the writing of the research report under the guidance of her Supervisor, Professor Edie Rasmussen, and her committee members, Professors Judith Saltman and Lisa Nathan, all from the School of Library, Archival, and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

An ethical review and approval were obtained from the UBC Research Ethics Board [Urban Youth Project: H10-00605] prior to the commencement of the fieldwork, which was funded with a Doctoral Research Award by the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada. Information on the centre is available on the web at www.idrc.ca.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. ii
PREFACE .................................................................................................................... iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................. v
LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................... viii
LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................... ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................................................................... x
DEDICATION ............................................................................................................. xii

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................. 1

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM .................................................................. 1
1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY ...................................................................... 7
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ................................................................................... 9
1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS ................................................................................... 10
1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY ...................................................................... 10
1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION ........................................................... 11

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................. 13

2.1 HOMELESSNESS AND YOUTH ....................................................................... 14
   2.1.1 Definition of Homeless Youth ................................................................. 14
   2.1.2 Categories of Homeless Youth ............................................................... 16
   2.1.3 Causes of Youth Homelessness .............................................................. 17
   2.1.4 Characteristics of Homeless Youth ......................................................... 20
2.2 THE CONCEPT OF INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR (ISB) ................. 21
   2.2.1 The Concept of Information Need ......................................................... 23
   2.2.2 Defining Information Need .................................................................... 25
   2.2.3 Concepts of Information Need by Different Scholars ......................... 26
2.3 EVERYDAY LIFE INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR (ELIS) ............... 32
   2.3.1 Defining the Concept of Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour 34
   2.3.2 Theories of ELIS .................................................................................... 35
2.4 EVERYDAY LIFE INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF THE POOR .... 43
   2.4.1 Poverty and Information Poverty ............................................................. 44
   2.4.2 Research on Information Seeking Behaviour of the Poor and the Disadvantaged ... 48
2.5 YOUTH AND INFORMATION ......................................................................... 74
   2.5.1 Research on Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour of Young People ... 78
   2.5.2 Everyday life Information Seeking Behaviour of Homeless Youth .......... 88
   2.5.3 ELIS Studies in Africa ............................................................................ 94
2.6 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE .................................................................. 105
2.7 CONCLUSION .................................................................................................. 107

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ............................................................................ 108

3.1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ....................................................................... 108
3.2 RESTATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS ......................................... 109
3.3 OPERATIONALISING CONCEPTS ................................................................... 110
3.4 ETHICAL ISSUES ............................................................................................ 111
   3.4.1 Seeking Consent from Participants of the Study ..................................... 113
3.5 SELECTION OF LOCATION ............................................................................ 113
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS ................................................................. 134

4.1 REPORT FROM OBSERVATIONS ............................................................... 134
  4.1.1 Problems of Homeless Youth ............................................................ 137

4.2 BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS ......................................................... 138
  4.2.1 Origin and Gender of Participants .................................................... 138
  4.2.2 Age of Participants ......................................................................... 139
  4.2.3 Educational Level of Participants .................................................... 140
  4.2.4 Marital Status of Participants ......................................................... 143
  4.2.5 Socio-economic Status .................................................................. 143

4.3 CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS .................................................................. 148
  4.3.1 Summary of the Causes of Homelessness ......................................... 150

4.4 DURATION OF STAY IN ACCRA ............................................................... 151

4.5 THE EXPRESSED NEEDS OF HOMELESS YOUTH ................................. 152
  4.5.1 Money .............................................................................................. 156
  4.5.2 Employment ................................................................................... 160
  4.5.3 Unfair Wages .................................................................................. 161
  4.5.4 Food ................................................................................................. 162
  4.5.5 Respect ............................................................................................ 162
  4.5.6 Vocational Goals ............................................................................ 163
  4.5.7 Education ........................................................................................ 166
  4.5.8 Shelter ............................................................................................ 167
  4.5.9 Security ........................................................................................... 168
  4.5.10 Justice ............................................................................................ 169
  4.5.11 Health ............................................................................................. 169

4.6 INFORMATION BEHAVIOURS, SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND BARRIERS TO EVERYDAY LIFE

INFORMATION SEEKING OF HOMELESS YOUTH ........................................ 170
  4.6.1 Employment ................................................................................... 170
  4.6.2 Shelter ............................................................................................ 176
  4.6.3 Vocational Goals ............................................................................ 177
  4.6.4 Health .............................................................................................. 178
  4.6.5 School Information Seeking Behaviour ............................................ 186
  4.6.6 Financial Management ................................................................. 189
  4.6.7 Food ................................................................................................. 193
  4.6.8 Strategies for Addressing Issue of Security .................................... 194
  4.6.9 Everyday Information Seeking Behaviour for the Administration of Justice ........................................................................ 195
  4.6.10 The Issue of Respect and Unfair Wages ........................................... 197
  4.6.11 The Mass Media and Everyday Life Information Seeking for Homeless Youth ................................................................. 198

4.7 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ......................................................................... 204
  4.7.1 Background of Participants .............................................................. 204
  4.7.2 The Expressed Needs of Homeless Youth ........................................ 205
  4.7.3 Information Behaviours, Sources of Information, and Barriers to Everyday Life
      Information Seeking of Homeless Youth ................................................ 206
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS .................................................................................. 210

5.1 BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS .............................................................................. 211
5.2 AGE OF PARTICIPANTS ............................................................................................... 214
5.3 EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF PARTICIPANTS ................................................................. 215
5.4 MARITAL STATUS OF PARTICIPANTS ......................................................................... 220
5.5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF PARTICIPANTS ......................................................... 221
5.6 CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS ..................................................................................... 225
5.7 LENGTH OF STAY IN ACCRA ...................................................................................... 227
5.8 THE EXPRESSED NEEDS OF HOMELESS YOUTH ..................................................... 228
  5.8.1 Nature of Problem Statements by Type of Need ..................................................... 230
  5.8.2 Categories of Need in Problem Statements ........................................................... 231
  5.8.3 Esteem Need .......................................................................................................... 242
  5.8.4 Cognitive Need ....................................................................................................... 243
  5.8.5 Self Actualization ................................................................................................... 245
5.9 EVERYDAY LIFE INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOURS OF HOMELESS YOUTH...... 246
  5.9.1 Everyday Life Financial Management Behaviour of Homeless Youth .................. 246
  5.9.2 Everyday Employment Seeking Behaviour of Homeless Youth ............................ 247
  5.9.3 Strategies Dealing with the Issues of Respect and Unfair Wages ......................... 250
  5.9.4 Strategies for Dealing with Issues of Security ....................................................... 251
  5.9.5 Everyday Life Information Seeking for Justice .................................................... 252
  5.9.6 Everyday Health Information Seeking Behaviours ............................................... 253
  5.9.7 Everyday School Information Seeking Behaviour of Homeless Youth ............... 262
  5.9.8 Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour for Shelter .................................. 266
  5.9.9 Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour for Skills Development ............. 267
  5.9.10 Television and Radio as Sources of Information ................................................. 269
5.10 PATTERNS IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIFE INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOURS (ELIS) 273
5.12 THEORETICAL INTERPRETATIONS .......................................................................... 285
  5.12.1 Theoretical Interpretations of the Findings in the Context of Chatman’s Theory of 285
       Normative Behaviour .................................................................................................. 285
  5.12.2 Theoretical Interpretations of the Findings in the Context of Savolainen concepts of 291
       way of life and mastery of life ................................................................................... 291
  5.12.3 Theoretical Interpretation of the Findings in the Context of Chatman’s Theory of 295
       Gratification ................................................................................................................... 295
5.13 SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS ............................................................................. 299

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ....................................................................... 302

6.1 SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS ....................................................................... 302
6.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY/CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE ................. 306
6.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE ......................... 308
6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS .................................................................................................. 310
6.5 TRANSFERABILITY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY ...................................... 313
6.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES .................................................................... 315
6.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS ............................................................................................ 317

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................. 319

APPENDIX A – LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH ......................... 342
APPENDIX B – LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM INSTITUTION ............................................. 345
APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE ............................................................................. 346
List of Tables

Table 4.1 - Educational level of participants ................................................................. 141
Table 4.2 - Parents’ educational status ............................................................................ 145
Table 4.3 - Nature of problem statement by type of need .............................................. 156
Table 4.4 - Participants’ uses for money .......................................................................... 157
Table 4.5 - Participants’ vocational choices by gender ................................................... 165
Table 5.1 - Origin of homeless youth, by regional population share ............................. 211
Table 5.2 - Incidence of Poverty by region (2005/06) .................................................... 216
List of Figures


Figure 2. 3 - Sense-making Model adapted from T. D. Wilson (1999). Models of information-making behaviour research. *Journal of Documentation*, 55(3), p. 253...... 43

Figure 3. 1 - A screen shot showing transcript folders in the NVivo Internals folder ........... 127
Figure 3. 2 - A screen shot showing tree nodes................................................................. 128
Figure 3. 3 - Tree node showing categories of information needs...................................... 129
Figure 3. 4 - A screen shot showing free nodes....................................................................... 129
Figure 3. 5 - Coding for everyday employment seeking behaviour of homeless youth ...... 130
Figure 3. 6 - Spreadsheet of Categories.................................................................................. 131
Figure 3. 7 - Spreadsheet for analyzing participants' problem statements ......................... 131
Figure 3. 8 - Spreadsheet for recording the categorization of problem statements, to assess inter-rater reliability................................................................. 132
Figure 3. 9 - Screenshot of inter-rater categorizations table..................................................... 132
Figure 3.10 - Screen-shot of online Kappa Calculator.............................................................. 133
Figure 4. 1 - A map of Ghana, showing the percentage of participants from each of the four regions of origin................................................................. 138
Figure 4. 2 - Age of participants............................................................................................... 139
Figure 4. 3 - Educational level of participants (N-41).............................................................. 140
Figure 4. 4 - Educational level of participants by gender....................................................... 141
Figure 4. 5 - Parents’ educational status..................................................................................... 146
Figure 4. 6 - Parents’ educational status by participants’ gender............................................. 147
Figure 4. 7 - Parents’ number of children.................................................................................. 147
Figure 4. 8 - Participants’ duration of stay in Accra................................................................. 151
Figure 4. 9 – Nature of problem statements............................................................................ 154
Figure 4.10 - Types of need expressed in problem statements................................................ 155
Figure 4.11 - Nature of problem statement by type of need.................................................... 156
Figure 4.12 - Participants’ uses for money............................................................................... 157
Figure 4.13 - Participants’ vocational choices........................................................................ 164
Figure 4.14 - Participants’ vocational choices by gender....................................................... 165
Figure 5. 1 - National Gross Enrolment Ratios..................................................................... 218
Figure 5. 2 - Structure of GDP by Kind of Economic Activity in 2004.................................. 222
Figure 5. 3 - Incidence of Poverty by Major Economic Activity........................................... 222
Figure 5. 4 - Adult Literacy Rates........................................................................................... 223
Figure 5. 5 - Categorization of needs of participants based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs ............................................................................................................. 231
Figure 5. 6 - ELIS diagnostic chart, showing the basic and information needs, categories of sources, and intervening variables of homeless youth ......... 275
Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the assistance and support of a number of persons and organizations.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor and mentor, Professor Edie Rasmussen for her sincere, loving, gentle, and patient support, guidance, valuable feedback, pep talks, fair criticisms, and encouragement, throughout this study and my entire program. I thank my committee members, Professor Judith Saltman for the interest she showed in following my studies, her continuous encouragement, and valuable feedback and suggestions to enhance the value and quality of the thesis report, and Dr. Lisa Nathan for agreeing to serve on my supervisory committee at short notice and for raising pertinent questions to make my report better.

I am indebted to these persons and organisations for making my study at all possible: The Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana (2002 to 2006), Professor Kwadwo Asenso-Okyere was instrumental in securing much needed 4-year funding from the Ghana Education Trust Fund to pay for my living expenses for my PhD program. The University of British Columbia gave me a tuition grant and several financial awards to ensure continuity and completion of my program. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada also provided a Doctoral Research award to pay for all the expenses of the fieldwork for the study. The Executive Director of HOMWAC, a non-governmental organisation for disadvantaged women and children, Ms. Alberta Adogla agreed to work with me and was instrumental in the recruitment of the study’s participants during the fieldwork.

I am also grateful to Professor Akussah, Professor Anaba Alemna, Professor Christine Kisiedu, Professor Ellis Badu, Dr. Emmanuel Adjei, and Dr. Musah Adams of the School of Information Studies, and Professor Irene Odotei of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana for
encouraging me to pursue the PhD program at UBC, and for their continuous support and well wishes throughout my program.

I thank the office staff at the iSchool@UBC, School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, Mary Grenier, Michelle Mallette, Debra Locke, Kiki Uppal and Heather Shand for their administrative support throughout my program.

I am very grateful to my fellow PhD students, Donald Force, Elaine Goh, Elizabeth Shaffer, and Janet Mumford for their support, friendliness, valuable suggestions, encouragement, and also help with the coding of my data.

I also appreciate the encouragement and prayer support I have received from members of the Liberty House of Worship, my church community in Vancouver.

I owe a million thanks to my family members, my dear husband, Martei, who has been my ‘chief’ supporter, helper and encourager throughout this program; and my children Marki, Martekor and David for their understanding and support; my siblings, Ayi, Armah, KK, Osa, and Anang, and my cousin Amerley, and my dear Sister In-Law, Dr. Carol Markwei for their show of love and continuous support throughout my PhD program.

Finally, I thank God for the gifts of life and opportunity, and for grace to complete my PhD program.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to:

The glory of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for showing me this amazing grace;

My Sweetheart, Martei for his selfless love for me; and

My children Marki, Martekor, and Marmah. I love you all.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the need for and importance of investigating the everyday life information seeking behaviour of homeless youth. Such youths have become a major challenge to urban planners and national governments in many countries across the world. The chapter is divided into six sections. Section 1.1 discusses the background and purpose of the study and Section 1.2, the significance of the study. Section 1.3 defines the specific objectives of the study and Section 1.4, the main terms of the study. The chapter ends with statements on limitations of the study in Section 1.5 and an outline of the structure of the dissertation in Section 1.6.

1.1 Background of the Problem

Homeless youth, like all adolescents, are transitioning from childhood to adulthood and it is imperative that they have access to sufficient relevant information for mastery of their developmental challenges. However, their immediate living circumstances especially their state of homelessness, makes it extremely difficult for them to access information for workable solutions to many of those challenges. Ammerman et al. (2004) also ascribe homeless youth’s lack of access to information to their inexperience and lack of knowledge of service systems and resources which are primarily tailored for adults, and lack of understanding of how to access such service systems. Clearly they need an information service tailored to their needs. Provision of quality information services, according to Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005), requires an understanding of the natural or day-to-day human information seeking behavior, that is, their everyday life information seeking behaviour (ELIS). Thus an investigation into the everyday life information needs and seeking of homeless youth is necessary if their information needs are to be met in an efficient manner. The purpose of the proposed study is to investigate everyday life information seeking behaviour of homeless youth in the city of Accra, Ghana to highlight their
information needs in order to inform stakeholders such as public libraries and other agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, that work with homeless youth to facilitate effective information service to this disadvantaged group.

Youth homelessness, or the issue of street children, is a growing phenomenon in cities across Ghana. Recently a Chief in the Northern region of the country bemoaned the annual migration of hundreds of youth (from age 10 and up) to urban cities in the country immediately after the Basic Schools vacate in July (Ghana News Agency, 2009). In 2002 a head-count of street children in the Ghanaian capital of Accra, conducted by Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS), gave an estimate of 20,000 and this number is growing (CAS, 2003). Youth homelessness is not only a Ghanaian problem but a worldwide phenomenon. Although statistics on youth homelessness are difficult to gather because these youth tend to be isolated and hidden, the World Health Organization and UNICEF in the mid-nineties estimated that there were about 100 million street children in the world. A study in 2000 estimated there were 25 million in Asia, 40 million street children in Latin America, 18 million in India and 10 million in Africa (Casa Alianza, Worldwide Statistics, 2000). In a more current set of data, the National Coalition for the Homeless (2008) in the United States estimates that homeless children in America number between 800,000 and 1.2 million. In Canada, non-governmental sources indicate that there are an estimated 8,000 to 11,000 homeless youth on any given night (United Way of Guelph and Wellington Newsletter, 2007).

Homeless youth, like all adolescents, need stable and nurturing families to make a successful transition to adulthood. A family serves as a positive resource, promotes prosocial behaviours and protects youth/adolescents from risky behaviours. Therefore homeless youth who are without families are prone to all kinds of risks and adversity (Molino and Franklin, 2007). Apart from the risk factors that drive them from their families they also experience all forms of risks on the streets. In Ghana, homeless youth or street children are at risk of child trafficking, vulnerable to sexual harassment, rape, and prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and youth
pregnancy (especially the girls) as well as conditions and diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, tuberculosis, jaundice, and typhoid; exploited by adults who underpay them for the work they do, and harassed by police and city authorities. They are also forced to work as fishers, farmers and hawkers (Boakye-Boaten, 2008; International Child and Youth Network, 2001; Orme and Seipel, 2007; Beauchemin, 1999; Shanahan, 1998). In a study of street children in the Asia-Pacific region, West (2003) described the dangers and risks faced by street children. They include domestic and cross-border trafficking for the purposes of criminal activities such as street thefts, or in the case of young girls, they may be sold into marriage or to commercial sex gangs. There is also a belief in this region that having sex with a virgin results in prosperity and disease prevention and cure, putting street girls at more risk of rape and infection with HIV/AIDS. They lack identification papers causing them to be excluded from free social services such as education and healthcare and businesses in both the formal and informal sectors use them as a source of cheap labour. Younger street children face extortion of their monies and clothes by older ones and some adults. They also face the risk of police harassment and incarceration, often as a way of removing them from the streets. A study of street children in Pakistan also revealed that they are subjected to long working hours (8 to 12 hours) and inadequate wages (about $1 or less a day), snatching away of their daily earnings, police harassment and physical abuse, and poor nutrition leading to stunted growth (Moazzam, Shahab, Ushijima, and De Muynck 2004). The findings of a study by the Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) showed that homeless youth are at risk of dropping out of school, have high rates of STDs such as gonorrhea and chlamydia, are sexually active with low levels of condom use, have multiple partners, trade in sex and smoke daily. In a United States Congressional report issued by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) (2003), homeless youth have been described as “the nation’s severely disconnected youth” (p.56), disconnected from family, absent from school and non-participants in the economy. Quoting several study sources the report further revealed that homeless youth have difficult schooling problems such as absenteeism, skipping of classes, expulsion, and school dropout before high school completion.
Their educational opportunities are also hampered by lack of proof of residency in a school district and other documentation, such as academic and immunization records which are required for school enrollment. These impediments lead to social and emotional challenges such as difficulty forming peer support systems and mentorship relationships with teachers, which can potentially cause academic failure. Reasons for work disconnection include inadequate skills and poor physical health such as addiction problems or mental illness. Some homeless youth are forced to engage in selling of drugs, prostitution and panhandling to earn income for survival.

Youth homelessness has financial consequences as well. As potential school dropouts, homeless youths face a dismal and uncertain future in today’s competitive job market. Students who are school dropouts and have no high school diploma do not get jobs, or earn the minimum wage when they are employed. For example, a Carnegie Corporation report by Hood (2004) indicated that dropouts are more likely to make only a “little more than minimum wage their entire lives” (p. 3). In an economic downturn, they are the first to lose their jobs and even during economic prosperity, they will still earn less than high school graduates. They are also likely to end up on welfare or be incarcerated. The report further revealed that dropouts in California cost the state $50 billion per year. A report issued by the Center for Labour Market Studies Northeastern University (2007) claimed that adults who are school dropouts are susceptible to a host of “adverse labour market, economic, health and social consequences over their entire lifetime” (p. 2). They may end up on government food stamps, be less employed, and receive less pay than their peers who are well educated throughout their working lives. They will also pay less taxes but then receive more state and federal government funds in the form of rental subsidies, medical and health insurance, and food stamps. The report also revealed that “a high school dropout received $5,300 more in cash and kind transfers from the federal and state government than he/she paid in federal and state income and payroll taxes in 2002 and 2004” (p. 2). Duane (2006) has also stated that the United States current dropout rates translate into
lost revenues in social security and income tax in the range of $58-135 billion per year. In Connecticut, state statistics show that increase in high school graduation leads to reductions in car thefts and assault arrests, consequently reducing the high cost of maintaining prisons. Connecticut has one of the highest juvenile incarceration rates for African American and Hispanic males in the United States and spent about $622 million on prisons in 2005. Finally it is estimated that high school graduates have a life span nine years longer than high school dropouts (Duane, 2005). Wells (1980) also explains that taxes needed to support and maintain government welfare programs increase with increased dropout rates. There is also loss in government revenues through non-payment of taxes by dropouts who may not be working. A report by the US Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) in 2003 emphasized that failure to help at risk youth results in an estimated $80 billion loss in earnings for about 450,000 high school drop-outs, and teenage pregnancy and child bearing also cost $30 billion annually. This includes costs of “helping young teen parents, as well as the productivity losses of teen mothers, fathers of their children and the children when they reach adulthood” (p.9). The longer homeless youths remain disconnected from their families, schools and communities, the higher the probability of their engagement in criminal and much riskier behaviours. In other words if governments around the world do nothing to improve the lives of these youths they may become social misfits and financial burdens on their countries in the future.

There have been some attempts by governments, especially in the developed world, to improve the lives of homeless youth. For example, in 1974 the United States enacted the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) to establish and authorize funding for support services and programs for at-risk youth such as parenting and pregnant teens, and runaway and homeless youth. Some of these programs include the Basic Center Program (BCP) to provide shelter services for youth under 18 years, and counselling to reunite youth with families or placement in foster care and the Transitional Living Program (TLP) to provide food and shelter, life skills, education and employment training to help youth to acquire relevant skills to live independently
In addition to the US federal government, other agencies such as libraries also provide services for homeless youth. A US national survey by Dowd (1996) showed that libraries are collaborating with community agencies such as public schools, shelters, and NGOs such as the Salvation Army to provide special programs including book deposits, fine free library cards, and story times at shelters.

By contrast, in developing countries, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, there is little government intervention in youth homelessness. The youth are left on the streets to fend for themselves and are often harassed by police and city authorities. In a few cases some NGOs provide homeless youth with some basic services. For example in Ghana the Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS) is an NGO whose three-fold mission is to:

... interact with street children so that they can be understood and supported; assist those children who choose to get off the street and into a stable living situation; and create general awareness about the plight of street children 0-18 years old who sleep rough and work in the streets of Accra, Tema and towns in the Accra Catholic Archdiocese (CAS, n. d.).

It is evident from the discussion so far that youth homelessness is a social problem with negative consequences to its victims, the youth. There is therefore an urgent need to empower homeless youth with the necessary information to change their circumstances and facilitate their maturation process. In a report of a study of everyday life information needs of urban teenagers, Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2006) argue that the poor circumstances of inner city teens make the “cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects of the maturation process” (p. 1394) much more difficult than maturation for teens living in better conditions. Therefore homeless youth need factual information that will keep them healthy, ensure their survival, and facilitate the understanding of their world and their roles as future citizens. In the opinion of Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2006) public libraries are well placed to provide such information. They further emphasize that librarians and other information professionals do not know much about the everyday information needs of teens, neither are they able to assess the extent to which their
everyday information needs are met because only few youth centered studies have investigated young adult reference and information services and their information seeking behaviours. On a similar note, Schilderman (2002) emphasizes that knowledge and information are important livelihood assets needed by the urban poor to improve their lives. He is of the opinion that the urban poor are often deprived of this ‘asset’ or find it hard to assess. He further points out the growing concern over the failure of urban research and development efforts and ascribes such failure to the lack of research into the information seeking behaviour of the urban poor. He believes that effective knowledge and information systems for the urban poor can be strengthened based on suggestions offered by such studies.

1.2 Significance of the Study
The study is significant in many ways. It will increase the knowledge base and understanding of youth information seeking behaviour and everyday life information seeking (ELIS) behaviour of youth, especially homeless youth in the Library and Information Science (LIS) literature. A review of the literature also shows that this will be the first study of ELIS behaviour of homeless youth in Africa, and one of only a few studies of information needs of homeless youth worldwide. Finally, the findings and recommendations of the study are expected to inform information providers, government agencies and other stakeholders about the information needs of homeless youth and ways in which those needs can be met.

In the LIS literature several authors have indicated that there is limited research in youth information seeking behaviour (Agosto and Hughes Hassell, 2005; Shenton and Dixon, 2004; Fourie, 1995). Available literature on youth information seeking behaviour has largely focused on the school and library context (Shenton and Dixon, 2004). This, according to Chelton and Cool (2007), has led to inaccurate perceptions and creation of gaps in the understanding of youth and their information seeking behaviour. For example, it has resulted in the reduction of all youth to "one-dimensional student beings" (p. xvi). They are also considered as individual
information seekers, contrary to their developmental needs. In other words during the adolescent age peers are very important to youth and so they tend to work together in peer groups and not as individuals. Other authors, for example Shenton and Dixon (2004), have described the knowledge base of youth information seeking behaviour as scanty and piecemeal. The implication of these claims is that researchers need to pay more attention to youth information seeking behaviour outside the library and school context, that is, their ELIS behaviour. In fact Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) acknowledge the limited research into the ELIS behaviour of young people and the need for more studies in this area. The above perceptions of young people and their information behaviour have consequently limited librarians’ perception of young people and how they can be served in the library. They contradict the ways in which young people themselves would want to be perceived and identified in the public arena (Bernier, 2007; Chelton and Cool, 2007). It is evident that more research is needed in youth ELIS behaviour for better understanding of this group and for improved information services which are tailored to their needs.

With regard to ELIS behaviour of homeless youth the literature revealed little research, and most of the few available studies have been conducted in the developed world such as North America and the United Kingdom (Alexander, Edwards, Fisher and Hersberger, 2005; Reid and Klee, 1999; Ensign and Panke, 2002). Generally only a few studies on information seeking behaviour have been conducted in developing countries (Dutta, 2009). In Africa no studies were found on ELIS of homeless youth (or street children as they are normally called in developing countries). Research on ELIS of youth has focused mainly on health information seeking. Examples are studies of health information seeking among Mbararan adolescents in Uganda (Ybarra et al., 2008); on how teens in Ghana use the Internet to find health information (Borzekowski, Fobil, and Asante, 2006); and on how adolescent girls in Owerri, Nigeria use the Internet to find health information (Nwagwu, 2007). Thus the proposed study of ELIS behaviour with a focus on homeless youth in a large urban city in Africa will be the first of its kind. It will
add knowledge to the ELIS literature from an African perspective. It is predicted that the socio-information circumstances of homeless youth from the developing world, especially Sub-Saharan Africa and those from the developed world are very different. For example a recent study of homeless youth in Seattle, Washington revealed that homeless youth have a range of services and information resources available to them. These include service agencies that satisfy the basic needs of homeless youth such as counselling, day shelters, meals, healthcare, together with hundreds of documents in the form of information flyers and brochures at physical locations and websites. Thus services and systems do exist, although there are clearly problems related to awareness of these services and the ability of youth to navigate them to satisfy their information needs (Woelfer and Hendry, 2009). The findings of the study are expected to reveal ELIS behaviour of homeless youth in an environment of limited services and information resources.

The study is important because youth are the future of any nation and they deserve access to the information and knowledge that will empower them, mitigate their risks and ensure their maturation to successful adulthood. Homeless youth must not be marginalized with respect to information provision just because they are homeless. They need information that is “relevant, timely and presented in forms that can be understood” to take effective action to develop their potential (Narayan-Parker and Narayan, 2002, p. 15). This study is a positive step. It will investigate the everyday life information needs of urban homeless youth; identify their patterns of information seeking from their perspective and make recommendations for effective information provision based on the findings.

1.3 Research Questions

The study is focused on everyday life information seeking behaviour of homeless youth or street children in a large urban city. It seeks answers to the following research questions:

- What are the expressed everyday information needs of urban homeless youth?
• What sources do they use to satisfy their information needs?
• What challenges/barriers hinder their information seeking?
• What are the patterns in their information seeking behaviour?
• How can the information needs of homeless youth be better satisfied by libraries and other appropriate agencies?

1.4 Definition of Terms

*Everyday life information seeking behaviour (ELIS)* refers to the seeking of problem-specific information such as finding a fact and seeking information that is relevant to everyday events by using various sources and channels (Savolainen, 2004).

*Homeless youth and street children* are used interchangeably and refer to young people ages 12 to 18 living under inadequate conditions with no adult or parental support and who spend most of their time on the street.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. One limitation is that there are homeless youth in other large cities of Ghana, such as Kumasi, Takoradi, Tamale etc., but the study will be conducted only in Accra, the capital city of Ghana so the results may not reflect the conditions in other large urban centres in Ghana. Secondly Accra has a homeless youth or street children population of about 20,000. It is not feasible to conduct the study with a sample allowing statistical significance for the results due to the transient nature of homeless youth or street children. Therefore the results can only be generalized to the street children that participated in the study. Further research on the ELIS behaviour of homeless youth or street children in other cities of the country would be needed for a generalization of the findings to include all homeless youth across the country. In spite of these limitations the findings will generate discussion among information professionals.
about the need to begin to provide information to this disadvantaged group, something that is non-existent in the country at the moment.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation
This chapter provides the background to the problem to be studied. It introduces youth homelessness as a phenomenon in both the developed and developing countries, discusses the consequences of youth homelessness, establishes the purpose of the study, outlines the research questions, describes the significance of the study (that is, its contribution to knowledge of ELIS in the LIS literature and its potential benefits to the youth, government and information providers), and discusses the limitations of the study.

Chapter Two is a review of the literature relevant to the study. It discusses the concept and categories of youth homelessness, causes of youth homelessness in different countries, and the characteristics of the homeless. It also discusses the concepts of information seeking behaviour, information needs, everyday life information seeking (ELIS), theories of ELIS, and research on ELIS of the poor or disadvantaged including homeless youth, youth information seeking and information seeking behaviour studies in Africa.

Chapter Three describes the methodology followed in the study. It discusses the theoretical perspective of the study, operationalisation of the concepts underlying the research questions, i.e., information need, information sources and barriers to information seeking. It offers justifications for the selection of the research location and study population, and describes the data collection instruments, and the data analysis techniques used. The ethical issues relevant to the study are also discussed.

Chapter Four provides a report of the field observations and a detailed analysis of the findings of the study including the background of study participants, causes of their homelessness, duration of their homelessness, and their expressed information needs. The information
behaviours, sources of information, and barriers to the everyday life information seeking behaviour of the eleven types of needs identified (namely shelter, employment, food, security, justice, health, respect, school information, financial management, fair wages and skills development) are also provided. Lastly descriptive statistics such as the type and nature of needs and demographic characteristics of homeless youth are also provided.

Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to the literature. The demographic characteristics of study participants are compared to national statistics of the location of the study (i.e. Accra, Ghana). The expressed information needs of study participants, their information sources, information seeking behaviours and barriers to their everyday life information seeking behaviour are compared to ELIS studies of the poor or disadvantaged, the youth including homeless youth or street children, ELIS studies in Africa, and other relevant literature. Theoretical interpretations of the findings based on three ELIS theories, namely Savolainen’s (1995) concepts of ‘way of life’ and ‘mastery of life’, and Chatman’s (1991) theory of gratification (Chatman, 1991), and theory of normative behaviour (Burnett, Besant and Chatman, 2001) are also provided.

Chapter Six provides the summary, conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the study and offers suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The overall purpose of the literature review is to provide an overview of the concepts, theoretical frameworks and positions, controversies and empirical research in everyday life information seeking (ELIS) of disadvantaged groups and the poor, the youth including homeless youth, and ELIS research in Africa. These detailed reviews offer the researcher a good understanding of these concepts and theories and facilitates their applicability to the study in areas such as operationalisation of concepts, discussions and theoretical interpretations of findings. Homeless youth are both youth and disadvantaged and the study is located in Accra, Ghana, that is, Sub-Saharan Africa. Hence the review is of ELIS studies of youth, the poor and Africa to provide a holistic background to inform the study and allow for comparison. Other purposes are to identify gaps in the literature and demonstrate how the present study can contribute to knowledge, and to identify the appropriate methodology for the study. The literature review is divided into six sections. Section 2.1 covers youth and homelessness and its purpose is to provide background information on homeless youth for the study. It discusses the definitions of homeless youth available in the literature, the categories of homeless youth and how the two terms ‘homeless youth’ and ‘street children’ relate to each other; and the causes and characteristics of homeless youth. The theories and concepts of ELIS in the LIS field are still evolving, with several ELIS theories available for ELIS research but no generalized theory. LIS scholars are not agreed on the definitions of some concepts such as information need and information seeking behaviour, therefore Section 2.2 reviews and discusses the concepts of information seeking behaviour and the different approaches to the study of the concept of information need by library and information science (LIS) scholars and how information need relates to the basic human needs. Section 2.3 identifies the definitions of ELIS and theories available for ELIS research. It also discusses the concepts of poverty and information poverty, and reviews the literature of ELIS of the poor and the disadvantaged. Section 2.4 includes an overview of youth information seeking
and discusses empirical research on ELIS of youth and homeless youth. Section 2.5 discusses ELIS research in Africa and Section 2.6 presents the summary and conclusion of the literature review.

2.1 Homelessness and Youth

“Homelessness: is an umbrella term applied to a variety of people who have no shelter of their own for different reasons and in a variety of situations” (Ploeg and Scholte, 1997, p. 4). The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 11302 of the United States defines a homeless person as:

1) An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and (2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is, (A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); (B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or (C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (2008).

MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2006) identified three categories of homelessness as primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. Primary homelessness refers to people with no conventional accommodation, using cars and railway carriages among others as temporary shelters. Secondary homelessness refers to “people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another, including boarding houses, emergency accommodation and short-term stays with other households”, and “tertiary homelessness refers to people staying in boarding houses on a medium- to long term basis, defined as 13 weeks or longer” (p.18).

2.1.1 Definition of Homeless Youth

There is no universal definition of homeless youth. The range of definitions available in the literature is based on age, adequacy of shelter, parental or institutional care, and circumstances leading to the state of homelessness. For example, the National Coalition for the Homeless
(NCH) defines homeless youth as “individuals under the age of eighteen who lack parental, foster, or institutional care” (NCH, 2008, Definitions and dimensions, para. 1). The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (2004) of the United States defines a homeless youth as “an individual, not more than 21 years of age and not less than 16 years of age, for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who has no other safe alternative arrangement” (42 U.S.C. 5701 note). The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of the United States (2002) defines homeless children or youths as:

(A) Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and

(B) Includes—

(i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

(ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii). (SEC. 725, Definitions)

Ploeg and Scholte (1997) identify two approaches to defining homeless youth, the ‘broad-band’ and ‘narrow-band’ approaches. The broadband approach considers homeless youth as “those young people who have been cast out, abandoned or rejected by their families and who have no fixed address and find themselves frequently moving from one place to another”. In the narrow-band approach homeless youth are defined as, “those youngsters who have no roof over their head and sleep every night on the street” (Ploeg and Scholte, 1997, p. 1-2).
2.1.2 Categories of Homeless Youth

Homeless youth is an umbrella term describing different varieties of young people such as runaways, throwaways, system youth, unaccompanied youth and street youth. They are explained as follows:

*Runaways* are youth “who have left home without parental permission”. *Throwaways* are those “who have been forced out of their homes”. *Systems youth* are those “who have become homeless after aging out of foster homes or the juvenile justice system” (Toro, Dworsky, and Fowler, 2007, p. 6-2). *Unaccompanied youth* are youth below the age of 18 who are living on their own without their parents or guardians in unstable or inadequate living situations (The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, as cited in Moore, 2005). With regard to *Street youth*, there is no consensus in the literature. Julianelle and Naehcy (2008) describe street youth as youth who have adopted street culture as a result of their prolonged homelessness engaging in substance abuse and other risky behaviours. On the other hand, Scanlon, Tomkins and Lynch (1998) point out that the term street children is a broader term, referring to the homeless, abandoned and runaways. UNICEF (cited in Scanlon, Tomkins and Lynch, 1998) describes two categories of street children, namely, children ‘on the street’ and children ‘of the street’. Children on the street are ‘home based’ who spend much of their day on the street but have family support and return home for the night”. Children of the street are “street based children who spend most days and nights on the street and are functionally without family support” (Definitions of street children adapted from Unicef 1986, para. 1 and 2). West (2003) notes that the use of the term ‘street children’ is restricted in developed countries. It has been replaced with ‘runaways’ or ‘homeless young people’. The reason for the avoidance/restriction of use is the fact that children under the age of 16 in most developed countries are considered under age and are not supposed to find work or be homeless.

In developing countries in regions such as Asia and the Pacific children may often be sent by families to the cities to work because of poverty (West, 2003). In Sub-Saharan Africa, for
example Ghana, thousands of youth migrate from rural to urban areas to look for jobs which are limited or non-existent in the rural areas (Beauchemin, 1999). In other words in developing countries, children work out of necessity to escape from poverty.

The discussions so far show that homeless youth irrespective of category are youth living on their own, often under inadequate living conditions without the support of a parent or a responsible adult. In this study the terms ‘homeless youth’, ‘street children’ or ‘street youth’ will be used interchangeably.

### 2.1.3 Causes of Youth Homelessness

The main causes of youth homelessness, according to the National Coalition for the Homeless (2008) are residential instability, economic and family problems. The findings of a survey conducted by the Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) revealed that street youth leave home because of:

- Fighting or arguing with parents /caregivers. Among the basis for these arguments are breaking of parental rules, financial difficulties, alcohol and drug use by both parents and youth.
- A quest for independence, travel or the attraction of moving to a larger city.
- Being forced out of the home.
- Parental neglect and sexual, physical or emotional abuse.
- Trouble with law enforcement agencies (p. 11).

A report on a study of youth homelessness in Calgary indicates that youth homelessness is caused by both push and pull factors. The push factors are parental neglect and abuse, learning and/developmental disabilities, poverty, and family conflict. The pull factors include street culture, substance use, and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships (Broadview Applied Research Group, 2005). Another study in Winnipeg by Higgit, Wingert, and Ristock (2003) identified normal adolescent behaviour such as rebelliousness at home and school, broken homes, and dysfunctional extended families as causes of homelessness. A study conducted by Hyde (2005) in Los Angeles to understand youth homelessness revealed that young people leave
home because of sexual and physical abuse, family conflict, substance abuse by parents, single parenthood, and poverty. Other reasons are conflicts over religious beliefs, sexual orientation, educational performance, and living styles such as hair colour and cut, body piercing and clothing. A report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2006) in the United States indicates that youth homelessness can be ascribed to failure of government programs such as mental health, juvenile corrections and child welfare programs. For example the report indicated that youth, 16 years or older who age out of the foster care system in the United States every year often have limited resources and face numerous challenges including homelessness.

In Asia and the Pacific, West (2003) reports that the street children phenomenon is caused by:

**Poverty:** The factors leading to poverty might be flood, drought, shortage or loss of land, earthquake, and lack of state support after a disaster, and closure of industries. The consequences of poverty are selling or abandonment of children, sending children to work to supplement family incomes, or whole families moving onto the streets.

**Domestic violence and abuse:** Domestic violence, including physical or sexual abuse, may stem from reconstituted families. For example a father or mother who re-marries may not take his/her children to the new household and they may end up on the streets, or step-parents may be violent or abusive to their step-children causing them to run away from home.

**Discrimination:** Children of prisoners, especially those convicted of murder, may be shunned by their communities. These children are left to their own devices often without state support and so end up on the streets. Other forms of discrimination are of children who are or whose parents are HIV positive, or whose parents have died of the disease and in places like Bangladesh, girls who have suffered acid burning because they refused
advances from men. Such girls are considered unmarriageable and therefore abandoned by their families.

Other causes are pressures and violence at school such as bullying and anxieties about doing well, violence from teachers, drug abuse by children causing parents to throw them out, armed conflicts in countries like Sri Lanka and Tajikistan, and natural disasters.

In Africa youth homelessness is caused by rural urban migration, armed conflicts, HIV/ Aids, domestic violence and obsolete traditions. There are an estimated 300,000 children and youth ages 15-24 currently participating in conflicts in over 30 countries and over 300 million young people under the age of 25 are living in these conflict zones. Some of these children become refugees in foreign countries and others are internally displaced. In Northern Uganda alone, there are about one million internally displaced children in overcrowded camps (Integrated Regional Information Network, 2007). In Ghana children have migrated from the rural areas to the cities for decades in search of jobs, vocational training, and education and most of them end up on the streets. The causes of the increasing number of street children are poverty, divorce, rural urban migration, child abuse, peer influence and dysfunctional families (Consortium for street children, n.d.). A study by Beauchemin (1999) showed that youth exodus from the urban to the rural areas is caused by poor economic conditions in rural areas, parental neglect and abuse, polygamy, poverty and lack of infrastructure such as good roads, water and electricity, poor school conditions (for example, lack of teachers and school materials which causes youth to drop out of school and head to the cities), lack of jobs, and obsolete traditions. In many Islamic communities for example, where Islamic beliefs and value systems are more highly regarded than secular values, children have to attend Islamic schools for three years to learn the Koran, and girls are less highly regarded than boys and therefore may be confined to do household chores without going to school. Girls without education have limited job opportunities and so many of them, especially from the rural areas of Ghana migrate to the cities in search of menial jobs and end up on the streets. Western cultures and growing poverty have undermined
the extended family system; that is, fathers are beginning to focus on their nuclear family alone, so that if a man dies his brothers are no longer willing to take care of his children, leading them in many cases to drop out of school and migrate to the city. A South African study by Le Roux (1996) involving street children ages 13-14 also indicates that children leave home because of parental abuse and alcoholism, personal reasons, family violence and poverty. Fall (1986) ascribed causes of youth homelessness to pull and push factors. He mentions independence, the possibility of improved living conditions, and the attractiveness of living in cities as some of the pull factors. Some of the push factors are urbanization, large family sizes and collapse of traditional families. The causes of youth homelessness are many and varied. Youth become homeless when they are separated from the safety net of family support due to poverty, broken homes, domestic, sexual and drug abuse, social disasters such as wars and HIV Aids, rural urban migration, failed government policies such as unfair distribution of resources and infrastructure, obsolete traditions and pressures of school.

2.1.4 Characteristics of Homeless Youth

Although homeless youth are many and diverse, a number of research studies by individuals and organizations such as Molino and Franklin (2007), Ferguson (2008), Burt (2007), Public Health Agency of Canada (2006), United States Department of Health and Human Services (2003), Robertson and Toro (1998), and the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2005) have identified some characteristics common to this group. These are:

Gender and age: Homeless youth on the street tend to include more males than females, but the proportions of homeless males and females in shelters tend to be even. The majority of homeless youth are age 13 and older.

Family characteristics: Many homeless youth have families which have low income, divorced parents, single parents, or had been homeless at some point in their lives.
*Residential instability:* Homeless youths have experienced repeated moves in their lifetime. Many have had contacts with public social systems such as foster care, criminal justice, and psychiatric facilities.

*Physical and substance abuse:* Most homeless youth have experienced family conflict which has often been reported as a cause for leaving home. They have also experienced multiple types of abuse such as physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse. Others are parental neglect, and substance abuse such as abuse of alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, hallucinogens, stimulants, analgesics, inhalants, and sedatives. Substance abuse is more prevalent among street youth than sheltered youth and runaways, and among older youths than younger ones.

*Physical health:* Homeless youth tend to have chronic health conditions such as asthma, high blood pressure, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, diabetes, hepatitis, skin infestations, nutritional disorders, etc. As a result of constant exposure to violence, they also have mental health disorders such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety.

*Lack of financial resources:* Homeless youth lack adequate financial resources due to their minimal education levels and lack of job training and marketable skills, which only allow them to secure low-wage jobs. Thus they are not able to afford basic needs like food and shelter.

The common characteristics of homeless youth revealed in the literature are dysfunctional families, chronic health conditions, drug and alcohol abuse, and lack of basic needs such as food and shelter, resources and skills.

2.2 **The Concept of Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB)**

Case (2007) observes that most accounts of empirical investigations have said little about the concept of information seeking and do not provide a definition of the term. He further
emphasized that the few authors who do provide an explicit definition describe it as a process of either discovering or filling in gaps in patterns that were previously recognized. Some of these definitions are as follows:

- “Specific actions performed by an individual that are specifically aimed at satisfying information needs” (Feinman, Mick, Saalberg and Thompson, 1976, p. 3)
- It is conceptualized as “how people need, seek, manage, give and use information in different contexts (Pettigrew, Fidel, Bruce, 2001, p. 44).
- “An activity of an individual that is undertaken to identify a message that satisfies a need (Krikelas, 1983, p. 6).
- “The purposeful seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. In the course of seeking, the individual may interact with manual information systems and computer-based systems” (Wilson, 2000, p. 49).
- “A conscious effort to acquire information in response to a need or gap in one’s own knowledge” (Case, 2007, p. 5).

The most influential advocate of the concept of information behaviour is Wilson (Case, 2007). In a paper entitled, On user studies and information needs, Wilson (1981) depicted an information behaviour model (Figure 2.1) to show the interrelationships among concepts used in the field. He suggested that “information-seeking behaviour results from the recognition of some need, perceived by the user” (Wilson, 1981, User studies, para. 1). To satisfy this need a user may obtain information from formal information systems such as libraries, other systems like estate or car sale agents which perform both information and non-information functions, or from interpersonal sources described in reference to Figure 2.1 as: ‘information exchange’. Wilson (1981) mentions that information exchange is reciprocal and considered a fundamental aspect of human interaction by both sociologists and social psychologists.
The diagram further shows that, in information seeking behaviour, failure may be experienced in using both formal information systems and people sources for information. Information accessed by users, irrespective of the source, will be used in one way or another. The use of the information may not always satisfy a need and the information sometimes may be transferred to another person because it meets his or her need. Thus information seeking behaviour starts with the identification of a need, and then a search for information which will be used to satisfy that need.

### 2.2.1 The Concept of Information Need

In the Library and Information Science literature there is no consensus on the meaning of the term information need (Shenton and Dixon, 2004). Wilson (1997) has suggested a number of reasons why the definition of the concept of information need has proved so difficult. He explains that “need is a subjective experience which takes place only in the mind of the person in need and consequently it is not directly accessible to an observer” (Wilson, 1997, p.552). Thus, the only way to discover any experience of need is to make deduction from a person’s
behaviour or through the reports of a person in need. Wilson (1981) also made the observation that the confusion over a definition also results from the lack of a single concept of information and failure to distinguish among alternative common sense meanings of the term information. Another reason is the association of the two words, ‘information’ and ‘need’. This association causes the combined concept to be equated to a “basic need qualitatively similar to other basic human needs” such as physiological (e.g. need for food and water), emotional or affective needs (e.g. need for attainment) and cognitive needs (e.g. need for achievement) (Wilson 1981, Information needs section, para. 11). He points out that there is an interrelationship between the three categories of needs since a physiological need for example may trigger an affective or cognitive need, and failure to satisfy a cognitive need may result in an affective need such as reassurance. These interrelationships suggest that in order to satisfy these basic needs, an individual may engage in a search for information. He therefore advocates the replacement of the term ‘information need’ with “information seeking towards the satisfaction of needs” (Information needs section, para. 12). The social role of an individual such as his or her responsibilities at work also determines his or her needs. Wilson’s assertion is that the motive of any search for information is ultimately to satisfy one or more of the basic human needs and so it is all right to do away with the phrase ‘information need’ which does not bring out the purpose or the motivation for the act of information seeking. He however notes that some affective or cognitive needs may not trigger an immediate information seeking response due to some factors other than a need situation. These factors include the importance attached to the satisfaction of the need, the consequences of taking action with limited information, and the availability and costs of using information sources. Other factors are the economic, political, cultural and physical environment of the information seeker.

Campbell (1995) has also said that since it is the perception of the lack of information that provokes a person to develop the need for it, it is difficult for someone to describe information he perceives as lacking. Since “information lack is an elusive and unquantifiable concept, it
follows that the corresponding information need to fill the gap is equally elusive" (p. 2).

Considering the elusive nature of an information need, Campbell describes as misleading the idea of clearly defining or understanding it. He emphasized further that, it is a lack of information that motivates a searching activity, and that lack is described as an information need. He concludes that the distinction between the two is subtle and they virtually mean the same thing. Campbell (1995) summarized the characteristics of information need as follows:

- An information need is by its nature impossible to describe or define because we cannot describe information we do not have.
- An information need is present only in the mind of the information seeking agent.
- An information need will change with time, as a result of the agent’s exposure to information.
- Information encountered during information seeking activities is more likely to change the information need to a large extent than that encountered elsewhere.
- The behaviour of the agent during information seeking activities is most likely to be influenced to the greatest extent by the information need than by other perceptions (p. 3).

### 2.2.2 Defining Information Need

Despite the controversies with the term information need, some authors have attempted to define it as follows:

- The “recognition that one’s knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a specific goal” (Case, 2007, p.5)
- “A consciously identified gap in the knowledge available to an actor” (Ingwersen and Jarvelin, 2005, p.20).
- “An individual’s conception of what information he or she needs to clarify an unclear aspect of a situation” (Kari, 1998, p.3).
- “An awareness of a state of not knowing or some conceptual incongruity in which the learner’s cognitive structure is not adequate to the task” (Ford, 1980, p. 100).
2.2.3 Concepts of Information Need by Different Scholars

There is no explicit consensus in the literature regarding the meaning of the central concept of information need. It has been defined according to the particular interests and expertise of various scholars. Case (2007) provided an overview of the concept of information need and described the ways in which it has been conceptualized in the literature. Some of these concepts are discussed in this section.

2.2.3.1 Concept of Information Need Based on Seeking Answers

Taylor (1962, p. 392) identifies four levels of need in describing how and why people come to ask questions at the reference desk of a library.

- **Visceral need** – a vague form of need which is not verbally expressed and may change in or form or quality “as information is added”

- **Conscious need** – “an ambiguous and rambling statement of the need”, which may require communicating with another person to minimize the ambiguity.

- **Formalized need** – “a qualified and rational statement” of the question.

- **Compromised need** – “the question as presented to the information system” in the form of a search term or by asking a librarian.

This conceptualization of information need, according to Case (2007), implies that what is perceived as need may be totally different from what is ultimately expressed in words. He emphasized that what is important is an individual’s ability to communicate his or her thoughts, ask and answer questions.

2.2.3.1.1 Information Need Based on Uncertainty

In the 1970’s a number of authors conceptualized an information need as a function of uncertainty (Case, 2007). In other words people are motivated to look for information in order to reduce uncertainty. For example, Atkin (cited in Case, 2007, p.73) defines information need as
“a function of extrinsic uncertainty produced by a perceived discrepancy between the individual’s current level of uncertainty about important environmental objects and criterion state that he seeks to achieve”. These environmental objects are “people, things, events, and ideas” of “psychological importance to the individual” (Case, 2007, p. 73). Belkin, Oddy, and Brooks (1982) maintain that information seeking is motivated by an ‘Anomalous State of Knowledge’ (ASK). A person is said to be in a state of ASK when there is a recognition of a gap or uncertainty in his or her knowledge about a “situation or topic” (p. 62). This anomaly or uncertainty is resolved by seeking information.

2.2.3.1.2 Information Need Based on Sense-making

The sense-making approach “posits an information need situation as one in which the individual’s internal sense has run out” and the person needs to create a new sense. (Dervin and Nilan, 1986, p. 21). This need situation is explained by the sense-making model labeled as SITUATION-GAP-USES. SITUATION is “the time space context at which sense is constructed”. The GAP is a discontinuity or gap in one’s knowledge, translated in most studies as an information need that needs to be bridged. The individual bridges the gap using different strategies. Dervin (1983b) says that:

… need implies a state that arises within a person suggesting some kind of gap that requires filling. When applied to the word information, as in information need, what is suggested is; a gap that can be filled by something that the needing person calls information (p. 156).

She further explains that an individual is constantly making sense of his/her world. This is done by asking questions about a situation in time and space. These questions are regarded as information needs. It is these questions or information needs that trigger a search for information.

2.2.3.1.3 Information Need Versus Basic Needs

Wilson (2006) argues that the satisfaction of basic human needs is what motivates an individual to engage in information seeking behaviour. Human needs theorists assert “that needs, unlike
interests, cannot be traded, suppressed or bargained for” (Marker, 2003, Arguments for the human needs approach, para. 1). They further maintain that one of the fundamental causes of prolonged conflict is people’s determination to satisfy their unmet needs at the individual, group or societal level (Marker, 2003).

Abraham Maslow, a humanistic psychologist who lived from 1908 to 1970 (Simons, Irwin, and Drinnien, 1987), identified five levels of basic human needs, namely physiological, safety, belonging, esteem needs, and need for self actualization. These needs are explained as follows:

**Physiological needs:** These are basic human needs to sustain life such as oxygen, food, water, a relatively constant body temperature, clothing and shelter. In Maslow's opinion, these are the most important needs and a person will always seek to satisfy them before any other need.

**Safety needs:** These are the needs for structure, stability, protection and safe environment (Marker, 2003; Boeree, 2006). A person becomes concerned with safety once the physiological needs are met. Signs of insecurity are more pronounced in children such as in times of illness, in the midst of strangers or any rough handling by parents. Adults tend to exhibit insecurity during emergency situations such as war, natural disasters and high incidents of crime (Green, 2000).

**Belonging needs:** These are the social or affiliation needs exhibited in our desires to marry, have, children, a family, and be part of a community such as church, association and club memberships (Boeree, 2006).

**Esteem needs:** These are needs for both self esteem and for the esteem a person gets from others. Maslow identified two types of esteem needs: A lower one characterized by a need for attention, status, glory, reputation appreciation, respect, etc., and a higher one
characterized by the need for independence, freedom, self respect, feelings of competence, achievement, confidence and mastery (Boeree, 2006). When these needs are met, a person feels a valuable member of society. Unmet esteem needs leads to feelings of frustration, worthlessness and helplessness.

*Self actualization needs:* Self actualization is the need for the fulfillment of one’s potential, or when a person ends up doing what he was born to do (Simons, Irwin, and Drinnien, 1987). Maslow asserts that self-actualization can be achieved only when the lower needs of physiological, safety, esteem, and belonging needs are truly met (Boeree, 2006). Maslow’s hierarchic theory is often represented as a pyramid (Figure 2.2).

![Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/regsrsy/maslow.html)

He referred to the lower four levels as *deficit needs* and the upper point as *being needs.* He claimed that society hinders people from moving in the direction of self actualization and emphasized that self actualization can be met only when the lower needs are taken care of to a considerable extent. He further identified education as one of the hindrances to self-actualization and recommended ways in which education can be used to advance the growth of an individual (Simons et al., 1987).
Although Maslow’s theory is generally accepted and applied in various fields, including politics, business, and management, there are a few criticisms, notably that the methodology for his theoretical propositions is not scientific. For example Boeree (2006) has observed that in Maslow’s selection of subjects, he simply declared some people to be self-actualized, read about them and interviewed them for his study. Other critics also assert that self-actualization is a basic attribute of every living creature, that is, “to grow, to become and to fulfill its biological destiny” (Some Criticisms section, para. 3). This is contrary to Maslow’s proposition that self-actualization occurs only in about two percent of the population. Maslow proposed that humans normally satisfy the lower needs of his hierarchy before self-actualization. However Boeree (2006) noted that throughout history there are many examples of renowned people who have self-actualized without satisfying the lower needs. Such people went through poverty, depression, bad upbringing, hunger and even neuroses.

Some of the limitations of Maslow’s theory have been addressed by other motivation theories such as the ERG (Existence, Relatedness, and Growth) theory of motivation, proposed by Alderfer (1972). The theory is similar to Maslow’s theory. It is hierarchical, made up of three levels: Existence (i.e., physiological and safety needs), relatedness (i.e., social and external), and growth (i.e., self-actualization and internal esteem needs). However, unlike Maslow’s hierarchy, the different levels of need can be pursued at the same time. In other words, one does not need to fulfill physiological needs before safety needs, or lower needs before self-actualization needs. It also proposes that a person can take the easier road of fulfilling a lower level need if there is a difficulty fulfilling a higher level need. Because the ERG theory is flexible, it is able to explain a wider range of human behaviours such as the “starving artist” who wants to fulfill growth needs before existence needs, or like Mother Theresa who prioritized spiritual needs over existence needs.

Apart from Maslow and Alderfer other researchers have identified other human needs. For example, Lawrence and Wilson (cited in Huit, 2007), using evidence from a sociobiology theory
Taylor (1997) also listed nine basic needs: exchange, adventure, community, freedom, expansion, power, expression, security, and acceptance. She described the positive and negative aspects of each need, how they manifest themselves in different people, and how these needs affect the workplace. For example, she explained exchange as the need to trade information and knowledge, as well as socialize and give and receive something of value, such as friendship or money. Some of the manifestations of exchange for different people are participating in discussions, staying in touch with friends, family and colleagues, and working with contracts and agreements. The positive aspects of this need are a positive role model for relationships, keeping things moving, and promoting equality in all interactions. The negative aspects include: gossip, stinginess, criticism, and generally negative behaviour. In their relationships, persons with a need for exchange would always want to receive and give something valuable and often get upset with unethical behaviour or acts of discrimination.

Human needs can be satisfied to a large extent by getting access to the right information in whatever source or format. Norwood (cited in Huit, 2007) has rightly observed that Maslow's hierarchy can be used to describe the different kinds of information people need at each level. For example, belonging needs of individuals can be met by enlightening information through the reading of books, esteem needs can be satisfied by information that is empowering, self-actualization needs by information that is edifying and safety needs by helping information, that is, information that would facilitate security. Any information that is irrelevant in satisfying a person's need is simply avoided.
The literature has shown that scholars in LIS have conceptualized information need variously as lack of information, a gap in one’s knowledge, a problem for which a person seeks help or an anomalous state of knowledge, showing clearly that there is no consensus on the meaning or concept of information need. This lack of consensus might be ascribed to the fact that information need exists in the mind of the information seeker, who is the only one qualified to articulate this need, and not an outsider. The researcher is of the opinion that this controversy over the concept of information need among LIS scholars will end if they agree with Wilson’s (2006) statement that “the full range of human personal needs is at the root of motivation towards information seeking behaviour” (p. 665). In other words information seeking must be regarded as an action to satisfy human needs and not information needs.

2.3 Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour (ELIS)

Much of the earlier research on information seeking behaviour in Library and Information Science (LIS) was focused on work-related information needs. Some authors have given reasons for this. For example, Case (2007) explains that the earlier focus on scientists was in response to public perception of scientists as working for public good and private profit, for example doctors working on treatments for heart disease. Leckie, Pettigrew and Sylvain (1996) have explained the shift of focus from scientists to other types of professionals such as lawyers, teachers, nurses, accountants, and the clergy in the late 1970s and early 1980s follows:

• First, Library and Information Science scholars wanted to advance the theoretical analysis of the information seeking process by comparing the information seeking behaviour of these professionals to already established knowledge on scientists. Thus they sought to investigate the purposes for which their subjects sought information, how their work was influenced by their information need, searching and use and the barriers they encountered to information searching and use;
• Second, commercial vendors were at the time offering customized information services to the second group of professionals, but lacked knowledge on the effectiveness of their services to them. Therefore, there was a need for research into the information required and used by them, to inform the vendors.

• Finally, it was a natural expansion of knowledge from the focus on scientists and scholars (Leckie et al., 1996).

In recent times a number of studies have focused on non-work or ELIS (Carey et al., 2001). McKenzie (2003) believes that LIS researchers began to focus on ELIS and other non-purposeful forms of information seeking when Wilson (1977) observed that people can discover information in their everyday life unintentionally that is, without planning to look for information. ELIS has often been referred to as non-work or citizen information seeking. Savolainen (1995) has however noted that situating ELIS in a non-work context “should not be interpreted as an attempt to create a dichotomy between job-related and other information seeking process because job-related information seeking and ELIS complement each other” (p. 266). He explained further that seeking information for a language course, for example, may be useful for both professional and leisure activities. Savolainen (1995) is of the view that the overlap between work and non-work information needs will provide a rich context for understanding individual approaches to information seeking. This view is supported by Smith (1987), who also maintains that divorcing the everyday life from the working world will hinder a full understanding of the everyday life of individuals. For the purposes of this study both work and non-work information needs of homeless youth will be considered in order to get a holistic understanding of their everyday information needs and seeking.

Research on ELIS was started in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when extensive surveys were launched in the United States to investigate the everyday information needs and seeking of ordinary citizens. Examples are studies of information needs of urban residents by Warner, Murray and Palmour (1973), of the everyday information needs of the average citizen, creating
a taxonomy for analysis (Dervin, 1976), of the development of strategies for dealing with the
information needs of urban residents (Dervin et al., 1976), and of the information needs of
Californians (Dervin, 1984). Subsequently other studies of everyday life information seeking
behaviour have focused on health information seeking (Wathen and Harris, 2006; Courtright,
2004) and information and poverty (Chatman, 1990, 1991 and 1996). The following section will
define ELIS, describe models of ELIS and review the literature on ELIS of the poor and
disadvantaged.

2.3.1 Defining the Concept of Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour

Spink and Cole (2001) have referred to ELIS as “a relatively new branch of user studies that
examines information behaviour of daily activities” (p. 301). ELIS has also been defined by
Savolainen (1995, p. 267) as “the acquisition of various informational (both cognitive and
expressive) elements which people employ to orient themselves in daily life or to solve problems
not directly connected with the performance of occupational tasks”. ELIS manifests itself in two
modes, namely seeking of problem-specific information such as finding a fact and seeking for
information that is relevant to everyday events by using various sources and channels
(Savolainen, 2004). Spink and Cole (2001) define the difference between occupational (work-
related) information seeking and ELIS (non-work) as follows:

In occupational or school information seeking, the user is seeking information in a
controlled environment with a definite end product that has some sort of paradigmatic
quality to it. ELIS on the other hand, is fluid, depending on the motivation, education and
other characteristics of the multitude of ordinary people seeking information for a

In other words, ELIS involves unplanned or unsystematic ways of acquiring information for daily
activities other than formal work environments.
2.3.2 Theories of ELIS

A number of theories or models have been developed for the study of ELIS, in addition to the many information seeking models available in the field of LIS. These became necessary because, as McKenzie (2003) explains:

- Current models of information behaviour and information seeking behaviour are limited in their ability to describe ELIS.
- They tend to focus on active information seeking, to the neglect of less directed practices.
- Most of them have not incorporated findings from current research related to incidental forms of information behavior.
- Many research-based models of information seeking are derived from studies of scholars, or professionals (such as Ellis, 1993; Kuhlthau, 1993) and are useful for describing systematic information searches in workplace environments.
- They tend to reflect analysis of a single, focused current need, and therefore do not attempt a holistic consideration of the variety of information behaviours individuals describe in their everyday lives.
- Many models have been developed using a cognitive approach (McKenzie, 2003, p.19 to 20).

Savolainen (1995) explains that adopting the cognitive approach alone fails to address the socio-cultural factors that affect information seekers. Some models for ELIS studies are Savolainen’s (1995) concepts of “way of life” and “mastery of life”, Williamson’s (1998) ecological model of ELIS, McKenzie’s (2003) model of information practices, Dervin’s (1983a) sense-making approach and Chatman’s (1999) theory of life in the round. Dervin’s sense-making approach, as noted by Savolainen (2004), is the most influential model in the study of ELIS. This is because it has been used to study the information needs and seeking behaviour of specific groups of people, in numerous contexts. Some of the theories for ELIS are described below.

2.3.2.1 Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) in Context of Way of Life and Mastery of Life

In a study entitled, ‘Everyday life information seeking: Approaching information seeking in the context of way of life’, Savolainen (1995) introduced the concepts of ‘way of life’ and ‘mastery of life’ to explain ELIS. Way of life “refers to order of things which are based on the choices that individuals make in everyday life”. “Things stand for various activities taking place in the daily
life world including not only job, household care, and voluntary activities” such as hobbies. He explained order as “preferences given to these activities” (Savolainen, 1995, p. 262). He further claimed that order of things can be determined in both subjective and objective ways. For example, the length of a working day which also determines the leisure time a person has is determined objectively, whereas a person’s perception of the most pleasant ways of spending leisure hours is a subjective way of determining the order of things. A person’s daily activities comprising both work and non-work activities tend to be so well established that it is easily accepted as the most natural way in which one’s life is organized. Savolainen (1995) also mentioned the cognitive order which is a person’s perception of a normal way of life. This way of life comes about through the individual choices people have engaged in. They try to keep this way of life as long as it is meaningful.

*Mastery of life* is the care an individual takes to ensure there is a meaningful order of things in his/her life. It also refers to “a general preparedness to approach everyday problems in certain ways in accordance with one’s values” (Savolainen, 1995, p. 264). In other words the mastery of life is molded by the individual’s culture and social class. It can be described as passive or active. The former refers to the situation where everything is generally moving as expected. The latter is a state involving pragmatic problem solving because “the order of things has been shaken or threatened” (p. 264). The mastery of life is a developmental process. If a person’s normal way of life is threatened in some way, he or she relies on past problem solving experiences to resolve the issues at hand. Concurrently, a person gains experience or becomes familiar with the information sources and channels which are useful in the resolution of the problems encountered in his or her daily life. Such experiences “affect the information orientation of the individual and lead to certain information-seeking habits”. Consequently, a “set of attitudes and dispositions” are developed “towards information seeking and use in certain problem situations”. These attitudes to information seeking unconsciously become part of the individual’s mastery of life (Savolainen, 1995, p. 265). Savolainen further mentions that the
factors that mold the mastery of life are individual orientations in problem situations and how people look for information to facilitate problem solving. In a problematic situation an individual can exhibit either a cognitive or an affective orientation to solving the problem. A cognitive orientation to problem solving adopts an analytic and systematic approach and an affective orientation is based on emotions and unpredictable reactions to the issues at hand. He further specified “four ideal types of mastery of life with implications for information seeking behaviour” (p. 265) based on the two dimensions to problem solving as follows:

**Optimistic-cognitive mastery of life:** The individual conceives problems as positive and solvable and focuses on a detailed analysis, systematic information seeking; and selection of the most effective sources/chanels for the resolution of the problem.

**Pessimistic-cognitive mastery of life:** The individual does not envisage the problem to be solved, but nevertheless engages in systematic information activities to solve it.

**Defensive-affective mastery of life:** The individual is optimistic about the solvability of the problem. However information seeking activities are dominated by affective factors, such as avoiding situations that imply risk of failure, and “wishful thinking instead of realistic considerations” (p.265).

**Pessimistic-affective mastery of life:** This type is characterized by absence of systematic information seeking, dominance of emotional reactions and short-sightedness and search of instant pleasures. The individual lacks confidence in his/her abilities to solve the problem and simply avoids it.

### 2.3.2.1.2 Williamson’s Ecological Model of ELIS

Williamson’s ecological model of information seeking and use was developed after investigating the information seeking behaviour of 202 older adults (age 60 and over) in metropolitan and
rural areas in Australia. The model is termed ecological because the research was conducted in the social and cultural environment of the respondents (Williamson, 1998). The model suggests that as people engage in purposeful information seeking to satisfy their perceived needs, they monitor their world and acquire or stumble on “information which they were not always aware they needed” (p. 35). The monitoring of their world is influenced by their physical environment, personal characteristics such as their state of health and lifestyles, value systems and socio-cultural backgrounds. The model further shows that they rely on the mass media, close personal networks such as family and friends, and wider personal networks including church and voluntary organizations in both their incidental and purposeful information seeking.

2.3.2.1.3 McKenzie’s Model of Information Practices

The model of information practices for describing ELIS was developed by McKenzie (2003) in her study of health information seeking of Canadian women pregnant with twins. Her model is a two-dimensional model comprising four modes of information practices revealed in the accounts of the subjects of the study. The four modes of information practices are:

*Active seeking* – This involves the systematic and active seeking of known items using pre-planned questions and active questioning strategies.

*Active scanning* - This involves looking for information at likely places by semi-directed browsing or scanning coupled with spontaneous questioning, actively listening to conversations, and observations of behaviours and physical characteristics.

*Non-directed monitoring* - This involves unexpected encountering of information in an unlikely place without actually looking for information at all, or while monitoring information sources with no intent of becoming informed.
*By proxy:* This involves consulting information sources that have been suggested by other people or information sources the seeker has contacted such as a gatekeeper or intermediary.

### 2.3.2.1.4 Interest-Concern-Caring

Wilson (1997) proposed a model based on the assumption that people would like to have some control or influence over things that happen in the world. He proposed a three-way concept of *interest-concern-caring* to explain the intensity and focus of ELIS in various phases of solving everyday problems. *Interest* is an expression of curiosity or wanting to know about things in a certain area. It might not lead to any action to change or control the objects of interest. It may be active, that is, a person is willing to look for information about a topic, or passive, that is, only available information will be received with no further seeking for information. *Concern* means a person is willing to control, influence, or act upon a situation. Similarly, concern can be active or passive. In the former, a person looks for more information to solve a problem or make sense of a situation in a systematic manner. A concern changes to *caring* when one engages in an action to change or control a worrisome situation. The process may reverse as the situation improves; that is, caring may change to concern or interest (Wilson, 1997).

### 2.3.2.1.5 Dervin's Sense-making Approach

The term 'sense-making' is a label used by Dervin (1983a) to describe a "coherent set of concepts and methods" used since 1972 to study information needs, seeking and use and how people make sense of their world (Dervin 1999, p.729). The sense-making project became necessary because a mass of evidence showed that formalized models for communication, education, and information systems were inefficient and ineffective. Dervin (1999) ascribed the inefficiencies of these models to the fact that they are transportation, or transmission-based rather than communication-based metaphors.
In the library and information science literature, Dervin’s approach to information behaviour studies through sense-making has been credited as a factor in the shift from system-centered to user-centered research (Naumer, Fisher, and Dervin, 2008). It is defined as “behaviour, both internal (that is cognitive) and external (that is procedural) which allows the individual to construct and design his/her movement through time-space” (Dervin, 1983b, p.2). Dervin (1992) further explained sense-making as a set of assumptions, propositions, and methods to study the everyday experiences of people or how they make sense of their world. She believes that information seeking and use and all forms of communication situations, whether intra-personal, interpersonal, mass, societal, cross-cultural or international, are central to sense-making. According to Dervin (1999) the sense-making approach is based on certain core theoretical assumptions as follows:

The human subject is perceived as body, mind, heart and spirit “living in a time-space, moving from a past, in a present to a future, anchored in material conditions” (Dervin 1999, p. 730) yet possessing the abilities to dream, plan, fantasize, make abstractions and have memories. The human subject is the prime focus of the sense-making approach mandated to rely on both his outer and inner worlds simultaneously in his sense-making. Thus it is possible for humans to use both cognitive and affective behaviours such as feelings, emotions, dreams, ideas, pretenses, etc., to make sense of their world.

Sense-making conceives humans as theorists of their world who must continually make new theories because of constant changes in their world. An individual is considered an expert of his/her world involved in developing strategies consciously and unconsciously to bridge the gaps he/she encounters on his/her way (Spurgin, 2006).

Sense-making conceptualizes knowledge and information as a verb. There is no distinction between them. Dervin (1998) is of the view that knowledge versus information is a system distinction which is irrelevant and of no meaning to reality and movement across time and
space. This view is supported by Savolainen (2006) who explains that whether information or knowledge is used as an input to sense-making is of no significance. Both of them can “serve as input (fodder) and as output (product) for sense-making and sense unmaking” (Dervin, 1998, p. 36). Sense-making by an individual at a particular instance is referred to as knowledge. It can sometimes be shared, agreed upon by a group of individuals, unexpressed, suppressed, formalized and published, or take on the status of facts (Dervin, 1998).

Sense-making assumes that “information is not a thing that exists independent of and external to human beings but rather is a product of human observing” (Dervin, 1983b, p.4). This applies to direct observations as well as observations made by others. These observations are guided and interpreted by the human mind. Dervin further asserts that human observings are constrained in four ways, namely physiological (humans are not capable of making some observations that other species are capable of making); present time-space (what we can observe over time depends on where we are, since we are bound in time-space); past time-space (our present observations rest on our past histories to the extent that sometimes, the present time-space is perceived as identical to the past); and future time space (our observations today have nothing to do with tomorrow and may also rest in part on our future focus).

Sense-making assumes that ‘factizing (i.e. the making of facts or creation of knowledge) is not the only useful way humans make sense of their worlds. Strategies such as consensus building, negotiating, power-brokering, emoting, defining, muddling and suppressing are equally involved in the sense-making and sense-unmaking process. Dervin (1999) refers to these sense-making strategies as ‘verbings’ and maintains that by putting them on an equal footing, “it frees research from the implicit assumption that there is one right way to produce knowledge” (p. 732). In sense-making every ‘verbing’ of human sense-making is conceptualized as important and is mandated to reveal it.
Sense-making perceives humans and their institutions as constantly changing and evolving through sense-making. The focus is to ascertain both the external and internal processes involved in these continual sense-making. As Dervin (1999) states, “Sense-making mandates a focus on the varieties of internal and external cognizings, emotings, feelings, and communications that make, reinforce, challenge, resist, alter, and reinvent human worlds” (p. 731). In other words there is an emphasis on processes and verbs and not descriptors and nouns. Naumer et al. (2008) explain that research is mandated to examine “how people define situations, how they integrate their contextual understandings into sense-makings, how they define their information needs, and how they communicate with others” (p.3). Sense-making maintains that by focusing on the changes across time and space it is possible to study the patterns in the human condition.

Sense-making acknowledges the role of energy/power as humans move across time and space. Such forces may facilitate, assist, motivate, constrain, hinder, or limit movement. Their sources can be natural, societal, and structural or from individuals themselves depending on their prevailing conditions. In the latter case Dervin (1999) observes that individuals possess the power “to resist, reinvent, challenge, deny and ignore” (p.732).

Sense-making acknowledges that humans largely have the capacity to draw on ‘knowings’ from their inner realms, i.e., emotional, spiritual and the unconscious, to the external to make sense of their world. They are also able to articulate how these forces constrain or facilitate their across-space movements.

Sense-making assumes human beings live in a world of gaps which is continually changing across time and space. Individuals react differently to particular time and space situations based on their own judgments or assessments.

Metaphorically Dervin (1999b) envisions sense-making as taking a continuous step in the everyday world. Every step corresponds to an action towards the resolution of a problem.
situation with the sense-maker drawing on previous understandings that were worked successfully in similar situations.

In research, sense-making is implemented within the framework of the *situations-gaps* and *uses* model, often represented in a triangle (Figure 2.3).

![Figure 2.3 - Sense-making Model adapted from T. D. Wilson (1999). Models of information behaviour research. *Journal of Documentation*, 55(3), p. 253.](image)

Dervin (1983a) explains *situation* as “the time space contexts at which sense is constructed”. The *gaps* are the different situations in which people get stopped in their movement and need to bridge or figure out what sense they must construct to continue moving. It is often translated in information seeking and use studies as “information needs”. *Uses* is “the uses to which the individual puts newly created sense, translated in most studies as information helps and hurts” (Dervin, 1983b, p.7).

### 2.4 Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour of the Poor

This section will discuss the meaning of poverty and the characteristics of the poor including their attitude to information and information seeking, information poverty, and the relationship between poverty and information. It will also review research on the ELIS of the poor and disadvantaged, focusing on their information needs, sources of information and the problems they encounter in their everyday life information seeking.
2.4.1 Poverty and Information Poverty

The World Bank considers “a person as poor if his or her consumption or income level falls below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs. This minimum level is usually called the poverty line” (World Bank, n.d., Measuring poverty at the country level section, para. 1).

The United Nations (UN) also describes poverty as:

a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. (United Nations Committee on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, 2001, Definitions section, para. 2).

The lives of the poor are characterized by inadequate education, food, shelter, and health. They are also vulnerable to natural disasters, diseases, economic dislocations and maltreatment by states, institutions and society as a whole. The fundamental freedoms of action and choice, which the middle class take for granted, are also beyond their reach. (UN, n.d.). The poor are also described by Lewis (1998) as having a special value system called the culture of poverty. People in this culture are characterized by a sense of powerlessness, inferiority, helplessness, marginality, personal unworthiness, and dependency. They feel alienated in the societies in which they live and believe that their interests and needs are not served by existing institutions. They tend to focus only on their immediate surroundings, problems, and their own way of life, and are not able to perceive the similarities between their problems and the poor in other parts of the world (Lewis, 1998). Obviously the poor lack the information that will empower them economically and socially. They need what Kagan (2000) suggests, the right information “in the most comprehensible format at the right time” (p. 29). The relationship between information and development has been corroborated by Narayan-Parker and Narayan (2002) who note that in any community those who exercise their rights, access services, hold their leaders accountable, negotiate effectively, and make use of available opportunities are the ones who are well informed. They emphasize that “without information that is relevant, timely, and presented in
forms that can be understood, it is impossible for poor people to take effective action” (Narayan-Parker and Narayan, 2002, p. 15).

The poor are also regarded as information poor. ‘Information poor’ according to Britz (2004) is a relatively new concept which has been defined using three different approaches, namely information connectivity, information content and human approaches. These approaches are briefly explained below:

Connectivity approach to information poverty: The focus of this approach is on lack of access to information communications technology (ICT). The assumption is that access to information using ICT is directly related to the socio-economic status of people. It is argued that much of the information that will help the poor, such as economic information, is available in digital format. These modern technologies are inaccessible to them as a result of the high cost and lack of expertise in using them. They are therefore excluded from the digital world economy (Britz, 2004).

Content approach to information poverty: The view of this approach is that quality information is not affordable, available or suitable to the poor. In other words, the poor lack the economic power to access the quality information they need for their development. At the same time such quality information may not be suitable for their use (Britz, 2004).

Human approach to information poverty: This refers to the processing of information for problem solving and decision making. Lievrouw and Farb (2003) argue that having access to information alone is not enough. What is important is that people have the skill, ability, and the experience to derive benefit from the information they access. Burket (2000) explains that people must be able to make sense of or transform the information they receive into knowledge. This sense-making requires interpretation,
evaluation, and understanding of the information and its subsequent use in decision making. Nath (2001) states that:

Knowledge is empowering. Lack of knowledge is debilitating. Knowledge enables an individual to think, to analyze and to understand the existing situation, and the inter-linkages and externalities of each action. Knowledge empowers an individual to form his or her own opinion, to act and transform conditions to lead to a better quality of life (Nath, 2001, Knowledge sharing for development, para. 4).

He further notes that most developing countries lack the ability to recognize knowledge, add value to it and transform it into their growth. Thus without the ability to make sense of information, the poor may not benefit from the information they receive.

Based on the three approaches to defining information poverty described above, Britz (2004) proposed a new definition of information poverty as:

That situation in which individuals and communities, within a given context, do not have the requisite skills, abilities or material means to obtain efficient access to information, interpret it and apply it appropriately. It is further characterized by a lack of essential information and a poorly developed information infrastructure (Britz, 2004, p. 194).

Essential information is information needed for development such as information about the basic minimum human needs, trade and economic development.

It is obvious from the discussion so far that access to the right kind of information is crucial in alleviating poverty and every effort must be made by governments and other stakeholders to provide much-needed information. Spink and Cole (2001) emphasize that the development and implementation of effective information services for low income citizens (or the poor), required not just a simple description of information use, but a careful and specialized assessment of their information needs. In other words it must not be assumed that the availability of a variety of information sources and services means that the poor will make judicious use of them.

Chatman and Pendleton (1995) have also said that the issue of concern and discussion among researchers interested in information seeking behaviour and poverty is the knowledge gap...
phenomenon. The knowledge gap theory was first proposed by Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1970). They believe that although there is an increase in information in society, it is not equally available to members. It is readily accessible to people with higher socioeconomic status because they are better equipped to acquire information, leading to two categories of people: those who are better educated and very knowledgeable and those with limited education and knowledge. Those in the latter category are alienated from news and important discoveries, have limited knowledge about public affairs and care less about their lack of knowledge. Chatman and Pendleton (1995) also observes that there are significant differences in the ways the information poor and the information rich search for, use and share available sources of information. The fundamental attitude of the poor is that sources of information available in their world do not solve their problems or are insufficient to meet their needs. They are also skeptical and suspicious of mass and interpersonal channels of information. Chatman (1996) further explains that the information needs of the poor are shaped within a larger social context, and therefore any research to investigate their information needs must examine their social environment and define information from their perspective. Dervin and Nilan (1986) have emphasized that a person's information need is what determines the information he or she seeks and processes from the environment, making information a subjective rather than an objective construct. On a similar note, Schramm (1954) has observed that an individual only selects communication messages that marches his/her needs from a pool of messages directed at him/her from the environment. In other words, the poor will only accept the information that is capable of solving their immediate problems. The nature of their problems probably does not give them the luxury of experimenting with information they regard as ‘useless' in meeting their needs.

The above discussions have shown that people are information poor because they lack quality or essential information and they are financially incapable of paying for information. They also lack the experience and technical skills to benefit from information using ICT, and even when
the information is available, they may lack the intellectual capacity to transform it into knowledge for their development. The cultural norms and values of the poor when it comes to information are also quite different from the rest of society. In other words, the information that might resolve an information need for the middle class may not do so for the poor, hence the importance of studying their information seeking behaviour in order to provide the information that might change their situation.

2.4.2 Research on Information Seeking Behaviour of the Poor and the Disadvantaged

Many of the studies on the information seeking behaviour of the poor and disadvantaged were conducted by Elfreda Chatman. However, prior to her studies, a significant study by Greenberg and Dervin (1972) investigated the communication behaviour of the urban poor. Their study was based on the following two hypotheses: the poor primarily use less print media and more TV than the population at large and secondly, that there are significant similarities between low-income whites and low-income blacks. The interview method was used for the study. The respondents comprised a low-income sample of 150 whites, 131 blacks and 31 Latinos. A total of 285 respondents sampled from the general population were also interviewed. The interviews sought information about their media use, content preferences, ownership, and attitudes towards the media. The results showed that there was no significant difference between low-income whites and low-income blacks with regard to media ownership. Respondents from the general population were likely to have more media available to them compared to the low-income respondents. With regard to television use and content preferences, both white and black low-income respondents were found to watch more TV shows and spend more time watching TV than the general population. Furthermore, the general population was found to read much more of the contents of newspapers while the low-income respondents read only the headlines, front page, and sports news. Similar results were obtained for use of radio and reading of magazines. The favourability rating for television was found to be higher than all other media attitude measures among the low-income sample. For example, the low-income
sample chose to believe news from television over radio and a majority of them indicated television was their preferred source for local and world news. The newspaper was a preferred medium for local news among the general population. A few differences were reported between low-income whites and low-income blacks. With regard to local news, the whites gave low preference to people, but equal preference to TV, radio, newspapers while the blacks highly preferred people as sources. Although the study was not informed by any specific theoretical framework it did provide information on the preferred sources of information for the poor. The study also confirmed the initial working hypothesis. Greenberg and Dervin (1972) concluded that there is a need for more research into communication exchanges or the everyday media use between the poor and the general population.

Chatman (1996) wanted to know the perception, use and sharing of information among the poor. Most of her studies were conducted in the context of what she called ‘small world lives’ (Chatman, 1999). The concept of ‘small world lives’ refers to small scale communities with the following characteristics: They have common language, customs, mutual opinions and concerns, predictable activities and routines, easy access to both intellectual and material resources, a collective awareness of people’s status, that is, knowledge of those who are trustworthy, important or have relevant ideas. In other words, “a small world is a community of like-minded individuals who share co-ownership of social reality” (Chatman, 1999, p. 213). The populations of Chatman’s studies included women in a maximum security prison (Chatman, 1996), janitorial workers in a southern university (Chatman, 1990), and retired women (Chatman, 1992).

Chatman (1990) examined the information needs and information seeking behaviour of female janitors in a southern university. She used Seaman’s (1959) five concepts of alienation theory as a theoretical framework. These concepts are *powerlessness* (a feeling of not being in control of one’s life); *meaninglessness* (lack of the intellectual ability to resolve problems); *isolation* (a situation where individuals lack a support system to address their concerns and problems);
estrangement (a feeling of being alienated from other people); and normlessness (absence of societal norms or standards of behaviour).

Data collection was by participant observation and interviews. The results revealed attributes of powerlessness, isolation, meaninglessness and self-estrangement among the janitors. However normlessness was not evident. Chatman (1990) reported further that the information sources of her subjects were restricted to primarily television and occasionally newspapers. They perceived information from personal experience as most reliable while information from an outsider was viewed with suspicion and often ignored. Outsider information was considered as incompatible with the commonsense reality of their small world. Their needs for information about health, university regulations, and employment benefits were not met. She also noted that there was limited information sharing among them, contrary to her expectations. She ascribed this observation to three causes: lack of trust among them, the discouraging nature of the university’s unwritten code, and the fact that they work independently. She observed that what little communication occurred among them was centered on complaints about excessive workloads, the need for increased pay and the exchange of gossip about supervisors and co-workers (Chatman, 1990). She concluded that although the study was not a typical library-focused investigation, it was of value in revealing the information behaviour of poor people so that they are better served by members of the information profession. She also pointed out that the study provides direction in describing “the everyday information concerns of low-income people in a scientific manner” (Chatman, 1990, p.367).

Chatman (1991) applied the gratification theory to study the social world and information behaviour of the janitorial workers in a southern university. The purpose of the study was to “investigate why some members of our society do not benefit from sources of information that could be helpful to them” (p.438). Her review of the literature on the gratification theory revealed six theoretical propositions about how poor meet their physical, social, and intellectual needs and their perception of social reality (Chatman, 1991). The six propositions are as follows:
Life in a small world: “Lower class persons have a more narrow and local view of the world” to the extent that they are interested in information that is not part of their social world.

Lower expectations and the belief in luck: “Poor people have a lower expectation of their chances to succeed in unfamiliar endeavours”. This prevents them from seeking new opportunities and inclines them to attribute every success to luck, fate or chance.

First level lifestyle: They become informed of important events in their social milieu through their peers (that is, people like themselves).

Limited time horizon: Their perception of time horizon is different from that of the middle class. For example “their view of time is the immediate present and the very recent past”.

An insider’s world view: They view their social world as “very local, concrete, unpredictable and often hostile”.

Use of the mass media: “The mass media, particularly television, is viewed as a medium of escape, stimulation and fantasy” (Chatman, 1991, p. 438).

The findings of the study indicate to a large extent that the gratification theory was adequate in explaining the information behaviour of the janitors, in that:

- Respondents did seek some information about promotions and transfers, but did not have, or engage in long-term plans that could improve their situation (small world lives);
- They perceived their chances of getting promotions as minimal and therefore did nothing to enhance their job opportunities. They believed promotions depended on favoritism from bosses (Lower expectations and belief in luck);
- Acceptable information must derive from accessible, verified and familiar sources (First level lifestyle);
• Their focus was on the performance of their daily routines with little hope of any advancement (Limited time horizon);
• They focused on localized events, believed in themselves and showed a general mistrust towards non-members of their accepted social network (An insider world view);
• They used television to pass time (entertainment) and as a source of diversion but not really for its fantasy content.

Chatman (1991) concluded that there is a need for librarians and other information professionals to educate themselves about how specialized populations perceive information in the everyday context in order to provide that information effectively.

Chatman (1992) also studied the information and recreational needs of elderly women in a retirement complex. Fifty-five women participated in the study and data collection was by participant observation and interviews. She originally applied social capital theory as a theoretical framework but this proved inadequate to explain the information behaviour of the women. Social capital is explained by De Graaf and Flap (1988) as the number of people a person can mobilize to support him/her with the resources at their disposal. The main proposition of the social capital theory is that “networks of relationships constitute a valuable resource for the conduct of social affairs providing their members with the collectivity owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 249). These networks of relationships include schoolmates, friends of friends, mutual acquaintances, family members, colleagues, etc. (Nahapiet and Goshal, 1996). Coleman (1988) lists some of the useful capital resources embedded in social capital as obligations, expectations and trustworthiness of structures and norms and effective sanctions. To clarify these capital resources, he explains that A shows B some favours and trusts that B will reciprocate this favour in the future. “This establishes an expectation in A and an obligation on the part of B” (p. 102). Coleman (1988) gave an example of an effective norm as a situation in which crime is inhibited so that individuals, especially the elderly, walk freely in a city without
fear for safety, or norms in a community that provide effective rewards for high achievement in schools, thus facilitating the task of schools or strengthening of families by the encouragement of members of a family to be selfless in the interest of the family. Chatman’s (1992) assumption was that because the women were living together in a residential facility they would have formed mutual relationships and friendships which would serve as a source of support and information to satisfy their information needs. On the contrary, the results revealed they imposed some social restrictions on themselves which created a barrier to their access to information. For example, information sharing among the respondents was guided by secrecy, risk taking, and deception. A condition for continued stay at Garden Towers was that the tenant be relatively healthy. Those who required nursing facilities had to leave. Therefore to continue to remain there the respondents lied to each other about their declining health and gave up on seeking information or gaining emotional support. However, respondents actively used the mass media, read books and magazines quite frequently, but were not active users of the public library. Chatman (1996) consequently proposed the theory of information poverty to explain her findings. The theory centered on the concepts of secrecy, deception, risk taking and situational relevance. The six propositional statements of the theory of information poverty are as follows:

- People who are defined as information poor perceive themselves to be devoid of any sources that might help them.
- Information poverty is partially associated with class distinction. That is, the condition of information poverty is influenced by outsiders who withhold privileged access to information.
- Information poverty is determined by self-protective behaviours which are used in response to social norms.
- Both secrecy and deception are self-protecting mechanisms due to a sense of mistrust regarding the interest or ability of others to provide useful information.
- A decision to risk exposure about one’s true problems is often not taken due to a perception that negative consequences outweigh benefits.
- New knowledge will be selectively introduced into the information world of poor people. A condition that influences this process is the relevance of that information in response to everyday problems and concern (Chatman, 1996, pp. 197-198).
Chatman (1999) also conducted a study to find out how women in a maximum security prison in the northeastern United States redefine their social world to survive in prison. The study was informed by her proposed theory of ‘life in the round’. According to Chatman (1999)

A life in the round is one lived within an acceptable degree of approximation and imprecision. It is a life lived with a high tolerance for ambiguity. But it is also lived in a world in which most phenomena are taken for granted. Occurrences are viewed as reasonable and somewhat predictable. It is a world in which most events fit within the natural order of things (Chatman, 1999, p. 213).

She used four concepts namely small world, social norms, worldview and social types as foundations for her propositional statements. These concepts are explained by Chatman (1999) as follows:

A small world view is a society in which mutual opinions and concerns are reflected by its members, language and custom bind its participants, resources (both intellectual and material) are known and easily accessible, there is a collective awareness of people’s status; that is, who is important and who is not, which ideas are relevant or trivial, and who to trust and who to avoid (Chatman, 1999, p. 213).

In other words, a small world is a community of individuals with similar social reality (Chatman, 1999).

Social norms “are the customary patterns that take place within a small world” (Chatman, 1999, p.213). Their purpose is to create a collective sense of balance, order and direction in a social world. They are codes of behaviour by which people are judged. Chatman illustrated social norms by quoting one of the white prisoners who was pregnant at the time she came to prison. She felt superior to the black inmates and would not talk to them. This attitude attracted contempt from fellow white prisoners and eventually she had to change her attitude and be nice to all like anybody else in order to make prison life tolerable (Chatman, 1999).

Worldview is a “collective set of beliefs held by members who live within a small world. It is a mental picture or cognitive map that interprets the world” (Chatman, 1999, p.213).
Worldview can be applied to prisoners with alcohol or drug problems who initially try to continue these deviant behaviours even in prison. But they soon realize that they are better off adopting the new worldview or value system of prison life because it works. This system allows for minimal security, reduced sentences, and a new awareness that it is possible to live without using drugs. Thus they realize that it is in their interest to give up their deviant behaviours and begin to conform to the norms of prison life.

*Social types* are “persons who exhibit traits or characteristics that distinguish them from other members of their world” (p. 214). Social types are classified as regular or outsider, but never neutral. Individuals are assigned specific social roles based on social types. According to Chatman (1999):

We identify persons by types to assist us in anticipating how they will behave towards us and how we can expect to act toward them. Most of us tend to reveal and exchange information among peers of “our own type”. Conversely, the further removed persons are from our own typology, the less likely are they to become sharers of mutual interest or information (p. 124).

In applying the theory of ‘life in the round’ to prison life, Chatman observed that inmates tend to actively gather information from the outside world through various sources such as making calls to family and friends and using the mass media with the hope of staying in touch with the outside world. They soon realize that as prisoners, they are no more part of the outside world and tend to be upset and overly concerned with information coming in from the outside world because they are not able to do anything about it, especially when they receive bad news about their family members, friends and children. For example news about their children not coping or doing well brings emotional problems, misery, yearning and a sense of helplessness. Thus they soon observe that it is better to focus and tackle the issues of their daily life and relationships within the prison environment. Chatman (1999) pointed out that because the prison world is controlled and predictable, inmates are insulated from their past undesirable lives, and the pain of separation from their families and loved ones.
Chatman (1999) claimed that the ELIS of individuals will be affected by life in the round because they will not search for information they do not need. If a community chooses to ignore available information, it means their world is working without it. Members of a small world will only legitimize information that is compatible with what they deem credible. Conditions for accepting information are that the provider can be trusted or the information can easily be verified. Chatman (1999) concluded that “life in the round is a routine, taken-for-granted” life that acknowledges everyday reality (p.216). It is also constraining because appropriate standards of behaviour are determined by insiders who also hold this world together.

Chatman (2000) also created her Theory of Normative Behaviour which Savolainen (2009) describes as an “elaboration and extension of the theory of life in the round” (p. 40). She defines the normative behaviour as “that behaviour which is viewed by inhabitants of a social world as most appropriate for that particular context” (p.13). The purpose of the theory is to explain the routine events that occur in a small world (Chatman, 2000). She mentioned that “much of the information that holds a small world together is appropriate, legitimate, and has a rightful place in the general scheme of things” (p. 10). Information from the outside or larger world, she continued, has little value in the small world. Chatman’s theory of normative behaviour is made up of four concepts, social norms, world view, social types and information behaviour. These concepts are the same as those for Chatman’s (1999) Theory of Life in the Round explained above. The difference is the new concept of ‘information behaviour’. Information behaviour is explained as “the state in which one may or may not act on information received” (Chatman, 2000, p. 12). It also includes avoidance of information seeking and the reasons associated with it, such as cost and the situation where the information is considered important but one can get along without it, or when the information is provided from a social type that is unacceptable to the small world community. Burnett and Jaeger (2008) explained information behaviour as the full spectrum of behaviours regarding information within a small world including formal information seeking, that is, when an individual presents an information need or query to a
formal information service such as a library; informal exchange of information among peers; and avoidance of information regarded as inappropriate or dangerous. Burnett, Besant, and Chatman (2001) also explained that information that conflicts with the social norms and worldview of its members of a small world is not trusted. It is considered dangerous, inaccurate and worthless and often ignored or resisted. The theory is made up of five propositional statements:

- Social norms are standards with which members of a social world comply in order to exhibit desirable expressions of public behaviour.
- Members choose compliance because it allows for a way by which to affirm what is normative for this context at this time.
- Worldview is shaped by the normative values that influence how members think about the ways of the world. It is a collective taken-for-granted attitude that sensitizes members to be responsive to certain events and to ignore others.
- Everyday reality contains a belief that members of a social world do retain attention or interest sufficient enough to influence behaviour. The process of placing persons in ideal categories of lesser or greater quality can be taught of as social typification.
- Human information behaviour is a construct in which to approach everyday reality and its effect on actions to gain or avoid the possession of information. The choice to decide the appropriate course of action is driven by those members' beliefs that are necessary to support a normative way of life (Chatman, 2000, pp 13-14).

Chatman's Theory of Normative Behaviour according to Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008) is relevant to understanding social access to information in two main ways, First, how do the concepts of social types, worldview and social norms influence what information coming into a small world would be permissible, acceptable, or made available to members? Second, how does it defines the appropriate activities and mechanisms needed to access information prescribed based on the social norms and worldview of the small world? Burnett et al. (2008) are of the opinion that the four concepts of normative behaviour would equip Library and Information Science researchers with the necessary tools to understand how people from different socio-cultural environments with divergent beliefs and assumptions might approach information.

In addition to Chatman, other researchers have conducted studies on the information needs of the poor and disadvantaged. For example Spink and Cole (2001) investigated the information
environment, information needs and information seeking of 300 African American households at Wynnewood Parks in Dallas, Texas. A 12 page questionnaire covering a broad range of life issues such as employment services, healthcare community activities and issues, use and need for financial services, security concerns, media usage, need for child care, and children’s activities and needs was used for data collection. The results of the study indicate that the information needs of respondents relate to everyday challenges such as finding money for food and rent, maintenance of the security of their households and health issues. The research participants used different sources of information to meet specific information needs. For example, the sources of employment information were newspapers, health information was accessed through the community’s physician, and family members were the main sources of news information. The respondents perceived that access to information could change their living conditions. However, information for improved education and employment was perceived as remote, that is, it did not satisfy an immediate need. The researchers explained that newspapers are not the primary source of news information for the poor because they often present a false image of low-income people and the news events they present do not conform to the way low-income persons process information. They further ascribed their participant’s lack of use of formal sources as resulting from a lack of options and not out of choice, citing lack of access to computers and the Internet, as well as limitations on the individual processing of such information caused by educational deficiencies. The study further revealed that the information environment of respondents was characterized by accessing information that is relevant to their needs. Arranging the channels and information needs in a circular model, it was observed that the formality of the channel increases as the scope of the information changes from inner (news) to outer (employment). In discussing the implications for developing appropriate information resources for this population, the researchers suggested the introduction of online technology as a source of health and employment information for the residents. With regard to news information, they suggested leveraging of technology to make
news media more relevant to the way poor people process information, through the use of interactive feedback loops that can present the information in a meaningful way.

Information seeking behaviour of the poor is also important when it comes to health information. According to Sligo and Jameson (2000), the concern among health professionals is that the poor, who are substantially at risk of diseases, do not make use of the medical solutions available to them. The reason for this concern is the emotional and financial difficulties that individuals and their closest family members will experience if they lack access to preventive medicine and knowledge about living a healthy lifestyle. This will eventually cause an exponential demand for healthcare and health resources and infrastructure. It will also cause high morbidity and mortality among the poor. Sligo and Jameson (2000) conducted a study to find the barriers to the use of cervical screening among New Zealand Pacific women and to propose solutions for improved access to the service. The study adopted a qualitative approach. A snowball-sampling method was used to select 20 participants. Each participant was interviewed in-depth for one hour. The questions covered their health and cervical screening information sources, and barriers to health information seeking. The study was informed by the diffusion of information and innovations theory, the knowledge-gap theory and Merton’s dichotomy of insiders and outsiders. The results showed that most of the participants are knowledgeable about the purpose of cervical screening but were hindered in taking action because of a cultural barrier. Among New Zealand Pacific women, it is a taboo to discuss the female reproductive system. Their means of obtaining cervical screening information was by face-to-face communication with health professionals, community group members, friends, and through the media in descending order. The study revealed that respondents were apparently “tired of and resistant to information that targeted Pacific Island people as a socially problematic group” (Sligo and Jameson, 2000, p. 865), They felt that the media publicized their community as prone to lower educational attainment, urban violence, higher disease rates and overcrowding in housing. It was this relegated status as a social problem that caused the
preference for interpersonal channels of communication. Respondents emphasized that advertising messages must present cervical screening as beneficial to all women and not just a single group. The findings of this study bring to the fore the importance of studying the socio-information environment of a people/community for effective information delivery.

Other studies on information seeking behaviour of the poor have focused on the homeless. For example Hersberger (2001) conducted a study to examine the everyday information needs and information sources of homeless parents. The rational for the study was that overcoming homelessness involves gathering relevant information from useful sources to address problems and resultant needs. Secondly, “people (including the homeless) in their everyday lives access information either to maintain or improve their everyday living conditions” (p. 120). The conceptual framework for the study was Dervin’s taxonomy for examining information needs of the average citizen based on studies she conducted in the United States. The study adopted a qualitative approach and used participant observation and interviews for data collection. Participant observation by the researcher involved a year of volunteering work at different shelters to observe and record daily life of homeless parents and to gain the trust of shelter residents. Purposive sampling was used to recruit 28 residents in six family shelters. Interviews were conducted to collect data on their demographic characteristics and everyday problems and how they were resolved using different information sources. Each interview session lasted for between 60 and 90 minutes and all interviews were audio-taped. Data was analyzed by coding and categorizations. The results of the study revealed that the everyday needs of participants revolve around finances, childcare and relationships, housing, health, public assistance, employment, education and transportation. These needs and the sources used to resolve them are as follows:

*Finances:* Financial needs were reported as the number one problem and they involved dealing with bad credit, problems with handling money and limited funds. Sources used
to resolve them included knowledge from personal experience and social service agency staff.

**Child care and relationships:** Information needs regarding child care were daycare and preschool issues, problem behaviour of children, relationship problems with spouses and family, domestic violence and a need to talk with others. Information sources included social staff in finding daycare resources and resolving children’s behavioural issues; and friends/families were used as sources for dealing with relationships as well as television talk shows.

**Housing:** Housing information needs included finding a place, barriers to getting a place such as bad credit, number of children, and crime and safety concerns. Sources of information for resolving housing needs included staff from the township trustee office, housing authority staff, the shelter staff, family and friends, personal insight from past homeless experience, newspapers, looking for ‘for rent’ signs during bus rides etc.

**Health:** Health needs were availability of healthcare, health information on specific diseases for themselves and their children, problems of alcoholism and drug addictions. Health professionals were reported as the main information source. Hersberger (2001) mentioned that the majority of the informants had Medicaid and those new to the welfare system were the ones who sought information about availability and adequacy of healthcare. Other sources mentioned were family/friends and other shelter residents with insights about childhood illnesses and personal health issues. Some informants mentioned God as a source of help, especially in dealing with stress.

**Employment:** The main employment need was dealing with unemployment and barriers to getting jobs such as finding appropriate daycare, lack of job training programs, and transportation problems, for example poor timing of bus routes and multiple bus changes.
**Education:** Education information needs included parents seeking adult education opportunities and credentials, and educational issues of their children, especially parent-teacher conflicts. Information sources used included shelter staff, other shelter residents, family/friends and teachers.

**Transportation:** Needs regarding transportation included car breakdowns with limited or no money for repairs, directional problems in the case of new residents, purchasing cheap used cars (mentioned by two males in the study), getting information on public transportation and reading bus schedules, limited or no money for transport. Sources of information used included sources of cheap and dependable cars, any persons available, shelter staff and bus drivers.

**Public assistance:** A few of the informants, especially those new to homelessness (11 or 39%), had information needs involving public assistance such as acquisition of food stamps, Medicaid, emergency housing and welfare benefits in general. Some mentioned acquisition of furniture for new apartments. The main information sources consulted or used for solving these problems were shelter staff and social services providers. Shelter residents were used when there was no competition for the same limited resources.

**Shelter:** Shelter problems included coping with other residents, other shelter children, disciplining of children, shelter rules and regulations, and lack of privacy. Information sources involved seeking counsel and support from family and friends and use of personal experiences and insights.

**Lesser problem areas:** A few of the informants mentioned problems involving crime and safety such as finding a safe place to live, legal problems involving husbands who were serving prison terms and needed legal advice, help with acquisition of legal documents such as getting duplicates of marriage certificates to satisfy shelter documentation. One informant mentioned the need for specific addresses and phone numbers and
information about summer recreational opportunities. Hersberger (2001) concluded that the “everyday life for homeless parents is complex and messy” (p.132). Problem areas are often inter-linked. For example housing problems are linked to bad credit, transitional housing programs, and education when parents wanted to live in certain areas where they can enroll their children in better schools. Financial problems are linked to employment and education needs in terms of getting job training. Homeless parents do not use formal channels like libraries and electronic resources but prefer social networks with close ties such as family and friends and weak ties such as social service providers.

Hersberger (2002) conducted a study on the everyday life information needs, information seeking behaviours and information sources of homeless parents living in shelters in Indianapolis, Seattle and Greensboro in the United States. Twenty-five homeless parents participated in the study. Data collection was by observation and in-depth interviews. Participants were asked to describe or indicate their daily activities, problems they faced and the sources they consulted to solve their problems. The study was conducted within the framework of Chatman’s theory of information poverty. The results of the study showed that the everyday life of homeless parents involved searching for social service resources such as subsidized housing, healthcare, food stamps and subsidized daycare. They also needed information resources on finding permanent or stable housing, more money and repairing bad credit history, jobs, legal and transportation assistance; and dealing with domestic violence and substance abuse. The participants used both formal and informal information sources. The formal sources were social service agency personnel, members of the clergy, healthcare and education officials. Informal sources used were family, friends and shelter residents. The results revealed that the main concern of the participants was to identify sources that provided them with information that met their needs, and not in the volume of information sources available to them. With regard to information seeking, participants preferred face-to-face contacts rather than telephone conversation. This was because face-to-face contacts often yielded direct receipt of
information. On the other hand they were often put on hold during a telephone call or the contact appeared busy with other tasks. Participants reported their frustrations with searches for documents required by service providers, especially with services where they have been rejected. For example one of the participants pointed out that “it was discouraging to spend a lot of energy tracking down a piece of paper that just says you aren’t good enough to be helped” (p.55). The study also revealed that sometimes shelter officials identify a need and bring in experts to address that need. Such sessions are mandatory for shelter residents. For example the study reported a session on repairing bad credit history which was facilitated by a local bank official, and another on birth control facilitated by the Planned Parenthood Association. The participants were more enthusiastic about the latter and not the former because their focus or immediate need was to acquire the money to pay their credit card bills and not information on financial management. Generally, shelter residents reportedly resented these information sessions. They found them a waste of time and preferred seeking information on their own after getting contact information. Apart from the participants in Seattle, the majority of the participants from Indianapolis and Greensboro did not search for information on the Internet. The study also sought to determine whether homeless parents are information poor or whether their lack of Internet access resulted from the digital divide. Chatman’s six propositions of information poverty were applied as follows:

*People who are defined as information poor perceive themselves to be devoid of any sources that might help them:* This proposition was not supported by the findings. The results showed that participants did not perceive themselves as lacking information. None of them mentioned that his/her everyday problems were a result of a lack of information. They rather reported being overwhelmed with information from emergency staff, clergy, and healthcare officials. Their main concern was unavailability of homes to rent.
Information poverty is partially associated with class distinction: That is, the condition of information poverty is influenced by outsiders who withhold privileged access to information: The results revealed that participants with a previous history of homelessness presented themselves as ‘insiders’, that is, knowing how the system worked whilst first time residents presented themselves as ‘information outsiders’ (p.57). Some participants complained that shelter staff withheld information based on favouritism. The researcher was not able to document whether this allegation was a matter of coping with rejection or some staff actually favoured some shelter residents over others.

Information poverty is determined by self-protective behaviours which are used in response to social norms: This proposition was not supported by the research. The results revealed that residents freely shared information with the shelter staff because that was the only way to gain needed resources from shelter staff. No protective behaviours were observed although some shelter residents complained about the nosiness of other shelter members.

Both secrecy and deception are self-protecting mechanisms due to a sense of mistrust regarding the interest or ability of others to provide useful information: Results did not show any behaviours of secrecy although some shelter residents employed deceptive behaviours to gain resources that they were ineligible for.

A decision to risk exposure about one’s true problems is often not taken due to a perception that negative consequences outweigh benefits: The results were mixed. Shelter residents shared sensitive information on topics such as substance abuse, legal issues, and bad credit history with shelter staff but tried to hide such information from others. The need for information about resources on such issues from shelter staff was considered more important than any negative consequences.
New knowledge will be selectively introduced into the information world of poor people. A condition that influences this process is the relevance of that information in response to everyday problems and concern: This proposition was directly supported by the findings of the study. Shelter residents felt they had much less information on the Internet that was relevant to their efforts at meeting their everyday needs such as subsidized housing and daycare, employment, food stamps, transportation. Some residents also lacked knowledge about using the Internet. Others with the knowledge were of the opinion that social services were so localized that there was no need wasting time to search for such information on the Internet. Some of those who knew how to use the Internet had problems with transportation to a library (probably due to lack of money but the study did not report that).

The study specifically sought to find out whether the participants felt they were information poor or whether their lack of access to the Internet had a negative impact on them. None of the participants felt they were information poor. With regard to the Internet, only six participants reported using the Internet at the public library to search for information on healthcare, employment and recreational information. The other 19 participants reported a lack of knowledge on using computers as a barrier to their use of the Internet. Apart from that, they preferred to get information face-to-face from local agencies. Those who had used the Internet previously expressed doubts about the credibility of some of the information on the Web, especially health information. The study concluded that homeless parents lack the resources to live in stable homes but they are not information poor, contrary to the literature on the digital divide that seems to suggest that the economically disadvantaged are vulnerable due to their inability to access digital information (Hersberger, 2002).

Hersberger (2003) examined information transfer via social networks among homeless populations living in shelters at Seattle (Washington) and Greensboro (North Carolina) The study was conducted to answer the following research questions:
What forms of social capital exist within the social support networks of homeless parents?
How is social network embedded in the social relations of homeless parents?
For which situations do homeless parents utilize their social support networks to access different forms of social capital?
What forms of social support, particularly informational, are needed, sought, obtained and used by homeless parents?
What catalysts exist which motivate homeless parents to attempt to gain or gather informational social support?
What impediments or barriers exist that discourage homeless parents in this process? (Hersberger 2003, p.100)

Twenty-one homeless parents participated in the study. The study used a qualitative approach and data was collected using structured interviews. The interviews gathered data on participants’ information needs, information seeking behaviour, information sharing, and information use. Each participant was asked to complete a social network map similar to that used by Pettigrew (as cited by Hersberger, 2003) in her study on “information needs and information seeking behaviours of senior citizens in their dyadic interactions with public health nurses” (p. 98). The map was made up of four quadrants (family, friends, neighbours, and others). In Hersberger’s study neighbour was replaced with shelter residents to suit the homeless environment. Each participant completed the map with information on “people who helped them, those who would help them upon request, and those they had helped either recently or regularly, and the nature of support and/or information exchanged” (p.101). All interviews were recorded. Preliminary findings of the study indicate that:

- Homeless parents rely on the social capital embedded in their relations with social service staff to obtain information, resources and the emotional support needed to improve their living conditions.
- Their social networks included shelter residents, Department of Social Services staff, shelter staff, church support staff, and physicians.
- They use their social networks in situations such as: resolving their children’s health and education issues, repairing bad credit histories, dealing with domestic violence and substance abuse and finding permanent accommodation and jobs.
• Homeless parents consider information as essential in improving their daily living conditions.
• They access social capital and informational support based on physical proximity
• Social services staff that provide information in a timely and caring manner are considered as family or friends.
• The social networks of homeless parents were found to be small (two to 21 data points), sparse and unconnected. The emphasis was on the help they got from their connections.
• Findings from the interviews and the social network maps confirmed some of Chatman’s (1996) propositions of information poverty such as secrecy and deception, employment of self protective behaviour, perceived risk of exposure, and acceptance of new knowledge based on its relevance to everyday life.

The study was perceived by Hersberger (2003) as significant because the study used qualitative methods instead of the survey methodology mostly used in traditional social network studies.

Felton, Hendrickson, McDermott, and Walsh (n.d.) conducted a study into the everyday life information seeking patterns of the homeless in Seattle. Seven homeless people participated in the study. The study was informed by Chatman’s theory of information poverty. The purpose of the study was to find sources of information, information seeking and information sharing behaviour of the homeless. The study used the survey method and participant observation for data collection. The report revealed that the information behaviour of the homeless is focused on seeking information to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and medical care. They use both formal and informal information sources depending on their personal circumstances of life on the streets. Their main sources of information are shelter workers and other homeless people. They do not use formal sources like libraries and outreach sources because they are not able to relate to the staff or the Internet. When they are new on the streets, they are reluctant to share information but those who have been on the streets longer share information freely. The participants generally felt they had a lot of general information and
were often overwhelmed with available information. However they indicated that there was not enough of the right kind of information about specific services. Secondly, the report revealed that those new to the street were often reluctant to share or ask for information from the insiders. Hersberger (2002) has said that the behaviour of those new to the street is not intentional but the fact is that those new to poverty often feel like outsiders. The findings of the study did not confirm Chatman’s first and second propositions of information poverty (already stated above) because the homeless felt they had plenty of information. However an alternate view is that Chatman’s first proposition was confirmed because the participants said they were not getting enough of the right information for specific services, meaning they lacked the information that will help them according to the first proposition. The homeless were willing to share personal information about food, shelter, clothing and medical care freely without any self-protecting behaviours, as posited by Chatman’s third proposition. With regard to the fourth proposition, the study reported peer-to-peer deception as a defense mechanism involving a single participant and some mistrust of shelter workers. One respondent indicated that he seldom visited some shelters because he doubted the sincerity of the shelter workers to really want to help. The study did not report evidence of Chatman’s fifth proposition but reported support for the sixth which suggests selective dissemination of new and relevant knowledge or information among the poor. This was evident in the report because, although the report indicated an information overload scenario, much information was of no value to them, partly because of the lack of knowledge in using it. The study concluded that information poverty among the homeless had to do with access to information. This was because the homeless themselves withhold information from each other (insiders and outsiders). Secondly most of them do not make use of the resources of public libraries. Lastly information providers do not have an organized information pool tailored to meet the needs of the homeless in one location.

The everyday information behaviour and information grounds of migrant Hispanic farm workers of the Yakima Valley (located at the eastern side of the Cascade Mountains in Washington
State) was studied by Fisher, Marcoux, Miller, Sanchez, and Cunningham (2004). The study was informed by the theories of information habits and information grounds. The former theory, developed by Harris and Dewdney (1994), asserts that “people follow deeply engrained patterns or habits in seeking information; that is, they tend to seek information that is easily accessible, preferably from interpersonal sources such as friends, relatives or co-workers rather than from institutions or organizations, unless there is a particular reason for avoiding interpersonal sources” (Theoretical framework and methodology section, para. 1). Pettigrew (1999) defines information grounds as “synergistic environment[s] temporarily created when people come together for a singular purpose but from whose behaviour emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information” (Pettigrew, 1999, p. 811).

The study sought to investigate the role of interpersonal information seeking in the lives of migrant Hispanic farm workers and their families, their information grounds, the situations under which they share information and the media they use. Data was collected at Community Technology Centers (CTCs) from workers who use these centers for various purposes such as helping their children with their homework, translations from Spanish to English and vice-versa and sending emails. The main data collection instruments were interviews and observations. Fifty-one farm workers and eight CTC staff participated in the study. The results showed that with regard to their information habits, most of the participants used interpersonal sources in their everyday life information seeking. For example they got to know about the centers through friends, family and acquaintances and used the same sources to satisfy their everyday information needs. “Out of the 51 CTC user responses, 36 (71%) cited an interpersonal source, while seven (14%) answered ‘the Internet’, and five (10%) indicated an organization such as the library” (Information habits and information grounds section, para. 3). The report revealed that ease of communication, familiarity, ease of access, and reliability are the reasons for their preference for interpersonal sources. Interviews with the CTC staff revealed that barriers to everyday information seeking include cultural differences, language/literacy problems, a sense of being outside the community, suspicion, and loss of control. With regard to cultural
differences for example, a man who relies on food stamps and medical coupons in caring for his family in Mexican culture, is considered incapable of supporting his family. Consequently Hispanic men do not take advantage of information about welfare and may avoid seeking such assistance from the Department of Social and Health Services in order to uphold their cultural values. Their information grounds as revealed by the report include barber shops, church, a garage, Pizza Hut, school, workplace, farm workers, hair salons, a daycare centre, medical clinic and a bookstore. The participants elaborated on some of the benefits of using these information grounds as face to face communications, ease of communication, and access to relevant and needful information that is reliable and trustworthy. They accessed information on wide ranging topics including current events, employment, local history, recreation, English and computer literacy, domestic violence, gossip, parenting, family issues, and legal information. In discussing their study, the researchers explained that,

... given the language, cultural, and economic barriers coupled with the deep extent of everyday needs associated with immigrants, especially those working in dangerous, low-tech occupations, it is consistent that they would rely heavily upon interpersonal information sources, especially close families and friends or people like themselves, finding credibility in the similarity of these populations (Fisher et al., 2004, Future Research, para. 2).

Schilderman (2002) conducted a study into the information needs and information sources of the urban poor in three developing countries, Peru, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe. The study was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The motivation for the study was a growing concern that researchers and development agencies have not been effective in applying their knowledge on urban development to improve upon the lives of the urban poor. Some of the reasons for this failure are limited knowledge about the information and resource needs of the urban poor and the inappropriate resources use to meet these needs. The field work was conducted in informal settlements of the capital cities of the three countries. Data collection was by interviews, focus groups using local teams of researchers, compilation of data on 40 projects with a focus on strengthening the knowledge information systems of the
urban poor by an international team, and a worldwide electronic conference involving 600 people. The study reveals that the urban poor have complex information needs, including information on employment, housing (access to credit for housing and utilities) infrastructure facilities, education, and health and security. (For example, in Zimbabwe, regarding security, they need information on the legal rights of residents and what to do in case of violation of their rights). Their main source of information was found to be social networks, such as reliance on family members, friends, and neighbours, leaders in the community, local groups and people at their work place. Participants in the electronic conference also referred to their reliance on social networks. Schilderman (2002) explained that poor people may rely on social capital to compensate for the lack of physical capital or financial means by adopting the principle of reciprocity, whereby people return something for the services they receive from others. Poor people are considered to be disadvantaged if they have few social capital resources because this may deprive them of some development resources and access to important sources of knowledge and information. For example, the report revealed that some poor communities in Peru were able to get pipe-borne water because of their links to local politicians. The report however revealed that sometimes information circulating among social networks is unreliable, incomplete, or of poor quality but the poor do not often check their facts, and on occasions when they do they tend to believe the people they perceive as trustworthy such as family, close friends, religious leaders, teachers, etc. Other sources of information identified in the study are infomediaries, that is, information producers or providers in the private and public sectors and non-governmental organizations, and key informants, that is, people who are knowledgeable in different aspects of community life and development or who have a range of links or contacts outside the community. The mass media, i.e. radio, television and newspapers, were found to be quite popular among the urban poor. However although the media were important for providing information on employment and also as a source of entertainment, the general consensus from participants was that they did not provide much-needed information for their day-to-day needs. Shadrach (cited by Schilderman, 2002) has said that the growing
commercialization of the media has led to a reduction of its service role and its globalization has led to a loss of local voices and local relevance with direct impact on the poor, particularly women. In answer to a question on how to strengthen the knowledge information system of the urban poor, the participants in the electronic conference emphasized the importance of involving the poor themselves. They pointed out that the poor might be illiterate, but may possess indigenous knowledge of great importance and relevance to an initiative. They advocate the rediscovery and strengthening of this indigenous knowledge by NGOs. The study concluded with a need for development agencies to re-access the methods of communicating information needed by the urban poor. For example it recommends the use of traditional media such as theatre, music and dance alongside modern ones to facilitate communication, overcome barriers such as illiteracy, and to adopt information strategies that will ensure equal access to information by the poor. Furthermore the study suggest the building of the capacity of key informants, investing in sustainable ICTs for the urban poor, and the adoption of a communication strategy that acknowledges the poor as a source of knowledge, and supports urban communities to build their knowledge and information capital by evaluating existing information resources and taking steps to address the gaps (Schilderman, 2002).

The literature reviewed so far has shown clearly that the economic and social circumstances of the poor make their information seeking behaviour unique compared to that of the middle class and the rich. They tend to look for information that relates to their daily challenges or that will meet their immediate needs. These needs are often basic human needs such as food, shelter, security and health. They do not seek information for their long term developments such as improved education and employment. With regard to information sources they prefer interpersonal sources especially information from members of their social networks (insiders such as friends, family members, co-workers, community leaders, key informants, etc). They do not trust information from formal sources such as libraries, organizations, and the media because it does not meet their everyday needs or because they find these organizations
suspicious. As Chatman (1999) points out, conditions for accepting information in the small world of the poor are credibility and believability. This credibility is dependent on the trustworthiness of the provider. Perception by the poor of what information is credible also creates a barrier to their access to information. This is because they may not avail themselves of information that might be helpful to them just because they do not perceive it as credible, thus delaying the solutions to some of their problems. Other barriers to their information seeking as revealed in the literature are language barriers, especially among minorities who do not speak English, lack of knowledge of information processing due to limited education, lack of access to ICT, lack of seeking and use of information that does not conform to their cultural norms and values, and lack of checking the facts of information received from members of the social networks which sometimes are of poor quality, unreliable, and incomplete. These findings re-affirm the importance of studying the information seeking behaviour of the poor in order to devise appropriate strategies and methods for effective information delivery of the right information that meet their needs.

2.5 Youth and Information

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2009) defines ‘youth’ as “the time of life when one is young especially the period between childhood and maturity” (that is, adolescence). Adolescence is the period within a person’s life span when his/her biological, cognitive, psychological, and social characteristics are changing from those of a child to those of an adult (Lerner and Spanier, 1980). UNICEF (2005) refers to adolescence as a time of transition involving multi-dimensional changes: biological, psychological (including cognitive) and social. Librarians for some time have searched for a term that best describe this group in libraries and words like ‘teenagers’ and ‘adolescents’ have been used in some libraries. Wilson-Lingbloom (1994) mentions that the term ‘adolescent’ has been found to be too clinical while ‘teenagers’ has been found to be insulting to the age group 18 to 21 years (p.3). Edwards (1974) also indicates that ‘teenagers’ was found to be an inappropriate designation and was considered
scornful, and it does not include the age range of 16 to 19; ‘adolescent’ was considered too biological and best suited for adult communication whilst ‘young people’ was generally considered by the public to mean children and not people of high school age. Consequently, the Young Adult Services of the American Library Association adopted the term ‘young adults’ to define its clientele (Edwards, 1974). The term ‘young adults’, as mentioned by Wilson-Lingbloom (1994) has been found to be acceptable and inoffensive to teens. It is defined by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), as “young people ages 12 to 18 who no longer see themselves as children but are not recognized by society as adults. The terms “teens,” “teenagers,” “adolescents,” “youth,” also identify young adults and will be used interchangeably throughout this document”. (Massachusetts Library Association youth services section, Introduction: Young adults as library users, para. 1). The focus of this study is on homeless youth ages 12 to 18.

Adolescents are at a stage in their lives when they need to master certain tasks to reach successful adulthood. Havighurst, a developmental psychologist, lists the developmental tasks of adolescents ages 12 to 18 as:

- Achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes;
- Achieving a masculine or feminine social role;
- Accepting one’s physique and using the body effectively;
- Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults;
- Preparing for marriage and family life;
- Preparing for an economic career;
- Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behaviour;
- Developing an ideology; and
- Desiring and achieving socially responsible behaviour (Havighurst, n.d., Developmental tasks of adolescents).

Mondowney (2001) observes that there is a need for adolescents to be independent of parents, siblings, and childhood friends. At the same time, they must “develop increasing autonomy in making personal decisions, assume responsibility for themselves, regulate their own behaviour, establish new friendships, move toward greater personal intimacy and adult sexuality and face
complex intellectual challenges” (p. 18). A report by the Carnegie Corporation in 1992 also mentioned the universal needs of adolescents as cognitive and educational competence, health and physical well being, personal and social competence, leadership and citizenship, and preparation for work. To meet these needs young people, including homeless and at-risk youth, need information, life skills, dependable relationships, a sense of usefulness and belonging, and bases for decision making and autonomy. Today’s information society also demands that young people develop or acquire multiple skills to be able to access the relevant information needed to make it to successful adulthood. However several writers including Shenton (2004), Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2006), and Chelton and Thomas (1999) have indicated that knowledge about young people’s information seeking behaviour is limited. Shenton (2004) describes the existing knowledge base on how young people seek information as ‘scanty’, ‘piecemeal’ and many of the topics addressed as ‘peripheral’ to the information seeking process (p. 243). He further emphasizes that coherent and comprehensive knowledge regarding young people’s information seeking is difficult to ascertain.

Studies on youth information seeking in the 1980s, according to Bernier (2007), were focused on what they know and learn but since the 1990s the focus has shifted to how they learn, that is on issues of cognitive development and its relationship to information behaviour. This shift in research focus has revealed some insights about how young people acquire bibliographic skills. For example young people learn and acquire bibliographic skills differently from adults and instructors must take this into account as they teach them; the principles and methods of instruction for young people must adopt flexible tactics and take into consideration how social factors like self confidence contribute to the composition of search statements by young adults; and researchers must begin to use ethnographic methods in studying how young people learn. With regard to current research on youth information behaviour Bernier (2007) is of the opinion that all young people have been confined to “student” identities and all their actions reduced to “skills” (p. xiv). This is because the focus of most of these research studies is school related,
such as issues of school assignments, student perceptions of information technologies, studies on student web searching etc. These studies only capture information behaviour of students pursuing academic goals and do not include the complex embodiment of young people’s information seeking behaviours and the many ways in which young people themselves may want to be identified in the public sphere. These studies also portray young people as lone or independent learners which is contrary to developmental postures of young people who often work in groups. Much of the current research also portrays young people in a negative light. For example a study by Branch (2002) characterized them as novice searchers with poor search skills in tasks such as formulating and refining effective search terms, assessing and refining of results and synthesizing of data. Other negative behaviours described are copying one another’s work, cheating or plagiarizing. They are also portrayed in the literature as having difficulty with learning information seeking and being challenged by technical interfaces. These difficulties have been ascribed to their low skill levels, short attention spans, lack of systematic planning, superficial browsing, difficulty in making relevance judgments, and inability to manage and reduce large volumes of information, among other factors. They are also characterized as impatient, unprepared and always prone to violating behavioural norms. (Bernier, 2007).

Current research is really less about youth information seeking than about framing youth as library, database or web users and about improving their achievements. Bernier (2007) is of the view that perceiving young people as information consumers has overshadowed the fact that young people are also producers of large amounts of information in various forms of media. He suggests that it would probably be more beneficial to consider youth as demanding rather than impatient, as customers requiring better designs from engineers and information managers rather than as unprepared and needing instruction in using software, as agents entitled to literary production rather than as mere information gatherers. Much of the available research on youth information seeking is task related, that is, school/academic-based and library-based and not related to their everyday lives. First, many studies are quantitative, investigating young
people’s use of particular providers and the ways in which they exploit these sources, and secondly, many are classroom/media center based qualitative studies to investigate the sources they use and the strategies they employ in using these sources (Shenton and Dixon, 2004). An understanding of the natural or day-to-day human information seeking behaviour according to Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) is essential to the provision of quality information services. Such information would influence “collection development, reference services, programming, and budget allotment practices” (p. 142).

This overview of youth information seeking reveals that most of the studies on youth information seeking have been school, library, media or technology based. However as Bernier (2007) points out, the lives of teens are more complex than has been portrayed in the literature of youth information seeking. The lives of teens are not only about looking for information to meet the challenges in their academic life but include other tasks such as the developmental tasks mentioned by Havinghurst (see above). Therefore there is a need for researchers to adopt a holistic approach to youth information seeking. The ELIS approach is a way of finding the breadth of the information needs of teens and how they go about looking for information to meet these needs on a daily basis.

2.5.1 Research on Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour of Young People

Research on everyday life information seeking of young people has focused on health, careers, drugs and their day-to-day information needs, their sources of information, and problems they encounter when looking for information. Some of these studies are reviewed below.

Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) conducted a study with the goal of determining the underlying problem of youth perception of libraries, whether it is an image problem or whether libraries are not able to meet the academic, health, and social information needs of young adults. The study sought answers to the questions:

- “What types of information do urban young adults seek in their everyday lives?”
Twenty-seven members of the Free Library of Philadelphia’s Teen Leadership program and participants in the Girls and Boys Clubs after-school program, aged 14 to 17, participated in the study. Data collection methods used for the study were surveys, group interviews, photographic tours, audio journals and written activity logs. The results of the study showed that the participants preferred people as sources of information followed by non-people sources. The people consulted included “family and friends, school employees, mentors, customer service staff, librarians, and passers-by” (p. 158) in descending order of frequency. The non-people sources included “telephones, television, computers, radio, newspapers, product packaging, personal communication systems (such as instant messaging, emails and written notes), printed school materials, product catalogs, printed ephemera, books, magazines and phone books” (p.158), also in descending order of frequency. The last major category represents ‘topics’ for which the participants sought information, that is, their information needs. Twenty-eight information need topics were identified which included: schoolwork, social life/leisure, time/date, daily life routine (such as meal and clothing selection), activities, weather, current events, personal finances, transportation, consumer information, popular culture, and personal improvement (i.e., self help, college and scholarship information). Agosto and Hughes Hassell (2006) used Havighurst’s developmental task as a framework and combined the 28 teen information needs topic into seven areas of teen development: the social self, the emotional self, the reflective self, the physical self, the creative self, the cognitive self, and the sexual self. The researchers concluded that the purpose of ELIS of the teen is “the gathering and processing of information to facilitate the multifaceted teen-to-adulthood maturation process” (p.1399). Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) indicated that the study was very significant for three reasons. First it confirmed the findings of other researchers such as Shenton and Dixon (2003b) who also identified consumer information, transportation, personal finances, time, daily
routines and weather as some of the information needs of young people. Second, it was the first
study to focus on urban youth. Previous studies dealt with rural populations and middle class
suburban youth. Third, the similarities between the categories of needs identified in the study
compared to previous studies implies that youth “have similar information needs across
socioeconomic, ethnic, and geographic boundaries” (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005, p.
160). With regard to teens’ perception of libraries and librarians, the findings revealed that
participants were frustrated with strict library regulations, unpleasant library staff, and lack of
culturally relevant materials, unattractive teen spaces and limited access to technology, among
others. The study concluded that urban teens do not consider “libraries as places where their
everyday life information needs can be met” (p. 162) since libraries and their collections, such
as books and magazines, were found at the bottom of the list of information sources they
consulted. The researchers also agreed with the conclusion of a study published by the Urban
Library Council in the United States that “urban youth are the best sources of information about
their needs and must serve as the cornerstone of all library initiatives designed to serve them”

Shenton and Dixon (2003) conducted a study to “investigate the information universes of
youngsters as revealed by their own words and ideas” (p. 178) and to find out how information
seeking behaviour changes during the years of childhood. The specific objectives of the study
were to identify their information needs and how they responded to them. For the purposes of
the study, information seeking was designated to include “any action taken by an individual to
address a perceived need” (p. 8), and an information need was considered to be the “desire or
necessity to acquire the intellectual material required by a person to ease, resolve, or otherwise
respond to a situation arising in their life” (Shenton and Dixon, 2003, p. 8). The study was
conducted in six schools at Whitley Bay, a town on the northeast coast of England. Three
schools with pupils ages 4 to 9, two middle schools with students ages 9 to13, and one high
school with students ages 13 to18 participated in the study. Each school designated one class
to participate in the study and random sampling was used to select the participants for the study. One hundred and eighty-eight pupils, made up of 95 boys and 93 girls, were selected. Data collection was by focus group discussions and interviews. To identify their information needs the study adopted a life-centred line of questioning, in which participants were required to narrate a recent incident when they needed to find something or learn about something for the purposes of school, personal interest or when they were worried about something. The results of the study revealed 13 types of information needs including need for advice, support for skill development, a spontaneous life situation in response to emerging problems and curiosities, empathetic understanding of others, school related information, personal information for the youngsters themselves or others in their social worlds, affective support, interest driven information, preparatory information to meet a challenge, reinterpretations of information already known to participants, and information to confirm or deny existing beliefs. With regard to information seeking, Shenton and Dixon (2003, p. 10) described what they called “the macrocosmic model” which involved:

- Adoption of one or more information directions (such as taking decisions on the information sources to use, the formats of those sources, and their locations including the home, school, the public library etc.).
- Choice of a specific source or sources within the category or categories specified in the direction (such as identifying a particular book, a CD-ROM package, an organization etc.)
- Efforts to locate the appropriate part or parts of the source or sources (interacting with the source to identify useful or relevant information).
- Attempts to access the desired information (scrutinizing identified information to select that which will satisfy a need) (p.10)

The study also revealed that youngsters tend to use other people to satisfy their information needs. Shenton and Dixon (2003b) categorized the people consulted by the participants of the study into three types. These are “people of convenience” (for example parents and siblings because they are easily accessible); “those in a comparable position” (often friends who had encountered similar information needs); and “experts” (for example teachers believed to have specialist knowledge of the subject area of need to participants) (p. 221). The researchers further indicated that out of the 13 types of information needs identified in the study, other
people were used by participants to address 12 of them. The exceptional need was consumer information which participants consulted for the purposes of making purchases. The main problem with using other people as sources of information was that young children could not identify the strengths and weaknesses of the people they approached for information and rarely questioned the accuracy of the information they received. Other problems were unhelpful or biased information from authoritative figures like teachers, hostility from potential information providers, and inaccuracy of information received, conflicting information received, and unavailability of information providers. The study recommended that librarians and teachers instruct youngsters so they are equipped with the requisite skills for using other people as information sources in the same way as they teach the skills of using other resources such as electronic resources. This would enable youngsters to evaluate the information they receive from other people without simply accepting it at face value (Shenton and Dixon, 2003b).

In a cross-national study involving adolescents from the United Kingdom and the United States Gray et al. (2004) explored perceptions and experiences of students using the Internet as a source of health information. One hundred and fifty-seven (157) students ages 11 to 19 drawn from seven secondary schools and six-form colleges in England and Scotland, and three public and two private schools in upstate New York participated in the study. The study used focus groups as a data collection method. Twenty-six (26) focus groups comprising 15 United Kingdom and 11 United States groups, each lasting between 30 minutes to one hour, were convened on school premises on normal school days. The group discussions focused on how participants perceive the Internet as a source of health information and the effect of the Internet on their leisure/work activities. Twenty of the groups were also asked to choose a health topic and search the Internet for information on that topic. The results of the study showed that adolescents primarily use personal sources for health information where possible and use the Internet as a second choice, or cross-check information from their personal sources to that found on the Internet for consistency. Participants perceived using the Internet as a source of
information empowering because they could avoid seeing the doctor. It also provides anonymity and makes health information easily accessible. Comparing information on the Internet to other sources such as books and health leaflets, the participants observed that it is regularly updated and they could examine a health subject from different perspectives rather than from the lone opinion of the author of a book. It could be personalized through feedback loops and printed or stored if required. Some older participants mentioned using multiple sources such as radio and television in addition to the Internet for health information. Reasons for seeking health information were to address specific health information needs for family members or themselves, or look for information on everyday health matters such as diet, fitness, acne, etc. The findings also revealed that most of the participants tend to find relevant health information but a minority of them, especially students from the UK, were frustrated with unsolicited advertisements for health products or medicines. Some of the participants were fully aware of the issue of credibility of websites and reported various strategies for appraising websites such as the structure of the address; for example ‘edu’ in the address signified a credible academic institution. They also recognized websites created by individuals who shared only their opinions and not facts on health issues. The study concluded that the “Internet can potentially combine all the best features of existing health information sources such as empathy associated with lay personal sources, the expertise/trustworthiness of professional sources, and the feedback associated with personal sources” (p.1476).

Other studies have focused on youth information seeking for career decision-making, which is important for adolescents about to finish high school. At this stage young people become very aware of the need to make plans for their lives after school, particularly the careers they would like to pursue and the educational paths they could follow to achieve their career goals.

Julien (1999) investigated the information seeking behaviours of adolescents in relation to their future careers. The study explored the difficulties they experienced in looking for the information needed to make career-related decisions. The research participants were drawn from three
secondary schools from a medium sized Canadian city. Three hundred and ninety-nine adolescents participated in the study. The study used the survey methodology and data collection was by questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study was informed by Dervin’s sense-making theory of communication. The assumption was that the respondents were actively constructing meaning as they made sense of their world. The data was analyzed within the theoretical framework of Harren’s decision-making style. Harren (1979) identified three main decision-making styles as rational, intuitive and dependent. In the rational style, the individual anticipates the need for making decisions for the future, actively seeks information about self and the anticipated situation and makes a deliberate, objective and logical decision. The intuitive style is characterised by use of fantasy, attention to present feelings, and an emotional self-awareness as a basis for decision-making. In the dependent style the individual is passive, compliant and makes decisions based on the expectations of peers and outside authority. The findings of the study revealed that the main barriers to career decision-making faced by the participants included difficulty in finding all the resources they needed to make decisions, lack of knowledge about where to find answers to questions regarding the future, lack of knowledge on specific information such as grades and courses needed to achieve career goals, obtaining funds for further education, and finding information about different jobs. Participants of lower socioeconomic background reportedly lacked the confidence to seek appropriate help, especially if the sources of help would not protect their privacy. Barriers to information seeking revealed from findings of open-ended questions included in the questionnaire were information overload in terms of the volume and variety of information needed for making informed career decisions, and institutional barriers such as “inability to obtain information because of school scheduling” (p. 43). Others were lack of understanding about decisions they needed to make about their future and lack of clarity about what constitutes appropriate career-decision making, causing participants to be overwhelmed. The study concluded that the findings are significant and will inform service providers such as librarians and guidance counsellors on the information needs and difficulties of adolescents.
making career decisions to improve on their services so that adolescents will be able to make good career decisions based on access to adequate and timely information.

Edwards and Poston-Anderson (1996) examined the information seeking behaviour of young adolescent girls in relation to their future jobs and careers. The study adopted a qualitative approach and participants comprising 42 adolescent girls from grades seven to nine were drawn from two public and private schools respectively. The study was conducted in Sydney, Australia. Data collection was by in-depth interviews. Participants were asked to discuss in-depth an identified life concern such as future job, future education, drugs and money; to remember the questions they had about these concerns (that is, information problems), their actions and feelings regarding these concerns from the first instant until the time of the interview, and the answers they had received or sought about these concerns if any. They were also asked to keep a diary for one month regarding these concerns followed by a second interview to ascertain the status of their concerns. The results of the study indicated that the main life concerns of the participants were whether they would be able to attain higher education qualifications or secure jobs that required higher scores in their final examinations. With regard to their information needs they indicated information about their education such as subject choices and length of a university education, and job information such as requirements for the pursuit of specific careers, length of training for specific jobs and how to secure a job. It was also evident that the participants engaged in little or no formal information seeking. Those who sought any information consulted their parents, especially their mothers. Furthermore, contrary to the expectations of the researchers, the participants did not consult formal human sources such as librarians, teachers, and career advisors. Their perception was that adults did not expect them to seek information about their future plans at that early age of 12 to 14 years. Edwards and Poston-Anderson (1996) also acknowledged the findings of other studies that indicate that information systems targeted at teens are often under-utilised, and adolescent girls aged 12 to 14 do not normally patronise formal information systems. The study therefore
suggested that there is a need for professionals working with teens to be proactive in making information targeted at teens highly visible and readily accessible. They must also use informal media for the dissemination of information to this age group.

Other studies focused on adolescents and drug information. For example, Todd (1999) investigated how older adolescents use the information they receive on the drug heroin. The study used a quasi-experimental approach. The objective of the study was to find out what happened in the minds of young people when they were exposed to drug information, that is, what they cognitively did with this information, how the information changed what they already knew and the effects of their exposure to the information (that is, the effect of heroin information on the cognitive construction of adolescents) (p. 11). Data was collected from four adolescent girls aged 17 and in their final year of secondary education in Sydney, Australia. The girls were characterized as above-average students, very fluent in English, motivated learners and of diverse backgrounds (Italian, Anglo-Celtic, Filipino, and Arabic). The reason for the selection of a small group was to get rich and well-rounded descriptions which would form the basis for further empirical examination. The results of the study showed that the existing knowledge structures of the girls went through three stages of revision conceptualized by the researcher as “construction, deconstruction and reconstruction” (p. 17). The effects of the exposure to heroin information on the girls were categorized as 1) “get a complete picture”, 2) “get a changed picture”, 3) “get a verified picture”, 4) “get a clearer picture”, and 5) “get a position in a picture” (Todd, 1999, p. 15). In other words the girls gained a more complete knowledge about heroin and its use which enabled them to form their own opinions about heroin. The study mentioned a number of practical applications of the findings to the dissemination of drug information to adolescents. For example, traditionally most drug awareness campaigns used graphics to portray the serious consequences of drug abuse with the hope of effecting a personal change of attitudes in adolescent behaviours. The researcher emphasizes that such authoritative and convincing information is not a guarantee that adolescents may receive or use the information.
He suggests that shifting the focus from mass communication facts to carefully selected content that takes into consideration the cognitive utilizations of the information might be much more effective.

The literature review on ELIS of youth has shown that youth have a plethora of information needs related to their development into adulthood. For example Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) identified 28 information needs topics including consumer information, daily life routine, personal improvement and finances, popular culture, skill development, schoolwork, time/date, social life/leisure activities, weather, current events, etc. Shenton and Dixon (2004) identified 13 information needs which included affective support, empathetic understanding of others, interest driven information, preparatory information to meet a challenge, etc. Their work also reveals that young people prefer human sources of information such as parents and siblings, peers and experts although they also use other sources such as the media (TV, computers, newspaper, and the Internet). With regard to the problem/barriers to their information seeking, their preference for human sources presents a major problem since they are not able to evaluate the strength, weaknesses, and accuracy or validity of the information they receive. Other barriers include information overload in that they are often overwhelmed with available information and lack the skills or ability to filter out the right kind of information to enable them to make the right decisions or to meet their specific information needs. Finally young people do not seek information from formal sources such as libraries. In fact the findings of Agosto and Hughes-Hassell’s (2005) study revealed a number of grievances teens have against libraries such as strict library regulations, unpleasant library staff, and lack of culturally relevant materials. This is a rather serious problem since the very institution designed to provide timely and relevant information for all, including teens, is perceived by teens as hostile and ineffective. These findings underscore the importance of research in youth information seeking so that information providers will identify their needs, sources of information and barriers to their information seeking so that they provide more effective service.
2.5.2 Everyday life Information Seeking Behaviour of Homeless Youth

In the library and information science literature only a few studies have focused on the information seeking behaviour of homeless youth. For example Alexander, Edwards, Fisher and Hersberger (2005) conducted a study to identify the health and human services needs of homeless persons comprising both youth and adults on the east side of King County, Washington, in order to inform the planning of services and provision. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What factors lead to homelessness in otherwise stable living situations?
- What interventions, including informational, might have prevented homelessness for particular people?
- What types of information, and health and human services do the homeless need?
- How can these informational and services needs be facilitated?
- What barriers do homeless people encounter when seeking help?
- What factor(s) can lead a person out of homelessness? (p. 3)

The study adopted a qualitative approach and was conducted within the framework of Chatman’s theory of life in the round and Dervin’s sense-making approach. Data was collected using in-depth interviews, unobtrusive observation, and field notes. Fourteen homeless persons ages 16 to 44 participated in the study. The results showed that their homelessness is caused by both personal and situational factors, such as inability to pay rent, unhealthy/abusive home situation, a request by parents/family members to leave home, loss of job, drug abuse by self/others, and injury or theft. Their preferred means of obtaining general information included the Internet, newspaper, speaking with someone face-to-face or on the telephone, and informational pamphlet. The results revealed that generally, participants’ information needs were closely tied to service needs with a wide variety of information sources. They tended to use informal sources (other people) rather than formal sources (print and electronic sources). Newspapers were indicated as good sources for job information. Two of the participants located a shelter by using the yellow pages and a brochure from a family member respectively. They also received information from several social service agencies and other organizations such as
the YWCA and churches. Barriers to their help-seeking were economic problems, lack of cleaning facilities, suitable clothing for job hunting and transportation issues. They also indicated that they were often too overwhelmed emotionally and time-wise to pursue needed information. In other words it takes time, energy and daily struggle to resolve homelessness. Interventions that they indicated might have prevented homelessness included favorable financial conditions such as transitional housing, lower cost of living, and assistance in finding jobs, job retraining and an intervention using a one-on-one caseworker. The study reported a sense of community especially among younger homeless persons which translated into information sharing among them. This, according to researchers is consistent with Chatman’s “small world” conceptualizations in which insiders learn from other insiders as much as possible and seek information from other sources when necessary (Chatman, 1999). This is clearly illustrated by this quote from a participant:

We’re kind of like a family [at the shelter], and [we’re used to] a few people, and then anybody who comes, we actually kind of look at them weird, and we accept them if they’re good people, but we kind of respect our own little group – everybody understands, you know? It’s kind of like a code. We make sure we all end up somewhere okay and we’re all happy for every single person that gets out of here (Alexander et al., 2005, p. 15).

The study concluded that the information sharing strategy among the homeless youth would be a useful one for information dissemination by shelter authorities among shelter residents. In other words relevant and important information from shelter authorities can be disseminated using shelter insiders. It also recommended a follow-up study of the observed phenomenon of community spirit among the youth because of its value as an information dissemination strategy.

Reid and Klee (1999) investigated service provision and perception of homeless youth of these services in Greater Manchester in the United Kingdom. The study population included homeless youth in Manchester city and the surrounding towns such as Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, and Stockport. The objectives of the study were to examine access and use of formal and informal support services such as housing, health, advice and information, confidence in securing help
and appraisal of service provision. “The operational definition of the homeless used in this study was youth who were roofless, residing in hostels and bed and breakfast accommodation or staying temporarily with friends” (p. 17). Two hundred youth, ages 14 to 25 comprising 143 males and 57 females participated in the study. The study adopted a quantitative approach and data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The study reported their information sources as: the Department of Housing for housing information, followed by advice agencies, social services, day centers, and friends or families in descending order. They obtained money or financial advice from friends/families, Department of Social Security, Hostel staff, probation or social services, and advice agencies in descending order. The majority of respondents used informal sources (family and friends) to satisfy their counselling needs and 32% or 64 of the respondents had no knowledge of where to get counselling. A few mentioned hostel staff, social services, and drug workers as sources for counselling. The majority of the respondents used voluntary organizations so they could have a place to shower, obtain clothes and enjoy the company of fellow homeless youth. With regard to their health seeking habits, the majority of them (156 or 78%) consulted GPs when they were sick followed by a small percentage that went to the accident or emergency departments of hospitals. Barriers to their health seeking included: limited income, the lack of an address, their perception that ‘sickness was not serious’ and the cumbersome process required to see a GP considering their homeless status. They were also dissatisfied with treatment they received at the hospitals and indicated they received better treatment at the hospitals than with the GPs. The main reasons for their dissatisfaction were discrimination because they were homeless or used drugs, and a general feeling that the symptoms of their sickness had not been well diagnosed and properly dealt with. The study further revealed, that majority of respondents had experienced drug-related health problems. They obtained “their injecting equipment from a specialist needle exchange service or from the pharmacy” (p.21), and received treatment or counselling from a drug agency. The main problem respondents had with the treatment agencies was the length of the waitlist, that is, the length of time they had to wait for their turn to be treated. The study concluded that youth homelessness
was becoming a problem in the United Kingdom and social service agencies must be proactive in identifying youth at risk of homelessness early in order to arrest their situation.

Ensign and Panke (2002) conducted a study to examine the “reproductive health seeking behaviours, sources of advice, and access to care issues among clinic-based homeless adolescent” in Seattle (p.166). Twenty women ages 14 to 23 participated in the study. The study was ethnographic and data collection was by semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Their sources of health information included health advice from informal sources such as a friend, mother or grandmother, reference books from a library or bookstore, herbalists or herbal reference books, or ‘Ask-a-Nurse’ phone consulting service. The reason for their preference for using a female as health adviser was that women are understanding and can relate to the health problems/issues of other women. With regard to health seeking behaviour the participants indicated they first practice self care such as taking ‘Tylenol’ and went to the clinic as a last resort. Others sought advice from alternative sources such as naturopathic pharmacies. They expressed a wish that medical practitioners would teach them self-care practices so they could save themselves time and the trouble of going to see a doctor. The barriers to appropriate healthcare included structural issues of the health care system, individual issues, characteristics of providers and communication issues. Structurally participants preferred to seek care from a clinic designated for homeless or at-risk youth, except that they were not able to access help from these clinics during the weekends because they were closed. The barriers to using other hospitals and clinics included questions about consent for care, identification cards and source of insurance or payment which they did not have. Individual issues include lack of transportation and money. The majority also indicated the state of being sick as a potential barrier because it is often difficult for one to drag oneself anywhere when feeling indisposed. The last individual barrier was lack of social support. They mentioned that they always liked to be accompanied by a friend or a partner for support when going to seek healthcare and would appreciate the opportunity to enter the examination room with their
friends. Participants indicated some of the characteristics of the regular clinics that they did not like such as not being addressed by name, being questioned about confidential matters openly by front desk staff, filling in of multiple forms, and being reprimanded by clinic staff for being inquisitive about personal medical charts. They would also like healthcare providers to treat them with trust, respect and acceptance. (For example, respondents mentioned that the fact that they were homeless did not mean they lacked knowledge about personal health care issues and needed to be educated about them). The results also revealed that participants preferred a female doctor for easy bonding and would like the conversations to be in simple language without medical jargon. The study concluded by highlighting the power imbalances in clinical settings where the care provider is considered the expert whose responsibility is to diagnose, teach and treat while the patient is the weaker one seeking assistance. The report suggested that the patient/provider relationship would be enhanced if health providers avoid stereotyping homeless youth, recognize their lifestyles, beliefs and adaptive behaviours, are good listeners, sensitive to their inherent powerlessness, non-judgmental and treat them with trust and respect. Furthermore health workers and all other personnel who interact with homeless youth must acquire knowledge about their culture and health issues, and policies affecting the homeless must include input from the homeless themselves.

Some related studies, while not focused on the ELIS of homeless youth, required them to indicate their needs. For example the Broadview Applied Research Group Incorporated (2005) conducted a study to investigate the realities of youth homelessness in Calgary, Alberta. A total of 354 homeless youth ages 12 to 17 participated in the study using survey methodology. The primary objectives of the study were to enumerate homeless youth in the city, identify the causes of youth homelessness and the strategies that will ameliorate the problem of youth homelessness. The questionnaire required participants to indicate their needs/wants with regard to programs and services. The results revealed a host of needs and preferences summarized as follows:
• Acceptance for who/what/where they are right now;
• Non-judgmental services and staff;
• Compassion, care, belonging and protection;
• Safety and refuge from all forms of threat and abuse;
• Family-style housing options that include the presence of caring adults and support;
• Education and support to learn to be independent;
• Adequate time to learn needed skills;
• Opportunities to fail and be allowed to learn from these experiences rather than be threatened with punishment or termination of services;
• Interaction with people with experiential knowledge, e.g. peer models;
• To not be pathologized or over-programmed;
• Natural learning and mentoring opportunities;
• Ease of access to supports – one stop shopping models of service delivery;
• Exposure to positive alternate ways of life, possibly through introductions to the principles and practices of community economic development and/or community development models such as micro-business opportunities and loans, cooperative housing and community empowerment; and
• Participation and a voice in determining what they need and how that need should be met (Broadview Applied Research Group Incorporated, 2005, p. ix-x).

These findings re-affirm the importance of using qualitative methods in information seeking research and allowing research participants to articulate their needs freely. The participants in this study were able to spell out their needs and preferences and what they thought could be done to get them out of homelessness or to improve their circumstances.

The literature on ELIS of homeless youth reveals that homeless youth are in need of the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter, healthcare and above all money. Other needs are for employment, education for self improvement, and transportation. These needs are what drive them to look for information. Their sources of information are mostly informal channels or people-centered sources such as family, friends, shelter residents, shelter staff and social service staff. Formal sources like libraries and the Internet are seldom used. They also have their preferences in seeking healthcare, such as the preference of female homeless youth for female doctors, Ask-a-nurse consulting services, alternative medicine such as herbal medicine, and clinics designated for homeless and at-risk youth. In looking for information to satisfy their needs they encounter problems such as lack of time, lack of cleaning facilities and suitable clothing for job hunting, and lack of money for transportation. Also the emotional weight
of homelessness can be so overwhelming that they are sometimes discouraged from looking for the very information that will help them. In other words they may be depressed which would aggravate their situation. With regard to their health seeking the literature revealed a number of issues that might deter them from seeking healthcare. These include lack of identification, health insurance and home address; the bureaucracy involved in seeing a General Practitioner; need for consent for care; lack of trust, respect and acceptance from healthcare practitioners; lack of social support; and a long waitlist for drug addiction treatment. It is obvious that homeless youth have unique needs, preferences and concerns which must be known to policy makers and all those who seek to improve their situations including information providers to facilitate effective service.

2.5.3 ELIS Studies in Africa

The aim of this section of the literature review is to ascertain the trend in ELIS research on youth and disadvantaged communities in Africa, to identify any gaps and to structure the study to make a tangible contribution to ELIS research in Africa.

Everyday life information seeking studies of youth in Africa have focused on their health information behaviour. For example, Nwagwu (2007) investigated the Internet as a source of health information among adolescent girls in Owerri, an urban city in Nigeria. The study participants comprised 1,011 adolescent girls from ten secondary schools (in-school adolescents) and 134 adolescent girls who were school dropouts (out-of-school adolescents). Their ages ranged from 13 to 19 years. The study adopted the survey methodology and a questionnaire was used to collect information on participants’ health information seeking behaviour, knowledge, attitudes, and socio-economic status. The response rates were 94% and 84% for in-school and out-of-school adolescents respectively. The results showed that in-school adolescents had greater access to the Internet both at school and at home than their out-of-school counterparts; the out-of-school adolescents used mainly friends (63%) and the Internet (55%) as a source of reproductive health information. Other sources were books,
television and magazines. The in-school adolescents used parents (66%), teachers (56%), and public health campaigns (55%), as well as books, health providers/clinics, health class and friends in descending order. Only 25% of the in-school adolescents reported using the Internet as a source of reproductive health information. In other words, the in-school adolescents used mainly parents and teachers while the out-of-school adolescents used the Internet and friends as a source of health information. The health topics accessed on the Internet by both groups of adolescents were HIV/AIDS (45%), sexual activities (37%), sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (35%), and pregnancy (32%). The out-of-school and in-school adolescents indicated that they used the Internet for health information because it offers unrestricted access and ensures the privacy of the individual. The researcher observed that these findings have negative consequences since youth have a tendency toward sexual experimentation. He emphasized that the out-of-school adolescents accessed the Internet at cyber cafes to browse information that might benefit from parental supervision. The study suggested that if governments and other stakeholders could take relevant steps to prevent adolescents from gaining access to pornographic and other dangerous sites, cyber cafes could become major sources of health information for them. Nwagwu (2007) argued that information professionals must acknowledge the role of the Internet as a potential source of health information. He also suggested that web designers and content providers must also exploit the power of Web 2.0 technologies and incorporate health information into tools like blogs, wikis, and podcasts which are more youth-friendly.

In a related study, Borzekowski, Fobil, and Asante (2006) investigated how teens in Ghana use the Internet for health information. The survey methodology was used and the study was informed by the uses and gratification theory. This theory proposes that media users play active roles in their choice of media content. They tend to select media sources that satisfy their needs and interests (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1974). The participants comprised in-school and out-of-school adolescents aged 15 to 18 years. The in-school adolescents (600 students) were
selected from 12 schools in six sub-metro districts of Accra, the capital city of Ghana. The out-of-school adolescents (178) were recruited from community centres that worked with youth through the help of centre administrators and staff. The study adopted a questionnaire that had been previously used in a US study and modified to suit the cultural climate of Ghana. For example to obtain data on socio-economic status, the questionnaire asked participants to indicate whether their households had items such as telephones or refrigerators rather than parents’ highest level of education as in the US study. The questionnaire assessed the health behaviours, knowledge and attitudes, media ownership, use and knowledge and use of online health information by participants. The results of the study revealed that the majority of the participants (63% of 778) have used the Internet and out of these users, 53% have sought online health information. However the out-of-school adolescents perceive the Internet as an important source of health information and ranked it fifth among other sources compared to eighth by the in-school adolescents. The health topics accessed on the Internet by in-school adolescents were diet or nutrition, sexually transmitted diseases, and fitness or exercise. The out-of-school adolescents looked for information about sexually transmitted diseases, sexual abuse, and sexual activities. Both groups use the Internet for health information because it offers relevant information, different opinions on health issues and it is easy to use. They accessed the Internet primarily at Internet cafes. Other sources of health information used by in-school and out-of-school adolescents are parents, health providers, and books by the former. Borzekowski et al. (2006) pointed out that parents seemed to be a significant source of health information for in-school adolescents as compared to out-of-school adolescents. They ascribed this to the probable lack of formal education and traditional attitudes of parents of out-of school adolescents, which might cause them to avoid discussing sexual issues with their children.

Other uses of the Internet by both groups of participants include communicating with friends via email, looking for information on and playing music or watching movies, playing games, accessing local/international news, visiting chat rooms, and instant messaging to friends in descending order. The study concluded that generally the youth of Accra have a positive
attitude about the Internet as a health information resource and expect this trend to continue as the Internet become accessible throughout the nation. Borzekowski et al. (2006) suggested the development of pro-health websites to be used by youth because of the high levels of interest and favourable perception of the Internet among these two groups of youths.

In a Ugandan study, Ybarra, Emenyonu, Nansera, Kiwanuka, and Bangsberg (2008) examined the sources of health information by secondary students in Mbararan, the sixth largest municipality in Uganda. A total of 500 adolescents aged 12 to 18 years selected from five secondary schools in Mbararan participated in the study. The survey methodology was used and questionnaires were designed to collect information on sources of information about health and diseases, sexual health, HIV and AIDS. The majority of participants (81%) cited parents, teachers, and other adults as their sources of health information. Other sources are books or libraries (56%), siblings and friends (50%) and a computer or the Internet (38%). Older adolescents (15 to 18 year olds) tended to rely on siblings and friends for their health information as compared to younger adolescents (12 to 14 year olds). For example 59% of older adolescents and 41% of younger adolescents used siblings and friends respectively as sources of information on HIV and AIDS. The study concluded that human sources (teachers, parents and other adults) might be the most efficient channel for health promotion and disease prevention among adolescents in an environment of limited resources. The researchers also suggested that using multiple delivery methods might make a greater impact especially in reaching older adolescents who use other sources such as books, computers and the Internet (Ybarra et al., 2008).

Other ELIS studies in Africa focused on rural communities. For example in Botswana, Mooko (2005) investigated the information needs and information seeking behaviour of rural women in three villages. The study sought to answer the following questions:
• What type of situations lead Botswana rural women to look for information for themselves or family members?

• What are their information needs?

• What kind of sources do they consult?

• What are their problems and successes when seeking for information for themselves and family members?

The study used snowball sampling to select 60 women ages 21 to 80 years to participate in the study and data collection was by the critical incident technique. The women were asked to narrate situations or problems that led them to seek information on behalf of themselves or family members within the past month. The findings of the study revealed that health information was the most prevalent need. The women needed information on diseases, especially HIV and AIDS, modes of contacting the disease, how to care for victims of the disease at home, and how to access financial support for better health care services. Other needs reported by the study are lack of jobs, vocational training, family violence, loans to expand businesses, etc. Mooko (2005) categorized these needs into healthcare, poverty, self development and economic development. She emphasized that the women “needed information that would make them more effective in their different roles and also help in improving the welfare of their family members” (p. 124). Other health situations faced by participants included high blood pressure, backaches, diarrhea amongst children, knee problems, and diabetes. Another problem situation was lack of child maintenance due to absentee biological fathers. This was prevalent among young women who were often reluctant to pursue court proceedings for several reasons, notably parental obedience and the belief system. For example they believed that going to court might cause the fathers of their children to kill their children by engaging the help of traditional doctors. The sources they consulted included the village nurse, medical practitioners, and traditional doctors for health information; agricultural and veterinary officers for information on farming; community welfare officers for information on government welfare programs, and
women’s organizations for financial information for those seeking to start small businesses. Other sources of information are the village chief, friends, neighbours and relatives, church and political leaders, radio etc. Women’s organizations were found to be the most useful sources of information. Some of the problems they experienced were misinformation by friends, inability to seek information elsewhere other than the village nurse, loss of confidence in the village nurse because of inadequate information and the fact that sometimes the information provided proved not to be helpful, unavailability of agricultural and veterinary officers when information was needed, favoritism and unfairness of community welfare officers in information provision, and lack of attendance at meetings meant for the dissemination of government information, policies and schemes. Mooko (2005) concluded that interpersonal sources played a significant role in the dissemination of information among rural women and suggested that the high demand for health information warrants the repackaging of health information in a manner that would be beneficial and acceptable to rural women. For example dissemination of information must be done at the kgotla (that is, village community centers), and at antenatal clinic sessions.

Momodu (2002) conducted a study to investigate the information needs, information sources, information seeking behaviour and barriers to information seeking of rural populations of the Ekpoma district of Nigeria. The survey methodology was used for the study and data collection was by questionnaire and interviews. The information needs of participants were agricultural information needs such as information on storage and processing of farm produce, building of fishing boats and net-making, purchase and use of fertilizers, pesticides, access to loans and hiring of tractors; health information needs such as handling of epidemics, information for treatment of diseases that had defied traditional medicine such as tuberculosis and cancer, treatment of water for domestic use since most of the rural population depended on surface water and information on how to access government help in the provision of healthcare; political information including political parties and their manifestos, voting rights, the merits and demerits of different voting systems; family support programmes; implications of structural adjustment
programmes; community information needs for example information on mobilizing people for self help projects, government agencies to be contacted, commissioning these projects and how to raise funds during the commissioning of projects. With regard to educational information needs, headmasters and teachers needed information for self development, promotions, and salaries. Students needed information on their final examinations, scholarships and bursaries and career prospects and counselling. Sources of information revealed in the study were radio, television, agricultural extension workers, postmasters, and officials of co-operatives, headmasters of teachers, traditional council of elders, adult education campaigns, market women organizations and their children in school. Momodu (2002) said that generally the rural dwellers preferred informal information such as information from relations residing in the urban areas, trusted friends and their children in school. They found such sources reliable and authentic but information from the mass media was treated with suspicion. Their perception was that information from the media had been dictated by the government out of selfish interest. The main barrier to information dissemination was found to be illiteracy and therefore rural populations could not benefit much from media-related educational campaigns and discussions which were often in English as a result of the many ethnic groups and languages in the area. Extension workers often had to use translators who tended to distort the facts.

Njoku (2004) investigated the information needs and information seeking behaviour of fishermen in Lagos State, Nigeria. The main objectives of the study were to identify their information needs, sources of information, information seeking behaviour, and barriers to information seeking. The study participants comprised 500 fishermen selected from 55 rural communities. Data collection was by interviews. The study results revealed the major information need of participants as obtaining credit for business expansion (60%). Other needs are information about modern fishing techniques and facilities, storage and processing, weather conditions at sea and where to get large catches, market conditions and government policies on fishing, in descending order. Their main sources of information were friends, relatives (24%),
followed by opinion leaders/role models (20%), mass media (20%), and educated people (18%). Other minor sources indicated by participants were personal experience, extension officers, newspapers and library materials. Njoku (2004) explained that reliance on informal sources such as friends and families may result in information that is not timely, reliable or accurate. Furthermore such information may not be adequate since the main information need of participants was how and where to obtain credit facilities. The study recommended boosting the number of agricultural information and extension officers serving the fishing communities to provide them with information that will facilitate productivity such as information on credit procurement and modern fishing techniques.

In a similar study, Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2003) examined the information needs and information seeking behaviour of artisan fisher folk of Uganda. The study was conducted in communities around three major lakes in Uganda, Lakes Victoria, Kyoga and Albert. The 118 study participants comprised 92 fisher folk, two boat builders, four fisheries extension agents, eight fish guards, and 12 chairpersons of fish landing sites management committees who were also fishermen. Data collection was by interviews, observations, and photography. Information need in the study was identified as problems faced by participants. Problems faced by participants included precarious weather conditions which led to loss of life on the lakes, especially Lake Victoria; water weeds in the form of water hyacinth which impacts negatively on the fishing industry, high costs of fishing equipment such as boat engines and fishing nets; illiteracy which affects their competitiveness as entrepreneurs; unhygienic living conditions and lack of basic amenities such as good drinking water leading to prevalence of conditions such as diarrhea and dysentery; poor post harvest management practices such as frying and smoking which causes depletion of forests because of excessive use of firewood; and predators in the lakes such as crocodiles and alligators, and tsetse flies, which are vectors for sleeping sickness. The findings also indicated that the fisher folk needed information primarily for the promotion of their occupation. Other areas in which they needed information were marketing, sources of
credit, fishing seasons, taxation, sources of fishing equipment, safety and security, education and training, landing site development, life and property insurance, weed control, marine cell phones and improved communication systems such as early warning systems, cheaper life jackets and banking services. Their information seeking methods include contacting knowledgeable people, asking friends, neighbours, relatives or colleagues, personal experience, listening to radio/television, consulting customers and using social networks. Other minor information seeking methods mentioned are print media such as newspapers, manuals/books, asking role models, listening to politicians, seeking assistance from area councillors, husbands, and observing others on the job in descending order. Organizational sources of information used by participants include the fisheries department, Uganda Revenue Authority, Health department, Non-Governmental organizations, National Agricultural Research Organization, Fisheries Associations, etc. The study also reported the use and impact of information on the participants. For example, understanding the information and its implications caused them to use recommended fishing methods and fishing gear. It also helped their personal development in areas such as treatment of diseases, personal hygiene, and developing good eating habits, and facilitated the expansion of their business such as in cross-border trades with neighbouring countries. Barriers to information identified in the study were illiteracy, nomadism, apathy towards information and difficulty in mobilizing fisher folks for the purposes of information sharing. Others are limited logistics such as lack of transportation and fuel for extension officers, lack of trained personnel who could communicate in the many local languages, lack of knowledge about where to get information and unreliability of information received. Among the recommendations made by the study are concerted efforts by the government to improve on functional literacy, health education and services, teaching of fishing management in schools, meteorological services and communication infrastructure in the fishing villages.

The literature review shows that only a few studies have been conducted on ELIS of youth and disadvantaged populations in Africa and therefore more studies are needed to contribute to
knowledge in this area. The youth studies focused on their health information needs and sources of health information. Two of the studies, Nwagwu (2007) and Borzekowski et al. (2006), focused on how two groups of adolescents, in-school and out-of-school adolescents, used the Internet as a source of reproductive health information and one (Ybarra et al. 2008) focused on sources of health information by secondary school students. The findings revealed that the Internet and friends are important sources of health information for out-of-school adolescents while in-school adolescents used other adults, parents and teachers, as sources of information and less of the Internet as health information. The preference for Internet use by out-of-school adolescents was ascribed to privacy and unrestricted access (Nwagwu, 2007). Ybarra et al. (2008) are of the opinion that out-of-school adolescents do not use their parents as source of health information because of parental illiteracy and traditions that prevent discussion of sexual health matters with children. Other sources of health information for adolescents are health providers, clinics, books, siblings, libraries and magazines. Adolescents search for information on reproductive health topics such as STDs and pregnancy, HIV and AIDS, Other topics include fitness, exercise, diet and nutrition. All the studies used the survey methodology and a questionnaire as the data collection instrument. Only one of the studies used a theoretical framework: Borzekowski et al. (2006) used the uses and gratification theory. It is obvious from these analyses that there is a need for an in-depth investigation into the everyday life information needs and information seeking behaviour of African youth in general using qualitative methods, and the problems they encounter in looking for information. Findings from such studies will enable information providers and other stakeholders to provide a holistic information service which will facilitate the successful growth of African youth into successful adults.

ELIS studies of disadvantaged groups have focused on rural communities such as women and fishermen, their information needs, sources of information and problems in their information seeking. The ELIS of rural communities can be summarized as related to work (e.g. storage and
processing of agricultural produce and modern fishing techniques and equipment), healthcare (e.g. treatment of chronic diseases such as tuberculosis, cancer and HIV and AIDS, and financial support for better health services), self development (e.g. vocational training and personal hygiene), economic development (e.g. access to credit for business expansion and good post harvest management practices), politics (e.g. government policies on fishing and merits and demerits of different voting systems), education (e.g. school examinations and career prospects and scholarships), basic amenities (e.g. treatment of surface water for drinking), and community development (e.g. mobilizing people for self help projects and fund raising strategies for community projects). Information sources of rural communities are primarily human sources such as friends, relatives, children attending school, knowledgeable people, neighbours, traditional elders, headmasters, teachers, colleagues, politicians, village nurses, traditional doctors, and agricultural extension officers. Organizational sources include NGOs, Women’s Organizations, and adult education campaigns. Other sources are the media such as radio and TV. Generally rural folk do not trust information from media sources because of the belief that governments tend to dictate to the media (Momodu, 2002). The problems associated with their information seeking are many and varied. They include illiteracy, and therefore they are not able to benefit from information that is most often delivered in English because of lack of translators of the many languages spoken in Africa. Available translators sometimes distort the facts (Momodu, 2002). Other problems are misinformation by friends, limited information providers and inadequate information, favoritism of information providers, unfairness of community welfare officers, and apathy towards information sessions (Mooko, 2005), and unreliability, inaccuracy and untimeliness of informal sources of information (Njoku, 2005).

The findings of the above studies of ELIS of rural communities are quite comprehensive, however there is a need for ELIS studies in Africa that focus on disadvantaged populations in urban areas such as homeless youth to contribute to knowledge and inform stakeholders such
as governments, NGOs and information providers so that the needs of this disadvantaged group can also be met.

2.6 **Summary of the Literature**

The literature review has shown that since the inception of ELIS in the 1970s and 1980s a number of researchers have studied the ELIS of the poor and the disadvantaged, especially Elfreda Chatman whose research examined how poor people view, use and share information (Chatman, 1990; 1991; 1992; 1996; 1999; and Chatman and Pendleton, 1995). Her studies revealed that the poor view information from outside their small world with suspicion while information from ‘insiders’ and personal experience are perceived as credible (Chatman, 1990); that information sharing is guided by secrecy, risk-taking and deception (Chatman, 1992); and the poor will only look for information that will satisfy their immediate needs and not for their long term developments (Chatman, 1999).

The information needs of the poor and the disadvantaged as revealed by the literature are primarily related to basic needs such as food, shelter, transportation, and money (Spink and Cole, 2001; Hersberger, 2001 and 2002; Schilderman, 2002; Alexander et al., 2005). Their preferred sources of information are interpersonal sources and their social networks (Schilderman, 2002, Hersberger, 2001; Fisher et al., 2004; Mooko, 2005) because they perceive them as trustworthy and reliable (Fischer et al., 2004; Chatman, 1999). The barriers to their information seeking include their mistrust of information from information outside their social networks, thus depriving themselves of credible information from formal sources such as the media and libraries that might help them (Chatman, 1999; Schilderman, 2002; Mooko, 2005). Other barriers are lack of the right kind of information to meet their needs (Hersberger, 2002), unreliability and sometimes poor quality of information from their interpersonal sources (Schilderman, 2002), lack of ICT and deficient education so that they are not able to access or make use of available information (Spink and Cole, 2001; Schilderman, 2002); adherence to
cultural norms and values at the expense of accessing available information (Mooko, 2005; Fisher et al., 2004; Sligo and Jameson, 2000), lack of money for transportation to access information (Hersberger, 2001 and 2002; Alexander et al., 2005); and lack of information providers (Mooko, 2005).

The literature reviewed reveals that youth, irrespective of their socio-economic, ethnic backgrounds, and geographic boundaries have similar needs (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005, Carnegie Corporation, 1992, Mondowney, 2001). These needs are many and varied. Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) and Shenton and Dixon (2003a) identified 28 and 13 different kinds of youth information needs respectively. These include consumer information, personal finances, and support for daily routines. They tend to use people in their lives such as teachers, parents, siblings, and peers as sources of information. However they also use formal sources such as books, libraries, magazines and the Internet (Shenton and Dixon, 2003a); Gray et al., 2004; Edwards and Poston Anderson, 1996; Ybarra et al., 2008). With regard to the problems they encounter in finding and using information, the literature revealed that their information sources are also the sources of their problems. For example, information they receive from other adults might be inaccurate but they lack the expertise to evaluate the information they receive (Shenton and Dixon, 2003a); library staff might be hostile and materials might be culturally unfriendly (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005); they may be unable to select the appropriate information in a situation of information overload; and there may be a lack of information providers (Julien, 1999).

The literature also reveals that the studies under review used different data collection techniques and those that use qualitative techniques, for example, in-depth interviews (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Hersberger, 2001; Schilderman, 2002), life-centered questioning (Shenton and Dixon, 2003a), and the critical incident technique (Mooko, 2005) produced a wealth of information about the ELIS of their target populations. This confirms Wilson’s (2003) position that qualitative research methods lead to an understanding of the aims and motivations
of the information seeker. This study will use in-depth interviews and the critical incident technique for the collection of data.

2.7 Conclusion

It is evident from the literature that youth homelessness is a growing phenomenon in most cities of the world with negative consequences both to the youth and their countries. Homeless youth are at risk of sexual and drug abuse, STDs and HIV and AIDS, incarceration, dropping out of school, violence, malnutrition, and child trafficking. The consequences of these at-risk behaviours to states and governments include increased expenditures on prisons, crime prevention, and social welfare, and lost revenues in income tax and social security. These negative consequences are obviously unsustainable and governments and other stakeholders must work to curb the tide of youth homelessness. Schilderman (2002) has noted that to mitigate risk and improve their overall asset portfolio, the urban poor need knowledge and information. Thus one way of solving the problem is to provide homeless youth with, as Kagan (2000) suggests, the right kind of information at the right time and in a most comprehensible format. Such information can be delivered with knowledge of the everyday life information needs and information of homeless youth. However the literature has revealed that only a few studies have focused on the ELIS of homeless youth and in Africa, ELIS studies have focused on normal or mainstream youth and rural communities. Thus there is a need for more studies on ELIS of homeless youth, and especially in Africa, to contribute to knowledge and understanding of their motivation for information seeking, their preferred sources of information and mode of information delivery and the barriers to their information seeking. The present study is expected to bring new knowledge from an African perspective since the socio- information circumstances of homeless youth in Africa and other developed nations are very different in terms of information resources and services available to each group.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical perspectives that informed the study and the research strategy; that is, ethical issues, selection of participants, data collection instruments, and data analysis.

3.1 Theoretical Perspective

The study adopted the interpretive tradition as a theoretical perspective. This tradition “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). It assumes “that knowledge is gained through social constructions such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings, documents, tools, tools, and other artifacts” Klein and Myers, 1999, p. 69). It also acknowledges the close relationship between the researcher and what he or she is exploring and the fact that knowledge is produced as researchers interact with participants of their studies (Klein and Myers, 1999). It allows the researcher to be self-reflexive, acknowledges the perspectives of participants and incorporates them into the research report (Flick, 1998). Interpretative research deals primarily with texts. Thus regardless of the methods used for collecting information, whether they are interviews or field observations, the raw data is transformed into texts by recording and transcription and lastly, the researcher is constantly engaged in a process of interpretation and re-construction of reality. This reality is based on the constructions of those interviewed, or observed.

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods are known to be best suited for studies whose purpose is to learn from participants about their experiences in their own settings and the meanings and interpretations they attach to these experiences. It is also suitable when the purpose of the study is to gain deep and detailed knowledge of a phenomenon (Richard and Morse, 2007). The purpose of the study is to gain a thorough understanding of the everyday life
information seeking of homeless youth in the city of Accra, by learning first hand from them in their own setting. The study was ethnographic. This methodology was used because it enables a researcher to uncover meanings and perceptions from participants from their own worldview or culture (Crotty, 1998). It assumes that beliefs and behaviours embedded within a cultural group are often not evident to the people of that particular culture. It will take an ethnographic researcher who does not share that culture (an outsider or someone from the ‘etic perspective’) to see the values, beliefs and practices embedded in that culture (Richard and Morse, 2007). As an outsider to the homeless youth population, seeking to learn about their everyday life information needs and information behaviour, the researcher provided an etic perspective of the study phenomena.

3.2 Restatement of the Research Questions

Qualitative research questions, according to Creswell (2002), are open-ended general questions that the researcher seeks to answer in a study. Creswell identified two types of research questions, namely, a central question which is an all embracing or a generalized question of the study and sub-questions which identify the subtopics the researcher would like to learn more about, from the participants of a study. The central question of this study is: What are the everyday life information needs and information seeking behaviour of homeless youths in a large urban city in a developing country? The specific sub-questions as follows:

- What are the expressed everyday information needs of urban homeless youth?
- What sources do they use to satisfy their information needs?
- What challenges/barriers hinder their information seeking?
- What are the patterns in their information seeking behaviour?
- How can the information needs of homeless youth be better satisfied by libraries and other appropriate agencies?
3.3 **Operationalising Concepts**

The important concepts for the study are defined as follows:

*Information need*: The study adopted Dervin’s Sense-Making definition of information need, that is a gap, or the different situations in which people get stopped in their movement across time-space so that they need to bridge or figure out what sense they must construct to continue moving. Dervin (1976) identifies four life situations: decisions, problems, worries and comprehending. Thus information needs in this study were obtained by asking participants to describe the problems, concerns, or worries they experienced in their daily life. Shenton and Dixon (2004) describe this strategy for investigating information needs as life-centered. In Library and Information Science literature, this method has been used by authors such as Poston-Anderson and Edwards (1993) and Hersberger (2002).

*Information sources*: Information sources were identified by asking the question, how did you solve your problem? Then whatever or whomever the study participants consulted to improve on or help them resolve their situation was identified as their information sources. In a study of the everyday life information seeking of urban teenagers, Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) identified both human and non-human sources of information.

*Barriers to information seeking*: Barriers to information seeking were identified as ways in which participants in the study were hindered, or problems they encountered as they tried to solve or address their problems, concerns and worries. Ensign and Panke (2002) identified questions about consent for care, identification cards, source of insurance or payment, lack of transportation, and money, as barriers to seeking health care among homeless and at-risk youth in Seattle.
3.4 Ethical Issues

The guiding ethical principles that have been adopted by Canadian agencies and research disciplines include:

*Respect for Human Dignity:* This is a principal requirement in modern research ethics. All research must show respect for human dignity and protect research participants from any kind of harm whether bodily, psychological or cultural. It also involves maintaining confidentiality with respect to identities and records of participants.

*Respect for Free and Informed Consent:* It is assumed that individuals have the capacity and right to make free and informed decisions. Therefore research participants must be given enough information to enable them to make free and informed decisions about whether they wish to participate in a study. They should also be made aware that they may withdraw from the study at any time.

*Respect for Vulnerable Persons:* Researchers must show respect for, and help maintain the dignity of vulnerable people; that is, those with diminished competence, or those incapable of competently making decisions (such as children or institutionalized persons). They must be protected against abuse, exploitation, or discrimination and be treated fairly.

*Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness:* Justice implies equity and fairness. It requires an independent ethic review process, a fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of research on the population, and the application of fair standards, methods and procedures for reviewing research protocols. It also requires that vulnerable persons must not be exploited for the promotion of knowledge and lastly, individuals or groups of people who may benefit from advances emerging from research must not be discriminated against or neglected.
Balancing Harms and Benefits: This means that the expected harm from a research study must not outweigh the expected benefits with regard to participants. This is especially true in the biomedical and health research fields and in research that may result in harming the reputations of individuals in public life or organizations.

Minimizing Harm: As much as possible, research participants must not be subjected to unnecessary risk of harm, and “their participation in research must be essential to achieving scientifically and societally important aims that cannot be realized without the participation of human subjects” (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2005, p. i.6). Also, harm is minimized by using the smallest number of human participants and performing the least number of tests on them needed to produce for scientifically valid data.

Maximizing Benefit: The outcome of the research must benefit the participants, other individuals and society as a whole. With regard to society, the primary benefits are the promotion, or advancement of knowledge. Research ethics demands the principle of beneficence.

Ethical review boards ensure that researchers uphold and employ appropriate ethical principles in the conduct of their studies. This also ensures a more general accountability to society. In most academic institutions, especially in developed countries, researchers whose work involves human participants are required to go through an ethical review process before heading to the field. Approval to conduct the study was sought from the Ethical Review Board of UBC before start of fieldwork.
3.4.1 Seeking Consent from Participants of the Study

The implementation of data collection instruments was preceded by seeking the consent of selected participants. The study participants were provided with thorough information regarding the study and their rights, as follows:

- The purpose of the study;
- What was expected of them such as the amount of time required for participation;
- The expected risks and benefits of the study;
- The fact that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without negative repercussions;
- How their confidentiality would be protected (that is, their real names would not be used in the study report and their consent would be sought for an audio-taped interview);
- The name and contact information of the lead investigator (that is the supervisor of the dissertation) to be contacted regarding questions, or problems regarding the research;
- The name and contact information of the appropriate person to contact with questions about their rights as a research participant, (that is, the designated person on the UBC Ethical Review Board (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). See Appendix A for participant consent form.

3.5 Selection of Location

The fieldwork was conducted in Accra because it is the preferred location for Ghanaian youth migrating from the rural areas in search of a better life in the city. Rural-urban migration to Accra dates back to 1877, when the British colonial headquarters was relocated from Cape Coast in the Central Region of the Gold Coast colony to Accra (Konadu-Agyemang, 2001). This brought in its wake a large number of merchants and increased investment capital, making it the political and economic power center of the colony. Colonial Accra with a population of over 42,000 (Skidmore, 2003) had a port which was centrally located and connected the Gold Coast
economy to England. It had several warehouses for cocoa and other exportable commodities which were transported from the hinterland and railway terminals to support trade, storage and distribution. There were buildings for the colonial administration, military bases and the central business district (CBD) in the immediate vicinity of the port. The CBD was the headquarters for foreign companies and served as a commercial area for trade, transportation, storage, distribution, and banking. In 1924 the colonial government built a market called Makola No. 1 in the nearby district called Native Town. This district was neglected by the colonial government. Lack of urban planning in this area led to poor structures, a congested environment and overcrowding. The native residential areas were not separated from petty commercial trading activities, leading to the creation of a “bazaar-like” atmosphere in the Native Town. This area became a major attraction for both locals and rural immigrants (Grant and Yankson, 2003). After the colony obtained independence and was renamed Ghana in 1957, the first elected president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah continued to maintain Accra as the capital city and centre of the national economy. All subsequent administrations have followed this trend, to the detriment of other major towns and cities in the country (Grant and Yankson, 2003). Today, Accra is a major transport hub with connections to major cities of the country. Its population is over 3.9million (Ghana Statistical Service, 2011). It is the seat of government and has many more industries (both small and medium scale) and large markets than any other city in Ghana, making it the prime target city for rural-urban migration. A head count of street children conducted by CAS in 2002 revealed that there were about 20,000 street children in the city of Accra (CAS, 2003).

The support of a service organization was critical for this study in helping to gain the trust of study participants. The researcher sought a relationship with HOMWAC or Home for Women and Children, an NGO in Accra that works with deprived women and children, and secured its full support for the study (see Appendix B for letter of support). This source of support was also an important factor in the selection of Accra as the locale for this study.
3.5.1 Population, Sampling Procedures, and Selection of Participants

The population for the study was homeless youth in the city of Accra. The most recent count of street children in Accra, an estimate of 20,000 was by the Catholic Action for Street Children in 2004. The snowball sampling procedure was used for the study. Bryman, (2004) explains snowball sampling as a form of convenience sampling in which a researcher makes an initial contact with a small group of persons relevant to a research topic and uses them to recruit other participants. With regard to sampling size, Marshal (1996) explains that, in qualitative research, the appropriate size is one large enough to answer the research questions. That is, the required number of participants becomes obvious as the study progresses to the point of data saturation when there are no new categories, themes, or explanations emerging. Creswell (2002) is of the opinion that “it is better to select a few individuals to study rather than many to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon as required in qualitative studies” (p.218).

The fieldwork commenced on July 12, 2010. The researcher first volunteered for two months as a phonics teacher at a school for children of homeless youth or street children and market women run by HOMWAC. This school is located about 500 feet away from the Ayowa Market\(^1\) where many street children lived and worked. The volunteer work involved teaching phonics to kindergarten children and primary one to three pupils on weekdays from 10:00am to 3:00pm.

The Director of the school was instrumental in providing access to both male and female participants of the study. She introduced the researcher to parents as a new teacher with responsibility to teach their children how to read, and gave her an opportunity to talk about her research. The researcher was also introduced to a 19 year old shoe shine worker, Kwame\(^2\) who slept in the school with two other colleagues to keep the school premises safe at night. Kwame introduced the researcher to his friends (Nsiah and Kojo). Apart from becoming study participants they became key informants for locating other male participants for the study. Some

\(^1\) The name of the market has been changed to preserve participants’ confidentiality
\(^2\) The names of participants have been altered throughout this document
of the potential male participants introduced to the researcher gave the phone numbers of their friends and those of mobile phone vendors near where they lived to be contacted for interviews at later dates.

On the third day of the second week of the fieldwork, the Director introduced the researcher to two parents at the market who were head porters\(^3\). The researcher briefed them about her research and requested their help in recruiting younger female adolescents aged 15 to 18 years. (The supervisory committee of the researcher and the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board agreed with the researcher’s explanation that youth ages 15 to 18 who had been living on the streets without adult supervision are mature enough to participate in the study without parental consent). One of the women went round and rallied 12 female adolescent head porters. The researcher gave them details about the study including the fact that participation was voluntary. Six of them expressed interest but the others were skeptical because they thought their photos would be taken and shown in the TV news. The researcher calmed their fears by assuring them that no photos of them would be taken throughout the fieldwork and their real names would not be used in the study report. They later showed us (the Director and the researcher) where we could locate them in the market. The researcher encountered these potential study participants and engaged the services of some of them to carry her groceries on several occasions throughout the fieldwork. They always called out to her in the market and introduced their friends. The researcher made the most of these encounters by informing them about her research and having friendly informal conversations with them in order to gain their acceptance and trust. Thus through the initial introduction of the researcher and subsequent encounters with parents and homeless youth, 41 homeless youth, 22 males and 19 females were selected for the study. The number of participants was based on the saturation of the data that is, the point at which no new information was being elicited from the interviews. Other eligibility criteria for study participants included: inadequate living conditions without parental or

\(^3\) Most head porters are females from the Northern regions of Ghana who carry loads for traders and buyers in the markets of cities located in the Southern parts of the country.
adult support, a town or village outside Accra as place of origin (the assumption was that a youth from Accra might have a relative nearby to visit from time to time) and also fluency in ‘Twi’, a local language used for the interviews. Twi was used over other languages because it is spoken by most Ghanaians and the street youth necessarily had to speak it in order to survive on the street.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments and Administration of Instruments

The study used participant observation, one-on-one, face-to-face in-depth interviews and the critical incident technique as data collection instruments.

3.6.1 The Observations

Participant observation is described by Bryman (2008) as “research in which the researcher immerses himself or herself in a social setting for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, asking questions” (p. 697). Sometimes the researcher is not participating, but only observing. In that case, the researcher is referred to as a non-participant observer. He becomes an outsider and observes the phenomenon under study. The observation process outlined by Creswell (2002) involves: selecting a site suitable for understanding the central phenomenon; getting a general sense of site by slowly looking around and taking limited notes; taking an initial decision on what your role will be as an observer and who or what you will be observing; conducting a number of observations necessary for understanding the site and the individuals who reside there; recording of information relevant to the study such as events, activities and portraits of participants and writing of reflective notes; making yourself known but remaining unobtrusive; and generally relating to the people in a respectful and friendly manner and finally slowly withdrawing from the site after thanking and informing participants about “the use of data and the availability of a summary of results after completion of study” (p. 201).
The initial observation during the first week was non-participatory and involved daily visits to observe the market setting, the homeless youth and their daily activities, the problems they encounter, and how they relate to one another, city officials, market women, and customers in an unobtrusive manner. Participant observation commenced in the second week after the researcher had gained direct contact with some head porters through the help of the Director of HOMWAC as mentioned in the previous section. This phase involved having informal conversations with the homeless youth and frequently using their services (especially the head porters to carry groceries) in a friendly manner with the purpose of gaining their acceptance and trust. The observations were not limited to the afternoons, and on two occasions observations and interactions with female homeless youth took place during an early morning marketing session (5:00am). Wolcott (2005) has said that “the critical art in all observation is achieved not in the act of observing but in recognizing when something of significance has been observed” (p.155). Salient events and exchanges relevant to answering the research questions of the study were written down inconspicuously as field notes. The researcher also dressed in a neutral way throughout the field work to make the street children comfortable around her.

3.6.2 The Interviews

There are various kinds of interviews available for research. Some are structured, others semi-structured, or unstructured. Also, there are various forms of interviews, such as one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, telephone interviews, email interviews, in-depth interviews, focused interviews (for questioning participants about events and situations relevant to the study), group interviews, oral history interviews (semi-structured or unstructured, involving the recalling of past events in the life of the respondent), and life history interviews. The unstructured interview is the most common form of interview employed in qualitative research. When used properly, it offers the interviewee an opportunity to tell his or her story without much interruption from the researcher (Richards and Morse, 2007). The aim of the unstructured interview is to “understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any
a-priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana and Frey, 2000, p. 706).

Doing a good and effective unstructured interview in the field requires assessing and getting a good sense of the setting, the identification of key informants, gaining trust and establishing rapport (that is, seeing the situation from the world view point of respondents and not imposing one’s world view from academia on them), understanding the culture and language, deciding how to present oneself, and finally, collecting empirical data (Fontana and Frey, 2000). Creswell (2002) also suggests using probes to obtain additional information and assuring participants of the confidentiality of their responses and the availability of the summary of the results. Fontana and Frey (2000) further gave advice on framing interviews, such as maintaining a ‘tone of friendly chat’, remaining close to the topic and guidelines of inquiry, breaking the ice with general questions before moving on to specific questions, avoiding getting involved in real conversations whereby the interviewer answers questions posed by the interviewee, or providing personal opinions on the matters at hand, acknowledging and noting non-verbal modes used by respondents in the course of the interview, etc.

The critical incident technique has been defined by Flanagan as “a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behaviour in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327). Gremier (2004) defines it as “a qualitative interview procedure which facilitates the investigation of significant occurrences identified by the respondent, the way they are managed, and the outcomes in terms of perceived effects” (p. 66). This technique is known for providing a rich source of data by giving respondents the opportunity to determine incidents of most relevance to them and the phenomenon being studied (Gremier, 2004). Flanagan (1954) defines an ‘incident’ as “any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act” (p. 327). The incident must essentially contain enough detail for it to be analyzed for unbiased and fair results. For an incident to be critical, the situation, its purpose and consequences, or effects
must be fairly clear to the observer without any doubt (Callan1998). There are several ways of collecting data using the critical incident technique such as direct observation, questionnaires, individual and group interviews. The most effective way, Flanagan (1954) believes, is by individual interview because it is immediate, efficient and makes minimum demands on the interviewee. It also allows the interviewer to use probes to extract the required information. The study adopted the principles of doing unstructured interviews given by Creswell (2002) and Fontana and Frey (2000) to collect data for the study. Open ended questions interspersed with probes were used to ensure that each participant answered all questions as completely as possible. The questions were designed to collect the following information from participants:

- Demographic information including place of origin, age, education, employment, socio-economic status, i.e. parent occupation, educational level, and number of siblings
- Reasons for coming to Accra
- Length of stay in Accra
- Problems/concerns/issues in their daily life
- Ways of addressing the problems/concerns/issues
- Knowledge of STDs including HIV and AIDS
- Use of, and benefits of radio and TV
- Ways in which their lives could be improved

Apart from the above foci for the interviews, the study also explored the knowledge and sources of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among study participants. This was because the Ghana Youth Policy mentions STDs including HIV/AIDS as one of the challenges among Ghanaian youth (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2010). To expand on their sources of information, the study also explored the everyday media (radio and television) use of study participants.

The observations were followed by a pilot study involving five homeless youth (two boys and three girls) in the fifth week of the fieldwork. Bryman (2008) mentions the usefulness of piloting
an interview schedule. For example, it helps to address persistent problems that might be identified after a few interviews have been carried out; it provides interviewers with experience in using the interview schedule and boosts their confidence; it helps frame questions for optimal clarity and to eliminate discomfiture for interviewees, or what might cause them to lose interest in the research and allows the researcher to determine whether instructions to participants are adequate.

The purpose of the pilot study was to test the research instruments, namely briefing interviewees about the study, seeking their consent, doing the interviews and recording them with a digital audio recorder. The participants provided answers to these general questions for the pilot study:

1) What kind of problems do you normally encounter in your daily life?
2) What major problem did you face recently that you were able to resolve successfully? Tell me about it and all the steps you followed to resolve it.
3) What major problem did you encounter recently that you have not been able to resolve? Tell me about it and why you have not been able to resolve it.
4) In what way would you like to improve your life?
5) What kind of help do you need to improve your life?

Each participant was compensated with GHC 2.50 ($1.78). This figure was determined in consultation with the Director of HOMWAC and one of the parents (who was a key informant and also worked as a head porter in the market) both of whom considered it a reasonable figure. The original figure of GHC10.00 (about $7.00 during the time of the fieldwork) according to the key informant was what some of them earned for a day’s work and was therefore found to be too much as a compensation for about an hour of their time for an interview.

The interviews, which were conducted in Twi, were translated and transcribed into English and analyzed.
The pilot study proved very useful for the success of the main interviews in three ways. First, it revealed that some of the homeless youth (mostly the females) were uneducated and therefore could not sign the consent forms. A stamp pad was then procured for them to use thumb prints in place of their signatures to confirm their understanding of the purpose and terms of the study as explained above and their consent to participate. Second, they generally found the questions difficult and unclear. For example, question two had to be discarded because participants could not describe any major problem in their life that they had successfully been able to resolve, for question three, they talked about their financial problems which they had already mentioned in answer to question one, and they were also confused by questions four and five, and mentioned their aspirations or life goals for both questions. In trying to explain the questions to them during the pilot study, the researcher was able to reframe the questions (for the main interviews) in a clear and simple manner to elicit the information that addresses the research questions. For example, the researcher adapted the critical incident technique of asking participants to describe a major incident in their life and how they resolved it. Participants were asked to describe their everyday problems and how they resolved them. Each one described at most three problems depending on their willingness to talk. Those who mentioned less than three problems were not forced to come up with more (See Appendix C for the full interview schedule).

The main interviews commenced in mid August, 2010 and lasted for about a month. The researcher visited the market daily to contact the potential participants. Those who were available were brought to the school to be interviewed in turns (in one of the classrooms after school hours for privacy). The interviews were preceded by a thorough explanation of the purpose of the study, what is required of participants, their rights as participants etc. (as explained under section 3.4.1). The problems encountered during the interviews included potential participants (especially the females who worked as head porters in the market) getting customers at the time they were called or on the way to the school. When this occurred, they
attended to the customer and promised to come back later. A few returned for the interviews but most of them did not show up. Others came at a later date. Some also who worked as helpers in stores or local restaurants were in a hurry to go back to their employers, or their friends were waiting for them so they become distracted. For example, two of the female participants could not complete their interviews because their employers needed them immediately to do some work. Most of the male participants were shoeshine workers as well as repairers who went from house to house throughout the city looking for customers. Thus although they lived in front of shops in the markets, they were not readily available and could only be reached by phone or after work when they returned to their living space in the market. The researcher contacted them by phone or visited places where they hung out after work to bring them to the school for the interviews. The problems encountered with the male participants included inability to reach them using the phone numbers they had provided because the phones were out of order, or some of those scheduled did not show up at all or arrived late from work. The researcher sometimes waited after school till about 7:00pm with none of those scheduled showing up. Eventually she had to interview 10 out of the 22 who participated behind a kiosk near the road in the evening using street lights because they were simply not available to come to the school. The researcher acknowledged the distraction from vehicles and pedestrians that passed by during the interviews and their possible effect on their responses. However, it was the only way the researcher could get them to participate in the interviews. Each interview lasted between 25 minutes to one hour and was dependent on how much time participants were willing to spend and how much information they were willing to share. Some gave elaborate answers to the questions while others gave short answers. By the time 29 participants (14 males and 15 females) were interviewed, the data was saturated; that is the participants were not providing any new information. Marshal (1996) explains data saturation as the point when there are no new categories, themes, or explanations emerging. This explanation suggests that data saturation can best be determined by actual analysis of transcribed data as they are collected to establish that there are no new categories or themes emerging. The original plan of the
researcher was to transcribe and analyze the data after every five interviews but this proved impractical because of the problems encountered with the availability of participants and the discrepancies in their interview scheduling. To compensate for this lapse, the researcher interviewed 12 more people to confirm the categories and emerging patterns she had discovered by listening to the participants.

3.7 Transcription

All the interviews were translated into English and transcribed. The researcher applied the principles for effective transcription outlined by Creswell (2002) such as typing the word [pause] to indicate when an interviewee “takes a lengthy break” in his/her comments, which tends to be useful information during interpretation of results; [laughter] when interviewee laughs; and [inaudible] to mark when recording is not audible during transcription (pp. 261-262).

To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, the participants were assigned pseudonyms such as Kojo, Maana, Anane etc. These are common names in Ghana based on the day of the week one is born or a person’s position in his family. For example, a male Monday born can be called Kojo or Joojo, and the female will be called Ajoa. A fourth male child in a family can be called Anane and the female will be called Maana. These naming systems were adopted because any Ghanaian can be called by one of those names.

3.8 Data Assessment

The body of data collected comprised about 15 hours of interviews. When translated and transcribed, they resulted in 338 pages of data, or 82,047 words. The researcher made about 14 hours of observations also, which resulted in three pages of field notes. The researcher had no reason to doubt the accuracy of the data collected. She was able to confirm some of the problems recounted by the youth, such as those associated with shelter, unfair wages, and verbal and physical abuse by market women, through the observations she made in the market.
She was able to confirm the truthfulness of female participants’ inability to tell their ages, through a chief and an opinion leader. These confirmations suggest that the youth were truthful in their narratives during the interviews.

The main limitations of the data collected are that it is thin on information needs (since the youth were highly focussed on their everyday needs) and on the use of formal sources of information such as libraries. Emphasis was placed on gathering the facts of the everyday life information seeking behaviour of the homeless youth from their own perspective, during the interviews. Additional questions about the kinds of information they need to resolve their everyday problems and about their use and non-use of libraries would have enriched the data. Interview questions did not specifically address their entertainment needs, and participants did not list entertainment as a problem area. Nevertheless, specific questions about their entertainment information needs would have enhanced the study, since entertainment is an important aspect of our everyday lives.

3.9 Data Analysis

The NVivo qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) was used to do a detailed qualitative content analysis of the transcribed data. Qualitative content analysis is described by Weber (cited by Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) as “examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings” (p. 1278). Bryman (2008) simply describes qualitative content analysis as “the searching-out of underlying themes in the material being analyzed” (p. 529).

According to Kaczynski (2004) the key advantage of using QDAS is that it supports the researcher’s efforts to pursue and interpret new paths of inquiry. The NVivo QDAS allows a researcher to code segments of text and use its memos to bookmark his/her thoughts about the interpretation of these segments simultaneously. The qualitative data analysis process is well documented by authors such as Bryman (2008) and Creswell (2002). The process comprised:
• Importing of data into NVivo QDAS followed by a preliminary exploration of data by reading (several times) to obtain a general sense of the information. The reading is accompanied by creating memos of ideas, hunches and interpretations of data segments using the software.
• Identifying and describing codes relating to the general themes mentioned above. For example the different types of problems of homeless youth identified in the data will represent different codes which will be aggregated under the theme information needs. In NVivo this coding can be done by using the ‘tree nodes’. A tree node implies connection between nodes (Bryman, 2008, p. 570-571).
• Coding data by highlighting segments of data that are applicable to each code.
• Saving the coded data which will produce a new document with the text re-arranged under the general themes.

3.9.1 The Coding Process

The coding process followed these steps:

1) Each interview transcript captioned by a pseudonym was saved in word in a folder called by the pseudonym. All the transcript folders were then imported into the project folder (Urban youth) in NVivo QDAS and stored in the Internals sub-folder under Sources folder (Figure 3. 1).
2) Each transcript was read twice to identify categories and themes based on the research questions of the study. For example, for the first research question, (what are the expressed needs of homeless youth?) 11 main categories of needs, namely, money, shelter, employment, education, skills development, security, respect, justice, food, respect, fair wages, were identified. For information sources, categories such as friends, teachers, employers, family members, radio, TV, libraries, etc., were identified. Other categories based on demographic characteristics include region of origin of participants, age, education, and parents’ socio-economic status. Others are reasons for coming to Accra, length of stay in Accra, life goals, etc.

3) The categories identified above were used to create nodes in NVivo QDAS. Both the free node, and ‘tree node’ features in NVivo were used in the node creation. Four tree nodes were created based on the research questions. These are information needs,
information seeking behaviour, problems in information seeking, and information sources (Figure 3. 2).

Figure 3. 2 - A screen shot showing tree nodes

Appropriate ‘Child nodes’ representing the different categories of information needs, sources of information, information seeking behaviours etc., were created under the tree nodes. For example the categories of information needs identified above were used to create child nodes under the tree node ‘information needs’ (Figure 3. 3).
Twenty free nodes based on the demographic characteristics mentioned above and other categories relevant to the data analysis were also created (Figure 3. 4).
4) Portions of transcript of each participant relevant to each node were identified and coded. For example, Figure 3. 5 is the coding for everyday life employment seeking behaviour of two of the participants, Afua and Ajoa. This process was followed till the entire data set was coded under relevant themes and categories.

Figure 3. 5 - Coding for everyday employment seeking behaviour of homeless youth

5) Coding was followed by the creation of a spreadsheet to tabulate the demographic characteristics of study participants and other relevant categories using Microsoft Excel. (Figure 3. 6 shows a portion of the spreadsheet).
This was used to generate descriptive statistics including frequency tables, charts and histograms to illustrate categories such as gender, age educational level, life goals, and duration of stay in Accra (The graphs are presented in Chapter 4). A spreadsheet of the problem statements (a total of 131 statements) was also created (Figure 3. 7) to analyze the nature and type of needs in the problem statements. The nature of problem statements was analyzed using Dervin’s (1973) scheme. This is explained further under Chapter Four (section 4.4).
An independent researcher was invited to repeat the categorization of the problem statements, to establish inter-rater reliability (Figure 3.8).

![Spreadsheet for recording the categorization of problem statements, to assess inter-rater reliability](image)

Results of the two categorizations were tabulated in another spreadsheet table (Figure 3.9).

![Screenshot of inter-rater categorizations table](image)
A ‘2’ in the table means that both coders categorized the statement as described by the column heading and a ‘1’ means that one coder only categorized the particular problem statement in that column. The Cohen Kappa k was calculated using an online Kappa calculator. It calculated the fixed-marginal kappa; that is, when raters are forced to assign a certain number of cases to each category (Randolph 2005). The fixed-marginal kappa was deemed appropriate for this analysis, because raters were required to assign each problem statement to one category only. The results indicate a percent of overall agreement of 0.931297 and a fixed-marginal kappa of 0.800960 (Figure 3.10).

According to Randolph (2005) kappa values of -1.0 indicates perfect disagreement below chance, 0.0 indicates agreement equal to chance and 1.0 means perfect agreement above chance. A kappa of 0.70 or more indicates adequate inter-rater agreement. Thus the fixed-marginal kappa of 0.80 confirms the validity of the results of the analysis. The results of the data analysis are presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings

Introduction
This chapter presents the findings of the study under the following headings: Report from observations; the background of participants, including their demographic information and socio-economic status; their expressed information needs; their information seeking behaviour; and problems they encounter in their information seeking activities.

4.1 Report from Observations
This section describes the Ayowa Market setting, the daily activities of homeless youth (including their relationship with the public) and problems they encounter. The report is based on the researcher’s observations in the market and informal conversations with homeless youth.

The Ayowa Market is located about four miles from the central business district of Accra. It is bounded by main roads to the east and west and unpaved access roads to the north and south. It is about 1000 square feet and surrounded by mini shops and stores, which are located in marine steel containers and wooden kiosks near the roads. There is a transit station for taxis and minibuses in the southwestern corner of the market and toilet facilities and a rubbish dump in the northeastern corner. There is a big shed built in the western part of the market by the municipal council to house the market women, but the majority of them sell their goods under make-shift sheds and umbrellas.

The market offers many types of goods and services, including clothing, building materials, stationery, auto parts, electronic goods (such as radio and TV sets, CD/DVD players, mobile phones, and home appliances), and non-perishable food items such as canned foods, spices and seasonings, cooking oil, cereals, pasta, rice, flour, drinks, etc. The perishable foods are sold in the main market and include staple foods (e.g. yam, cassava, plantain, corn and beans), vegetables, fruits, meats and fish.
Other businesses in the market include chop bars (eateries offering local dishes), dressmaking shops, grain and vegetable mills, hair dressing salons, key cutting and knife sharpening services, mobile phone vendors and microfinance agents (‘Susu\(^4\) agents’). The market is both a working and living space for many homeless youth, who tend to belong to one of three vocational categories, that is, truck pushers, shoe shine workers, or head porters. Activities of these vocations are described as follows:

*The head porters:* Their main occupation is carrying loads in big head pans for market women, customers to the market and shop owners. Most of them are females from the northern regions of Ghana. They normally start work as early as 5:00 am and finish the day’s work about 6:00 pm. They look for work by hanging around the transit station to carry the goods of traders to their market stalls, or offer their services to customers about to enter the markets. In the latter case they follow their clients around the market to carry groceries purchased. Both traders and market customers call the head porters *Kayayoo* (plural, *Kayaye*), which is a combination of two words. *Kaya* means luggage in the Hausa language and *yoo* means woman in the Ga-Dangbe language (USAID, 2011). They are often persistent and may continue to follow customers until the latter procure their services, because their groceries become too heavy to carry conveniently. Some head porters also work as helpers for store owners, market traders and food vendors. The duties of store helpers include displaying goods on the shelves and in front of the stores, packing them for secure storage at the day’s end, serving customers, cleaning the stores, carrying loads for customers who buy in bulk (for a private fee) and running errands for store owners. Helpers for market women sweep their stalls, prepare and display their produce, such as washing vegetables or packaging flour, sugar, groundnuts, shrimp powder, etc. in different container sizes, or in polythene bags for

---

\(^4\) ‘Susu’ is a traditional informal financial system involving the regular collection of fixed deposit premiums. The amounts are refunded to depositors at specified time intervals, or on demand. The collector charges a commission equal to the deposit premium (Alabi, Alabi and Ahiauwodzi, 2007).
Helpers at the food vendors’ stalls wash dishes, cut vegetables, clean floors and run errands.

The head porters migrate to the city for various reasons; including obtaining money to buy household goods and sewing machines. The researcher observed a bus load of kitchen wares and sewing machines surrounded by a group of head porters. When questioned by the researcher, some of the porters revealed that they were preparing to travel back home. They indicated that some of the goods belonged to their friends also. They were acting as couriers in transporting the goods to relatives of their friends.

**The truck pushers:** The truck pushers cart loads for traders and shop owners in the market and often go from house to house to collect garbage, when there are no jobs in the market. Most of them are males. They do not own the truck but rent it for work and pay the owners at the end of the day.

**The shoe shine workers:** The shoe shine workers (popularly called ‘shoeshine boys’) go from house to house throughout the city to repair and polish shoes for customers. They attract custom by beating their toolbox with a stick as they walk in neighbourhoods across the city.

During their free times, the homeless youth tend to group together along gender lines. The porters sit together in shaded places, at the transit station, or along the roadside; sometimes competing with pedestrians for space. Their activities during these times include eating, caring for their children and chatting. The truck pushers and shoe shine workers tend to chat excitedly (in the twi language understood by the researcher), about interesting news items and sports, share jokes and experiences of the day’s work, play football, and eat, during periods of slow trade.
4.1.1 Problems of Homeless Youth

Three main problems were observed. Homeless youth lack shelter, are harassed by city authorities, and are mistreated by market women. The homeless youth sleep together in gender-based groups on cardboard placed in front of shops near the main roads. They have to hang around after work until the shops close before they sleep. On one occasion when the researcher went to contact some shoe shine workers for interviews, one of them showed her a used shoe shop by the road where they slept. He mentioned that sometimes the shop closed at 10:00pm. Most of the shops have TV so the owners watch their favourite programs before closing. Some of the businesses by the road, especially drinking bars and music stores, allow the youth to watch their TV while they wait to sleep.

The market women often insult the head porters and shout at them, sometimes for no apparent reason. This usually happens when the porters come close to their wares, or try to attract a customer who happens to be buying goods displayed by the traders. The researcher witnessed several such incidents. In one instance when the researcher had engaged the services of one of the head porters, the store owner called out “Go away from here!” before being informed by the researcher that she had procured the youth’s service. The store owner offered no apology; her only response was “Oh, I see”. On other occasions, interventions by the researcher evoked surprise from the market women. Informal conversations with the youth revealed also that some buyers and market women cheat them by refusing to pay agreed fees for services rendered. When they insist on their fees, some insult them, or throw reduced sums at them before leaving the market.

Municipal authorities of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) also harass them to pay weekly levies of 50 pesewas (about 50 cents). They normally collect these levies in the morning and seize the head pans of those who do not pay. Defaulters often borrow the fees from their friends to enable them to retrieve their head pans.
This report has described the observed work activities of homeless youth, their living conditions, their relationship with the public and problems they encounter in their daily life.

They do not have proper shelters and normally sleep on cardboard placed in front of shops in the market. For their hygiene they use the toilets in the markets but also commercial toilets and bathrooms run by individuals in the neighbourhood. They pay about five cents to use a toilet and 10 cents to have a wash. For storage they place their personal belongings in boxes in empty spaces between stores/shops.

4.2 Background of Participants

4.2.1 Origin and Gender of Participants

A total of 41 homeless youth comprising 22 males and 19 females participated in the study. They come from four of the 10 regions of Ghana, namely the Ashanti (12.2%), Brong Ahafo (41.5%), Northern (36.6%) and Upper East regions (9.8%).

Figure 4.1 - A map of Ghana, showing the percentage of participants from each of the four regions of origin
Figure 4.1 is a regional map of Ghana showing the distribution of participants from the various regions. The male adolescents come from the Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions, while the female adolescents come from the Northern and Upper East regions of the country.

### 4.2.2 Age of Participants

Figure 4.2 shows the distribution of known ages of participants. The ages of the male participants are between 15 to 18 years. A problem encountered in the field was that the majority of the female participants (84%), when asked about their ages, simply said they did not know.

![Age of Participants](image)

*Figure 4.2 - Age of participants*

The researcher had to estimate their ages as between 15 to 18 by enquiring about the number of siblings who come before or after them and by their physique. Only three or 16% of them (comprising 5% and 11% age 15 and 16 years respectively) confidently indicated their ages as shown in Figure 4.2. One respondent explained that she was not told her age, or date of birth by her parents. Another said she did not know when she was born and a third mentioned that her
parents had informed her that there was no official recording of births at the time she was born. Below are some of their responses:

*I do not quite know, I was not told.* (Ajoa)

*When I asked her, she said she did not know it.* (Meefua)

*I don’t know when I was born.* (Kai)

*No she did not tell me.*

*When we ask our parents, they don’t know and they tell us that they were not writing down dates of birth when we were born but now they have started writing it.* (Maame)

The researcher investigated the matter further by enquiring from an opinion leader and a chief from the Northern region, where most of the female participants came from. She learnt that most women in the Northern region give birth at home and not in hospitals. Deliveries at home are not included in official records. Moreover, there is a high illiteracy rate in the region and therefore parents are not able to write down the birth dates of their children.

### 4.2.3 Educational Level of Participants

The educational level of study participants is shown in Figure 4.3.

![Pie chart showing the educational levels of participants.](image)

**Figure 4.3 - Educational level of participants (N-41)**

Generally, the males were better educated than the female participants, as illustrated in Table 4.1 and Figure 4.4. Of the 15 (36.6%) participants who had no form of formal education, only
one (4.5%) was male. All female participants who had any formal education (5 or 26.3%) had primary education only. By contrast, 18 (81.8%) of the 22 participating males had secondary education (from grades 7 to 12).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Education</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
<td>14 (73.7%)</td>
<td>15 (36.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 to 6</td>
<td>3 (13.6%)</td>
<td>5 (26.3%)</td>
<td>8 (19.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (none or primary)</strong></td>
<td><strong>4 (18.2%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>19 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>23 (56.1%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7 to 8</td>
<td>5 (22.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>5 (12.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Grade 9</td>
<td>10 (45.5%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>10 (24.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10 to 12</td>
<td>3 (13.6%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>3 (7.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal (secondary)</strong></td>
<td><strong>18 (81.8%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>0 (0.0%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>18 (43.9%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>22 (53.7%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>19 (46.3%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>41 (100.0%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 - Educational level of participants

The reasons for not attending school were mainly economic, as indicated in these responses:

*There is no money.* (Abla)
Because my mother did not have the money to pay my fees. (Ama)

It is because of poverty. (Meefua)

It is not because of anything, my mother is not well and my father says he does not have money to send me to school. That is why I came here. But for this reason, I am too young to come and make money. I am of school going age and it is very difficult for me when I see the children here who are my age going to school. School is very good for everyone and it builds one’s future. Even if one has to learn a trade, the medium of instruction is English and if you don’t understand English, you can’t learn the trade. We know the value of education; it is our parents who are not in the position to help us go to school to become big people to help them out of their poverty. (Maana)

It is because my father died. (Maame)

After the above respondent’s father died her mother could not sponsor her education in addition to the cost of educating her two older siblings.

One of the male participants dropped out of school in grade 6, due to parental neglect after the death of his biological mother and another did not attend school at all because his father died when he was a child:

Because of money, my parents don’t look after me. The money they gave me to go to school was not enough so I went to tell my madam [teacher] about it and she came to talk to my mother but she was still adamant. Up to now, if I go to her and tell her to take me to school, she does not mind me. My father also does not mind me when I tell him about it. They are all not minding me at all. My real mother is dead but my father is still alive and he does not mind me at all. (Mensah)

It was only the girl who attended school because when my father died, I was very young and did not get help from anywhere to go to school. (Manu)

Only one respondent indicated that she did not attend school because she did not like it.

Because I do not like school. (Akua)

The findings show that the homeless boys in the study were better educated than their female counterparts. The causes of non-school attendance are parental poverty, death, or sickness of a parent, or neglect.
4.2.4  Marital Status of Participants

Two of the female participants are married with a toddler each. Both of them had left their husbands in their hometowns. One of them came to the city because she was idle. The other (who indicated she was 15 years old) plans to join her husband soon in his bicycle business in her hometown. One other participant (16 years old) has a toddler but is not married. Below are some of their responses:

No, it’s just that there is nothing to do and that is why I have come to Accra. (Akosua)

Yes, I’ve told him that when I come back home, I’d not return to Accra again so that we do the same business and both of us stay together at the same place instead of this separation. (Sisi)

4.2.5  Socio-economic Status

To examine their socio-economic status, participants were asked about their parents’ occupation, their level of education, marital status and the number of children they had.

4.2.5.1  Parent’s Occupation

The findings showed that majority of the parents (75.6%) of participants were engaged in subsistence farming. Some mothers were food vendors as well, as indicated by the following respondents:

He farms.
She sells pito [a local beverage]. (Abena)

They are farmers. (Esi, Yao, Sisi, Yoofi, Joojo)

Yes, they farm.
They cultivate maize and yam. (Kai)

... they are farmers
They cultivate and sell the produce. (Anane)

Yes, they do [farm] and also sell [ Beans, groundnuts, and maize]. (Tsoo)

They are farmers. After the farming season my mother sells food. (Afua)
The problem is that they farm and often times they do not get the yields they expect. (Akosua)

My mother is a trader and my father a farmer. (Akua)

My father is a farmer.  
My mother prepares and sells food. (Fiifi)

In some cases one parent may be too old, or too ill to work:

My father is a farmer and also he is old now ...  
She was a farmer till she became sick. (Maana)

My dad is blind so he is not working, but my mother sells oranges. (Badua)

My father used to be a farmer, but he is now an old man and cannot farm anymore.  
[My mother] doesn't do any work. (Meefua)

When the above respondent (Meefua) was asked how the parents survived, she mentioned that they were supported by her older siblings.

My older siblings are small scale farmers and they support the family. (Meefua)

Some participants (34.1%) are from families with widowed parents, who are the sole breadwinners:

No, my father is dead.  
[My mother] sells vegetables. (Yaa).

[My widowed father] is a farmer. (Abla)

[My widowed mother] is a food vendor. (Fafa)

My father is dead.  
[My mother] farms. (Tawiah)

My father died ...  
[My mother] was teaching, but now she is a farmer. (Abeeku)
Some participants’ responses suggest that their parents are not earning enough from their economic activities. Some participants have to work in the city to support their families, such as these respondents:

*It is due to the fact that my parents put in a lot of effort in their farming, but often have poor yields and so they do not earn enough to look after us. So when you come here to work and make some money, you give it to them to support their efforts. If they knew how to get good yields we would all be fine and then we would not have to come here.* (Ama)

*No, when I come here and make some money and I go back, I give her some money to spend.* (Yao)

### 4.2.5.2 Parent’s Educational Status

The educational status of the parents is shown in Table 4.2 and Figure 4.5. The findings showed that 12.2% of participants are from families with both parents educated (meaning they have some form of education. Most of the participants could only say their parents had attended school but could not tell which grade they attained). Those with one parent only educated make up 22.0% and those with neither parent educated, 48.8% of the study sample. All the participants with both parents educated are males.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Male participants</th>
<th>Female participants</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both parents educated</td>
<td>5 (22.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>5 (12.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One parent educated</td>
<td>5 (22.7%)</td>
<td>4 (21.1%)</td>
<td>9 (22.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents uneducated</td>
<td>7 (31.8%)</td>
<td>13 (68.4%)</td>
<td>20 (48.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>5 (22.7%)</td>
<td>2 (10.5%)</td>
<td>7 (17.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>22 (53.7%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>19 (46.3%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>41 (100.0%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.2 - Parents' educational status*
Only four of the participants knew their parents’ actual educational level. Their parents had progressed to grades 6, 9 or 10 before ceasing formal education. The rest knew only that their parents had been to school, but did not know their final grade levels. The findings suggest that parents of female participants were less educated than the male participants. For example, 68.4% of females indicated their parents were uneducated, compared with 31.8% of males whose parents were uneducated; as illustrated in Figure 4.6.
4.2.5.3 Number of Parents’ Children

The findings showed that the participants belong to large families with an average of five children per family (Figure 4.7). More specifically, 46.3% of parents had 5 to 6 children, 29.3% had 3 to 4 children, 14.6% had 7 to 8 children and 2.4% had 1 to 2 children.
The low educational status of the parents coupled with their subsistence farming activities and large family sizes suggest that the participants were from low socio-economic backgrounds and that is why they had come to the city to work and fend for themselves.

4.3 Causes of Homelessness

The main cause of homelessness of participants was found to be poverty. This assertion was based on the findings of the socio-economic status of participants (Section 4.1.3) and the primary problems and challenges that caused them to come to the city. The participants are from low socio economic backgrounds and Figure 4.10 (p.155) indicates that their major concern, problem or issue is money. As many as 98% of participants indicated that they were in the city primarily to look for money to meet one or more basic needs such as food, clothing, education, and skills training; and to acquire capital for business and, or to prepare for marriage. These are explained fully under section 4.3.1 (Money).

Lack of job opportunities in their towns and villages was also identified as a cause of homelessness as indicated by these respondents:

- Because there are no jobs in our hometown that is why we came here and besides, we are poor people and we cannot continue to stay there. (Meefua)
- No, it’s just that there is nothing to do and that is why I have come to Accra. (Akosua)
- Nobody told me, I decided to come. If you are just sitting around without doing anything, it is not good so I decided to come and work to earn some money to do my own work [become self-employed]. (Badua)
- There are no jobs [back home] and that is why I came. (Abla)

These statements suggest that if they could readily get jobs in their regions they would stay with their families and work without having to migrate to the city to look for jobs and become homeless.
Another cause of homelessness is death of a parent. For example one of the respondents described the difficult living conditions he endured after the death of his father, to the extent that he often went to school on an empty stomach and relied on his friends for food. His story also suggested that his mother could not provide adequately for him because there were four other siblings to be cared for. Below is his story in his own words:

*The reason is that my father is dead and my mother finds it very difficult to look after the five children including me. I attend school and sometimes money to buy food to eat is difficult for me. If my friends have money, they buy food and give me some to eat. If I am lucky, I come home after school to find that food has been cooked and then I eat some. But often times I go to school on empty stomach till I come home after school to come and eat. So this holiday, my friends were coming to Accra and I decided to come with them to make some money to enable me buy food to eat when I go to school.* (Nsiah)

Two of the participants were also working in the city to assist their parents in financing the education of their siblings. The first one (Kai) explained that by the time she was of school-going age her parents could not afford to fund the education of their five children so she did not go to school and is now working in the city to help her older siblings to complete their education. The second respondent (Kwabena) had given up on continuing his education after completing Junior high school because of lack of finances and is now working as a truck pusher in the city to help with financing the education of his younger siblings. Below are some of their responses:

*I came to make money for my parents. It is because they did not have money to sponsor my education. My siblings attend school and I support my parents to sponsor their education.* (Kai)

*I came to make some money to enable me buy food to eat and to help my siblings to be able to complete school. At this stage, I don’t think I will go to school again unless of course someone sponsors my education now. I can’t sponsor myself in school so I will rather help my younger siblings.* (Kwabena)

The cause of homelessness can partly be ascribed to the information about life in Accra they received from their friends and siblings who had returned, such as job opportunities in Accra and ability to earn money and buy the things one needed as indicated by these responses:
Some of my brothers [actually neighbours, homeless youth sometimes refer to neighbours and friends from their hometown as siblings] in school told me that when they come here, they make a lot of money. (Yoofi)

It was my brothers who are here but come from Dormaa who told me about Accra. Some of them have been here before so they tell us what job to do to make enough money. So when they were coming I followed them here. (Kwabena)

My brother [biological brother] lives here and he asked me to come and see if I can gather some money. I have therefore come to see if it is good and if I realize that it is not as good as he said, I will go back home and farm to make some money to write the music. (Koku)

My friends were coming and I liked it so I joined them. They said they were going to look for money which will help them. (Akua)

I heard that there are people who come here to make money to cater for themselves and there are others that come to make money to buy their things. (Kai)

Others decide to go to Accra based on the seeming affluence of their friends who had come back from Accra. For example when they observe the nice clothing, machines, and kitchen utensils their friends had brought they are inspired to go and acquire those things as illustrated by this exchange:

If people come from Accra and they bring nice things, you would also want to come. Even when your parents don’t want you to come, you’ll force to come, because you also want to acquire some of those things. Cooking utensils and some bring sewing machines for training as seamstresses and so also know that if you come and work, you can get those things. [In answer to: So what things do they bring?] (Mansa)

4.3.1 Summary of the Causes of Homelessness

The findings suggest that youth homelessness in the family is caused by push factors such as parental poverty, death of a parent coupled with a large number of siblings, lack of job opportunities in the areas of origin of the youth, and pull factors such as the good report they receive from friends and siblings returning from Accra and the affluence of the returnees. These push and pull factors motivate the youth to migrate to the city and endure homelessness, while pursuing opportunities to earn money to cater for their needs.
4.4 **Duration of Stay in Accra**

The findings (Figure 4.8) indicate that the majority of the male participants (68%) and 42% of females are short term migrants to the city and have been there for less than six months. The findings also suggest that the female participants tend to stay longer in the city than their male counterparts.

This assertion is based on the fact that apart from the 21 to 25 months category, the female participants have higher percentages in all categories than their male counterparts. For example, 32% of females compared to 9% of males have been in Accra for 6-10 months and 16% of females have been in Accra for over 25 months.

![Participants' duration of stay in Accra](image)

**Figure 4.8 - Participants' duration of stay in Accra**

The findings also indicate that some of the participants visit the city regularly or have been there more than once to work. For example Manu comes regularly to the city for work, for Fafa it is her fourth visit, and for Kwabena, Maame, and Mansa, it is their second visit at the time of the fieldwork. Below are some of their responses:
Yes I have been here before; I come and go back regularly (Manu)

Yes I was here some time ago and I am back again. This is actually my fourth time of being in Accra.

Eight months on the very first time, Eleven months the second time and nine months on the third time [In answer to: How long did you stay in Accra the first time?] (Fafa)

Yes, I have been here before. I stayed for four months. (Maame)

4.5 The Expressed Needs of Homeless Youth

The expressed information needs of study participants were ascertained by adopting the life-centered approach, a strategy first used by Dervin et al (1976) to access information needs within the context of life concerns. Their rationale for using this approach was to avoid the use of the word “information”, which they thought could limit the responses, because of participants’ perception of the term. Dervin (1976) and her research team identified four main life situations as concerns, worries, problems and decisions. This strategy was chosen because of the educational background of participants. The literature reveals that homeless youths in Accra are either uneducated or have inadequate formal education. Thus they may not be able to relate with the word “information”, which would consequently limit their responses. Hersberger (1998) also acknowledges that articulating information needs can be difficult for individuals, but they are able to describe them within the context of a problem and the resolution of a problem. Thus during the interviews participants were asked to describe the problems, or concerns they had to deal with and the issues that worry them in their everyday lives, how they resolve these issues and their reasons for coming to the city.

The study recorded a total of 131 primary problem statements making an average of about three primary problem statements per participant. Primary problem statements were identified as challenges which either motivated participants to migrate to Accra, or the most important challenges or problems they face in Accra. The researcher examined the nature of the primary problem statements by adapting a scheme devised by Dervin (1973) to analyze the problem statements of participants in an information needs survey conducted in Seattle and Syracuse, in
In Dervin’s scheme, each problem statement was subjected to three dichotomous judgements, based on the following three questions:

- Does the respondent complain about or lament a problem/question of social or personal concern? (Yes or no)
- Does the respondent state a need for information or advice? (Yes or no)
- Does the respondent suggest a need for actual help, assistance or action in order to answer his question or solve his problem? (Yes or no)

The researcher tabulated problem statements in the study and attributed each statement exclusively to one of three categories that describe the nature of a statement:

- Is the problem statement a mere complaint about a personal, or social concern;
- Does the problem statement suggest a need for information, or advice;
- Does the problem statement suggest a need for assistance, or help to resolve the challenge.

The findings indicate that the majority of respondents’ problem statements (68.7%) were mostly complaints about a personal, or a social concern (Figure 4.9). The next largest category of statements (28.2%) suggest a need for assistance or help, and only 3.1% of the statements suggest a need for information, or advice. The reasons for the few articulations of information needs in the problem statement will be discussed in the next chapter.
The problem statements were analysed to ascertain the type of needs articulated by participants. The analysis revealed 11 types of need, or issues of concern or problems in their everyday lives. All 11 types related to basic needs (Figure 4.10). They are money, employment, vocational goals, education, shelter, security, justice, health, food, respect and fair wages. The findings reveal that out of the 41 participants, 40 or 98% listed money as a problem. Shelter (25 or 61%), education (24 or 59%) and employment (22 or 54%) are the most important concerns in their everyday lives. Food, fair wage and justice needs were mentioned, but appear to be of least concern. The articulated concerns or problems will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections.
Finally, the problem statements were analysed by both nature of problem statement and type of need. The findings (Table 4.3 and Figure 4.11) indicate that the few expressed needs for information relate to money and education. For example, out of the 40 problem statements relating to need for money, 4 or 10% included a need for information and assistance and 32 or 80% were complaints about personal or social circumstances. Most of the problem statements regarding health, food, and fair wages were complaints, with no request for assistance or need for information. For example, all 10 of the problem statements relating to health and all 6 of the problem statements relating to food, that is 100%, are complaints with no requests for information or assistance. These findings will be discussed in the next chapter.
### Table 4.3 - Nature of problem statement by type of need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Personal / social complaint</th>
<th>Information need</th>
<th>Request for assistance</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>32 (80%)</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>14 (56%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11 (44%)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>10 (42%)</td>
<td>3 (13%)</td>
<td>11 (46%)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>10 (45%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>12 (55%)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteem</td>
<td>15 (88%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (12%)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>11 (73%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (27%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>10 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire skills</td>
<td>8 (89%)</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair wages</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Money was found to be a common issue for all respondents and the major reason for migrating to the city to live the homeless life. They needed money to address various issues in their lives, in order to bring order or exercise control over their lives. Fifty-four percent of respondents
needed money to pursue their life goals, such as skills training, as indicated in Table 4.4 and Figure 4.12 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males N=22</th>
<th>Females N=19</th>
<th>Total N=41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life goals / Acquiring skills</td>
<td>6 (27.3%)</td>
<td>16 (84.2%)</td>
<td>22 (53.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education</td>
<td>5 (22.7%)</td>
<td>5 (12.2%)</td>
<td>5 (12.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School related expenses</td>
<td>5 (22.7%)</td>
<td>1 (5.3%)</td>
<td>6 (14.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
<td>3 (15.8%)</td>
<td>4 (9.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for marriage</td>
<td>11 (57.9%)</td>
<td>11 (26.8%)</td>
<td>22 (53.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others needs</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
<td>2 (10.5%)</td>
<td>3 (7.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 - Participants’ uses for money

They describe their need for money in the example responses below:

Well, I’ve completed [Junior high] but my parents don’t have money so I decided to come down to work so that when I get money, I will learn a vocation. I’ve decided I’d like to be a mechanic. (Kuuku)

I have completed school and I want to learn a trade but financial constraints made that impossible, so I travelled here to make some money to enable me learn the trade. (Baako)

I am looking for money so I can start my apprenticeship as a seamstress. (Akua)
She [my mother] said I should come to Accra to make some money to enable me to learn tailoring. (Fafa)

When I stopped going to school and I told my grandparent to let me learn a trade, she told me that she did not have money to pay the apprenticeship fee and it really worried me a lot. I wasn’t a good student in school either, so I decided to come here with my friends to make some money so that I can start the apprenticeship. (Kwesi)

All that worries me are money issues and the fact that I want to learn a trade in the future so that by the time I am old enough, I will have my profession. (Kwabena).

Some of them had already started their skills training, but needed money to settle fees related to their trades. The following respondents describe such situations in their own words:

I am learning a trade but lately money is hard to come by so I decided to come to Accra and make some money and then go back. (Joojo)

I was an apprentice as a motor fitter but due to my inability to pay my apprenticeship fee, the master craftsman asked me to leave and since my father is dead and my mother is bedridden due to sickness and I have nobody to pay the fee on my behalf, I decided to come to Accra and make some money to pay the apprenticeship fee of [GHc150 (US$100)]\(^5\). (Manu)

Other respondents (12.2%) had completed junior high school and needed money to continue their education to senior high school.

I came here to make some money to enable me continue my education, because my parents do not have money to sponsor me. (Badu)

Please I have completed school and my parents don’t have money. One of my sisters completed [Junior high] school and could not continue too, because my parents don’t have money. Because of that I decided to work and make some money to enable me to continue my education. (Anane)

I completed school this year and since I want to continue my education, I decided to come here and make some money for use when I go to school. (Fiifi)

When I completed [Junior high] school and the results were released, I did not have money to continue the education, so I came to Accra to make some money and then go back to school. (Kobi)

Yet others (14.6%) needed money to pay for school related costs, as exemplified by these responses:

\(^5\) US$1.00 was equivalent to about GHc1.50 at the time of the fieldwork. GHc1.00 equals 150Gp.
I am a student from a poor family so I came here to make some money to buy books, school uniforms, bags and others things that will make life in school easy. Even though my parents are poor, I want to help myself to be educated. (Kojo)

My problem is how to get someone to pay my fees so that I can concentrate on my studies. I have two other siblings in SSS [Senior secondary school] and knowing that there is no money at home, if I don’t work to make some money, the burden will be too much on my parents sponsoring three people in SSS. I know that if they had money, they would sponsor my education and that is why I struggle to get what I will use to pay my school fees and that is my problem. (Oko)

Some respondents (9.8%) needed capital to set up their own business:

*I’ll like to sell cooked rice, soap or some of the things people sell here.* (Akosua)

*I came here to look for a job to make some money to write my music.* (Koku)

Those who intended to use the money they earn in preparing for marriage (26.8%) were all females. Examples of their responses are as follows:

*I will use part of the money to buy cooking utensils and give the rest to my parents. I will keep them [the utensils] at home and when it is time for me to get married, I will take them to my husband’s house.* (Meefua)

*When we come and work and get some money, we buy cooking pots [in preparation for marriage] and take them back home.* (Akua)

*We use them [utensils] to decorate our rooms when we get married and are given rooms.* (Maana)

Other respondents (7.3%) specified a use that occurred infrequently among those surveyed. For example, one respondent needed money to sponsor her child’s education:

*Well, I have a baby so I came down to work to earn some money to take care of my child when she turns to school age.* (Sisi)

Two of the respondents needed money to buy clothes:

*I don't have clothes I wear at home so if I make money, I will also buy some clothes and take them home.* (Adusa)

*I heard that there will come a time that you may not get money to buy soap and clothing. If your mother is not able to give you money for these things, you'll just be there and that is why I decided to come.* (Ama)
The needs for money expressed above suggest the desire and determination of participants to take control over their lives in the absence of any help, by working to meet their basic needs. The findings show that the respondents needed money to address issues including education, apprenticeship, marriage, childcare and clothing.

4.5.2 Employment

The results showed that all the participants were economically engaged, working to earn the money for which they had migrated to the city. The male participants worked as shoe repairers (popularly known as shoeshine work) (46.3%), and truck pushers (7.3%), while the female participants worked as head porters (43.9%). Three of the girls worked respectively as a store help, a dish washer for a food vendor and a clothes washer for a customer in addition to the head porter job. The main concern participants expressed with respect to employment was the lack of alternate jobs. They would have preferred less tiring jobs that yield stable incomes, as indicated by the following respondents:

We do this kind of work because there is nothing else for us to do around here. We will appreciate it if we can get another work to do because lately, we walk a day looking for prospective clients but we don’t find any. (Kai)

We don’t get other jobs to do. If we get some other job, we will stop the shoeshine job. (Kwesi)

I wish I could get a better job to do so that I will stop this one [shoe-shine work] and make enough money to fulfill my purpose of being here so that I can leave. (Kojo)

The other problem is the fact that we don’t have a definite job we are doing here in Accra. Sometimes we walk aimlessly looking for clients. We would be happy if we had a constant job. (Baako)

The carrying of loads is very tiring. We don’t have any alternative that is why we continue to do it. Otherwise we would have stopped it to do something else. (Tsoo)

Please I just completed school and I don’t have any work except shining shoes here. (Badu)

Yes if we had jobs doing we won’t come and sleep in this cold out here. (Joojo)

I walk long distances and make very little money which more often than not, is used for buying food. (Efia)
It is the work, to work and get enough money to go back home. That is what troubles me. If you wake up and do not have money, it is troubling. Sometimes I walk the whole day without getting any customer. (Afua)

Some of the expressions above suggest a need for information about available and alternate job opportunities. Such information would have improved the chances of Kai, Kwesi, Kojo and Tsoo getting alternate jobs, instead of settling for a job they would rather not do. Other expressions were more like complaints than expressions of information need. For example, Baako and Efia were simply complaining about walking the whole day without customers.

4.5.3 Unfair Wages

Another problem expressed by some of the participants was the fact that they were not always paid the agreed fees by their customers. A protest or complaint from the youth might attract physical or verbal assault. These are their stories in their own words:

One other problem is that after charging for work done, the customers refuse to pay the agreed fee and if you complain, you can be beaten up. (Adusa)

Yes I have been beaten before I charged him GH¢1 [67 cents] and he gave me [40Gp (27 cents)] and this resulted in an argument and I ended up being beaten. (Adusa)

Sometimes they cheat us. They don't pay the agreed fee for our services. You will say [50Gp (33 cents)] and they end up paying [20Gp (13 cents)] or even [10Gp (7 cents)]. (Esi)

Also, some of our clients overload us with goods but refuse to give us commensurate compensation and when we complain, they insult us saying that, if we had that kind of money would we have come to Accra? (Maana)

Sometimes we have problems with some of them. After agreeing the fee, on reaching their destination they decide to pay us any amount they want and if we refuse, they insult us. (Meefua)

When we carry the load, some will give us enough money, others will pay us little money. (Akua)

In the problem statements above, the respondents were merely complaining about the bad attitudes of some of their customers, such cheating and verbal attack. There is no suggestion of information need.
4.5.4 Food

The findings revealed that some participants (15%) worry about food. On some days they do not earn fees and are therefore unable to buy food. Some resort to eating twice a day instead of thrice, because of inadequate earnings.

There were days that I did not have money to buy food to eat. (Tawiah)

Some of us roam the whole day without making any money and sometimes, even money for food is a problem. (Ama)

... Also the fact that I eat only twice a day here as compared to the three times that I eat at home. (Yoofi)

Sometimes, I walk the whole day without getting any customer and I go very hungry because I don’t get any money. If your mother or your sister is here, she will give you money for food. When you ask your colleagues, they will say they do not have money. So that is what troubles me. (Afua).

4.5.5 Respect

Homeless youth desire to be respected and esteemed. However the findings reveal that homeless girls in particular encounter indiscriminate insults in their daily work. The researcher witnessed several incidents of market women insulting head porters for no known reason and tried to intervene. The women seemed surprised whenever the researcher intervened and some even laughed over it. Some of the female participants (31.7%) indicated that they were often insulted by both market women and customers, even when they had done nothing wrong. The following respondents described their verbal encounters in their own words:

The woman [my employer, an eatery operator] was always insulting me for any small offence but because of the money I didn’t complain. (Badua)

As we go about our duties, people insult us, our parents and even our grandparents. If we offend them they should just insult us but why should they insult our parents? (Esi)

Yes, some of them [market women] are very hostile towards us and insult us anytime we go near their wares. (Efia)

Sometimes you’ll be walking and someone will just push you for no reason and when you complain, he or she will insult you as well. (Ajoa)
Some of them [market women] insult us for doing nothing [no obvious offence]. Sometimes when we are soliciting work from customers, they [market women] just rain insults on us and drive us away. (Afua)

Sometimes when we are sitting and resting, they’ll come [market women] and shout on us that we are making the place dirty. And when it is raining and we take refuge under a shed, they will drive us away with the same reason that we’ll dirty the place. (Afua)

Some of them [market women] insult us even when we have not done anything against them. They say we are disrespectful towards them. (Kai)

4.5.6 Vocational Goals

The findings revealed that one of the main concerns and reasons for coming to the city was to look for money to fulfil their vocational, or life goals. More than half of the respondents (53.7%) indicated that their main pre-occupation is to get enough money to be able to pursue various vocations.

Some of their responses were as follows:

That, I’ll get money to learn a trade so that it will be well with me in future. (Akua)

That I will get enough money and start training as a seamstress. (Afua)

When I make the money, I will use it to buy a sewing machine or use it to learn hairdressing. (Kai)

I worry about getting money to buy a sewing machine. (Maame)

The majority of them (87.8%) had a clearly defined vocational goal, as illustrated in Figure 4.13.
The dominant vocational goal of female respondents is to become a dressmaker (68.4%). Other goals are to become a food vendor, or retail merchant. The male participants mentioned a wide choice of vocations, probably because they have more choices open to them as literate persons. These include welder, plumber, auto-mechanic, teacher, banker, politician, steel bender, carpenter, etc. (Table 4.5 and Figure 4.14).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaker</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto-mechanic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glazier</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food vendor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail merchant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musician</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steel bender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welder</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specified</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5 - Participants' vocational choices by gender

![Bar chart showing vocational choices by gender](chart.png)

Figure 4.14 - Participants' vocational choices by gender
4.5.7 Education

The findings show that most of the participants’ concerns about education are economic. Some could not complete their education due to lack of funds after the death of a parent, as illustrated by this response:

_I was attending secondary school and at a point in time, my father died and I did not have anybody to sponsor my education so I stopped the school and came to Accra._ (Abeeku)

Others had to settle for low quality schools because of lack of funds to attend better schools.

_I will tell him [the President] to help us, because when we are going to the top schools, it is very expensive. So instead we attend the local schools because we can’t afford the top schools._ (Anane)

Some could not afford educational costs such as examination registration fees, books, school uniforms and even food.

_I have to register for the examination which costs [GH¢60 (US$40)] but the woman I live with cannot afford it, since she also has children she is looking after in SSS [Senior High]._ (Adusa)

_The students among us really suffer a lot, because we receive no help from our families. If we had money to buy books and uniforms, we wouldn’t come here_ … (Kojo).

_There were days that I did not have money to buy food to eat. Also I didn’t have money to buy books._ (Tawiah)

_I liked education a lot but due to financial constraints, I couldn’t pay my fees and buy books. Sometimes if I compared my uniform to that of my colleagues, it never made me happy at all._ (Baako)

_When I was in school, I couldn’t get money to buy pamphlets and handouts, so I had to rely on what was taught by the teacher in class. Because of that, I had to come to Accra on holidays and work to make some money and then go and pay my school fees._ (Abeeku)

_When I was in school, sometimes money to buy food was a problem. I also could not buy books, shoes, clothes and a table to use in class._ (Kwabena)

Two of the respondents were concerned about lack of facilities, such as computers for their information and communications technology (ICT) course:
We don’t have a computer in the school and yet we learn ICT. If you are learning ICT without a computer, you won’t understand it so we need a computer in the school. (Adusa)

What disturbs my studies is the fact that we don’t have enough computers for ICT studies in my school and so a lot of students get crowded around one computer, making ICT studies not interesting. (Oko)

4.5.8 Shelter

Shelter is a major problem for the participants and 68.3% of them expressed concerns and dissatisfaction with the places where they slept. Only four of the participants, all males, indicated they slept indoors, two in a classroom, one in a kiosk and another in a container\(^6\). The majority of the participants sleep on the verandas of shops in the markets and near the main road, making them vulnerable to the weather, mosquitoes, inadequate sleep and vehicular accidents. They also faced threats of ejection and destruction of their belongings by shop owners and sometimes their own colleagues.

My worry is since we’ve been here, we don’t have a proper place to sleep, and we actually sleep outside. (Badu)

We sleep on the veranda, in front of the stores. (Ajoa)

I sleep in one of the classrooms in a school. (Nsiah)

In a container at Bukina [a suburb in Accra]. (Kuuku)

When I arrived here, I was sleeping in the kiosk. (Oko)

We sleep outside and the owners of the places where we sleep constantly harass and threaten us with ejection and throw stones at us. They sometimes burn our clothes in our absence. (Baako)

Sometimes they [shop owners] would just come and sack us saying you will not sleep here again, all of you will go back to your villages, here is not your hometown, go back to your hometowns. (Esi)

There is a boy from my hometown who also sleeps here [classroom] with us who is threatening me to leave this place, I even had a confrontation with him yesterday and he threw my sleeping cloth outside. If he comes again today and asks me to leave, I will have no choice but to leave. (Kojo).

We sleep outside on the verandas because of poverty. When it rains, we have to stand till the rain stops before we are able to sleep again. (Meefua)

---

\(^6\) Containers are small rooms built with steel for commercial purposes but sometimes used as accommodation by the poor in the city because of the high cost of regular accommodation.
If it rains you are not able to sleep. (Ago)

The cars that pass by disturb our sleep, making us unable to have a good sleep. It is only after 12 midnight that we are able to have some sleep. Also, when it rains we have to stand up till it stops raining and the floor is dried before we sleep again. (Yoofi)

Mosquitoes bite us a lot over there and also when it rains we have to stand up till it stops and the ground is dry again, before we lay our mats and sleep. (Adusa)

There is a gutter with a lot of stagnant water which breeds a lot of mosquitoes that bites us at night (Badu).

We are harassed by thieves and mosquitoes and when it rains, we can’t sleep. (Badua)

4.5.9 Security

The lack of shelter is accompanied by security issues for participants. Security problems encountered by respondents include theft of their monies and valuables, sexual harassment and physical assault, often during their sleep time.

We do not have security in front of the shops where we sleep. Thieves come and steal our boxes, take our monies and sell our wares at times when we are sleeping. When we get accommodation, our belongings will be safe. (Afua)

... they [thieves] can come and cut your pocket and take away your money while you sleep. So if you have money in your pocket you have to be very careful while sleeping. Sometimes they beat you up, if they don’t find any money in your pocket. (Baako)

... sometimes as we sleep out there in the open, people come to do things we don’t like. Sometimes people steal your money and while out there, a man can just come and sleep with you and you’ll be pregnant. (Ajoa)

Sometimes people come around to steal or try to have sex with one of us. When we catch the person we beat him, or then he runs away. Some people also hang around us looking for opportunities to steal somebody’s money. Some succeed in stealing the money and when you catch them and say something, they will beat you because they are boys. (Akosua)

... robbers also attack us at night and take our monies at gunpoint. (Kojo)

One day I was going for credits to sell and was attacked by robbers on the way who took away the bag containing the money and the phones. When I reported it to the woman I worked for, she did not believe me and asked me to pay for the lost items and refund the money. (Oko)
One respondent mentioned that some of the homeless boys steal from their friends. The older homeless youth sometimes bully the younger ones by forcibly taking their monies and valuables:

*Yes they are all my colleagues. They can even come and steal your phones right now. My phone has been stolen once when I was sleeping. It was a Vodafone with the screen smashed so when he realized this in the morning, he brought me back my phone.* (Abeeku)

*Yes he can take your money or anything valuable and you don’t have the strength to challenge him.* (Abeeku)

*It is because he is older and can use force to take things from us, because our mothers are not here. We have nobody to complain to.* (Abeeku).

4.5.10 Justice

A respondent complained about collective punishment by law enforcement agencies in the event of a reported theft. She mentioned that they were sometimes made to pay for stolen goods by the police, despite being innocent.

*Sometimes one can go and carry someone’s goods and then we are all asked to pay for them. When we are sent to the police station we do not know what to do and then we are all made to pay for the goods.* (Ama)

Other times they are falsely accused by their own peers as indicated by this respondent:

*One other problem is that sometimes your brother will accuse you of something you have not done.* (Mensah)

4.5.11 Health

The nature of their work makes the homeless youth vulnerable to bodily aches and pains. The boys walk long distances in the hot tropical sun, looking for customers who want their shoes repaired or polished, and the girls carry heavy loads on their heads, to earn a living. Some respondents were concerned about the body aches they suffer as a result of their work.

*The only problem is I usually got severe headaches from walking in the scorching sun.* (Badu)
The pan we carry is very heavy which gives us headaches. Our mothers are not here to give us medicine and all we do is to sleep. (Efia)

We usually get bodily pains from carrying loads. (Fafa)

Some of them were aware that they can contract malaria through mosquito bites and therefore, they were worried about their exposure to mosquitoes. The following respondents expressed their concerns in their own words:

Mosquitoes bite us a lot and we have malaria attacks often. (Kojo)

Our main problem was the rain and also we had mosquito bites a lot. (Koku).

We are harassed by thieves and mosquitoes and when it rains, we can’t sleep. (Badua)

4.6 Information Behaviours, Sources of Information and Barriers to Everyday Life Information Seeking of Homeless Youth

This section describes the information seeking patterns, sources of information and problems, or barriers encountered by study participants in resolving their everyday issues, concerns and problems.

4.6.1 Employment

Most of the participants were self employed, with the male participants working as shoe cobblers (46.3%) and the female participants working as head porters (43.9%) in the market. The head porters do not require any skill, in contrast with the shoe cobblers. Some of the male participants learnt the job before coming to the city, either by themselves, or through training by a friend or sibling.

No I didn’t learn it. At home we mend our own shoes. (Okö)

I knew how to sew shoes before coming here ... I learnt by mending shoes at home. (Tawiah)

I learnt it [cobbling] on my own. (Adusa)

One of my brothers taught me [cobbling]. (Anane)
A friend was repairing shoes and on days that I did not go to work, I went and sat by him and I observed him till I came here. (Ago)

Generally, all newcomers were given orientation on how to succeed in the city. The orientation is basically an information transfer and included directional information and counselling on how to handle customers in order to stay out of trouble, and generally how to conduct their affairs in order to meet their goals and be successful in the city. Those who did not have shoe mending skills were taught by their friends, on arrival in the city. Those without tools were provided with a box of tools through a communal contribution by their friends. The obligation to refund such contributions depended on the generosity of the individual contributors.

When someone comes here and he does not have everything to start up, we try to get him the logistics he needs to enable him start work. Later, he will refund such contributions and the contributors may choose whether or not to take back their monies. (Manu)

We also buy a box and stock it for him to start work. He is made to follow one person round the whole day and he is shown the rudiments of the work. After this, he is left on his own to do his work. (Oko)

You learn it here by following someone who teaches you for about two days, after which you go alone. (Mensah)

When I arrived here, my brother who is here took me round the whole day and showed me how to find my way back home. The next day, I was able to do it on my own. (Adusa)

The counselling included information on handling customers, relationships, and avoiding use of drugs:

When you first come, you are advised that if you find a client’s money or mobile phone in a shoe you are working on, you have to give it back to the person. Don’t take anything that belongs to another person. (Tawiah)

We talk to the person about how to be polite when dealing with clients. (Oko)

He [a friend] advised me about the kinds of friends I make here. He said some of the boys here smoke marijuana and drink alcohol and so I should shun such company. (Yao)

We advise each other against womanizing, marijuana smoking, and all other forms of social vices. If you are someone who wants to make money and go back home, you should shun all these things. (Kweku)
Yes some of my friends here do not like chasing women and they advise me that a young man who wants to achieve something in life does not go after women because it will not keep you focused. (Joojo)

I should avoid chasing girls and picking up fights. (Kuuku)

When the researcher asked Kuuku to explain why he was advised by his friends to avoid fighting and chasing girls these were his responses:

Well, we are far from home and in case you’re caught by the police, your relatives may not be informed about it to come and bail you and you might go to jail. Because you might waste the little money you get on your girl friends and would not be able to send money home when needed or save any money at all. (Kuuku)

Someone [a friend] advised me that if you come here and go for prostitutes, you will never make enough money to go back home because the little money you make, you will take it there. Also if you go there, you will not make enough money the next day because they are tagged to be bad luck. (Ago)

Some of the counselling came from their customers as indicated by the following response:

I get a lot of advice from some of my clients. They advise me to be focused on the reason why I am here and to avoid stealing and fighting and go back home peacefully. (Yao)

Some of the participants had engaged in alternative jobs in previous times. Others were seeking alternate jobs besides the shoe shine and head porter jobs, at the time of the fieldwork. The strategy they used was active searching, by asking people they met, as indicated by this respondent:

I have been asking people about masonry and those who really make shoes. (Koku)

Sometimes they were approached by prospective employers and offered alternative jobs, as they went about their business.

The employers come to us when we are sitting down and then we follow them to go and wash for them. (Maana)

Yes, she said she wanted someone to work with and I said I will work with her, despite the fact that none of the girls wanted to go. (Efia)
She [a food vendor] came to the market to look for a helper and I decided to go and do it. (Mansa)

I was passing by one day and she called me and asked if I could wash her clothes and I said yes and [she] was impressed by the way I washed and asked me to come weekly and do it for her for a fee. (Meefua)

We are continuing the shoeshine job and if one is lucky, someone can come and call you to do sachet water job, security job or perhaps be a cleaner in his, or her house. (Manu)

As a result of these encounters, some participants were passive about their alternative job searches and hoped that as they engaged in their self employment, prospective employers might offer them jobs:

At the moment we are not looking for one. But in our movement around the city, if someone asks us to do some job for him, or her other than the shoeshine, we will gladly do it. If I get another job, I will stop the shoeshine. (Nsiah)

Other respondents got alternative jobs through their siblings and network of friends. The following respondents got garbage collection jobs through their friends:

She (sister) looked for the chop bar [local restaurant] job for me. (Badua).

My sister is looking for another job for me to do. (Kai)

When I came here, my friends were already engaged in it [garbage collection] so I always went with them. (Kwabena)

I followed my friend that I came to Accra with to work and I got the job [garbage collection]. (Kweku)

When I arrived here I saw some people from my hometown here who were doing the job [garbage collection] and they introduced me to it and said if I could, I should do it. I said because I am a young boy I could do it and started it. (Kobi)

Some used the head porter job as a means of advertising themselves to prospective employers, as mentioned by these respondents:

Yes we start with that job right away. It is when we are doing it that people will inquire about our interest in other jobs. (Afua)

I carried a load for her and she was impressed with my service. (Fafa).
The second respondent above was hired as a dishwasher by the prospective employer. Other respondents learnt about job opportunities through word of mouth, or the grapevine, such as this respondent, who obtained weeding jobs this way:

“When I hear them talk about it [a weeding job], I tell them that I will do it.” (Tawiah)

4.6.1.1 Problems/Barriers to Job Seeking

The findings revealed that some of the youth engaged in active job searching without success, as indicated by these respondents:

“We have been looking for masonry, or sachet water selling jobs but we can’t find any. If we get shop keeping, we will like it too, but we don’t get any.” (Adusa)

“We don’t get other jobs to do. If we get some other job, we will stop the shoeshine job.” (Kwesi)

“The carrying of loads is very tiring. We don’t have any alternatives and that is why we continue to do it. Otherwise we would have stopped it to do something else.” (Tsoo)

Others were hindered from seeking other jobs, because of lack of capital:

“Some of the boys sell yogurt and cocoa but that entails depositing about [GH¢50 (US$33.33)] before one is able to start. Since most of us cannot afford that, we go into shoe-shining, because that is cheaper to start.” (Jojo)

One respondent indicated that he felt shy to ask about job opportunities:

“Sometimes it is due to shyness; that is why I don’t ask around.” (Nsiah)

Some of the female participants also indicated that sometimes customers did not use their services and prospective employers rejected them because they have babies:

“When you have a child, customers often deny you of your services. They say that you have a child so you can’t do the work. Even when you insist you can do it, they may not give you the job.” (Sisi)

“I had information some time ago that a lady wanted someone to work with, but when I went there she said she wanted someone without a baby. Even in carrying loads, some clients do not want to use those of us with babies. They prefer those without babies.” (Ama)
Another female participant mentioned that sometimes city authorities confiscate their pans for carrying luggage when they had no money to pay their tax.

*Sometimes when they bring us the tickets and we don’t have money, they seize our big bowls for carrying the loads then we have nothing to work with. Unless we tell our friends about it who will then give us 1,000 cedis (10 pesewas or about 2 cents) to go and pay to retrieve our bowls.* (Akosua)

One respondent was of the opinion that the shoe shine job was much safer and was cautious in seeking other jobs, due to a mishap that led to the death of a colleague:

*Because of an incident some time ago when one of the boys from our place came here and instead of doing shoeshine, he went to sell sachet water. About a month ago he went to gamble (he can really play cards) and got severely beaten by some people, which later resulted in his death when he went back home. Thus we would rather stick to doing the shoeshine. Nevertheless, if someone needs us to mix mortar for him, or her, we can go and do that.* (Fiifi)

The lack of formal qualifications deterred some participants from seeking alternative jobs. One respondent did not venture to seek a job as a garbage collector, because he had not completed high school.

*After I completed [Junior High] school, I could use my results to go to school but because I did not complete SSS [Senior High], I am not qualified to do that job.* (Kobi)

In response to further probing by the researcher, the respondent above mentioned also that he would need his parents, or someone else to make the job inquiries on his behalf.

*Yes I should have gone to ask, but I don’t know anybody to take me there to make the enquiries. I came here all alone, my parents are not here. It is just me here.* (Kobi)

### 4.6.1.2 Summary of Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour (ELIS) for Jobs

The findings show that homeless youth acquire job information by themselves (self taught), through face to face meeting with prospective employers by active searching (that is, going round and making inquiries about job opportunities); incidentally through employers who
approached them with job offers, and through their network of friends, who tell them about the jobs they do.

Their sources of information include self, prospective employers, friends, siblings, and the grapevine. Hindrances/problems to their job seeking include lack of alternate jobs, lack of capital to pursue jobs they could have done, motherhood, lack of qualifications, seizure of the head pans of head porters for lack of daily tax payment, lack of job advice and confidence to make face to face inquiries, and their perceptions about the safety of alternative jobs.

4.6.2 Shelter

The findings indicate that participants approach store owners directly to seek permission to sleep in front of their stores suggesting a need for information about store owners willing to give them sleeping spaces.

_We asked permission from a lady store owner to sleep in front of her store._ (Ama)

Informal conversations with homeless youth as well as interviews revealed that some youth do not seek permission from shop owners but sleep at any available space when shop owners close for the day. Others just join their friends and family members at their sleeping places when they arrive in the city, by coming to the market to look for them or contacting them by phone.

_No, we sleep in front of the shops when the shop-owners close._ (Joojo)

_My sister came first so I looked for her._ (Badua)

Others contact their friends/siblings by phone when they arrive in Accra.

_I had lived at Lapaz before so when I arrived, I called them on the phone and they came to take me home._ (Mensah)

The main barrier to renting affordable housing such as a single room or a kiosk is the high cost involved and therefore as one of the participants indicated, he would rather sleep outdoors and save the money to meet other pressing needs such as going back to school. Other barriers are
the perception by kiosk owners that street youth are thieves, and unavailability of kiosks to rent in the market area of the study compared to other market areas in the city.

I have not stayed here long enough to get the money to rent a kiosk to sleep in. Renting a kiosk in Accra is very expensive, so I will sleep outside till I make some money to go back to school (Kobi)

Renting a room here is very expensive, even stores cost c5000 a day. A lotto kiosk also costs c5000 a day, so we lay our mats in front of people’s shops and sleep and wake up in the morning to go to work. (Kwabena)

If you ask people to sleep in their kiosks, they would think you are a thief, so they will not do it. If someone asks you to sleep in his kiosk, then you go and sleep in it. Right now if you go and sleep in front of someone’s kiosk, he will say that you are a thief. (Mensah)

There are no kiosks at Malata for rent. The ones at Agbogbloshie were specifically made to be rented to Kayayei7 and they pay weekly. (Maana)

4.6.3 Vocational Goals

As indicated in the discussion of vocational goals, a majority of the participants (87.8%) would like to learn a trade. More than half of them (53.7%) were in Accra to earn money for that purpose. Three (7.3%) of them indicated they had already started their vocational training. All three were training as auto-mechanics through apprenticeship programmes, as described by this respondent:

At the beginning, I went to tell the master about my intention to learn the trade and he said I should bring [GHc100 (US$66.67)] and also look for money to buy my tools. So I paid the money to the master and I started. If someone brings his car for repairs, he would call me to come and assist him. All this while I was using someone else’s tools, so I decided to struggle and buy my own tools so that I will feel comfortable when I am using them. (Kwesi)

Their skills development efforts exclude formal readings from books, as indicated by this respondent, when the researcher asked whether they get any information on their skills from books:

No we don’t use books to learn the trade. We only use books to write down estimates and measurements of jobs to be done. We observe what the master craftsman does and do likewise. (Joojo)

7 Head porters are locally referred to as Kayayei.
The main barrier to skills development among participants was lack of money, to pay apprenticeship fees and living expenses like food while training. Two of the three participants who had already started skills training were working in Accra to earn enough to pay debts owed to the master craftsman and a colleague.

*I was an apprentice as a motor fitter, but due to my inability to pay my apprenticeship fee, the master craftsman asked me to leave and since my father is dead and my mother is bedridden due to sickness and I have nobody to pay the fee on my behalf, I decided to come to Accra and make some money to pay the apprenticeship fee of [GH¢150 (US$100)]. I am a hardworking person and am usually able to make good money in a short time. That is why I usually stay for a few weeks and then I leave.* (Manu)

*I am learning a trade but I owe some money at that place [his workplace] so I have come to make some money and go and pay the money I owe. Nothing is hindering me except that I don’t have money to buy food when I go to work.* (Kwesi)

*If get money to take care of myself whilst I am learning the trade, I will finish my apprenticeship in time to be able to open my own shop and life will be good. I could not continue my education and if I am not able to finish my apprenticeship, life will not be worth living.* (Joojo)

4.6.3.1 Summary of Findings on ELIS for Skills Development

Information for skills development is by face to face instruction from, and observation of the master craftsman. Therefore trainees’ main source of information is the master craftsman. The main hindrance to participants’ skills development is lack of money to pay for the cost of training and to buy lunch during their period of training. The pursuit of money in the city interrupts their skills training process.

4.6.4 Health

Participants were asked to describe what they do when they fall sick, to determine their health information seeking behaviours. The findings showed that generally, participants’ first point of call for medical assistance is the pharmacy, to buy drugs:

*When I am sick, I go to the pharmacy shop to buy medicine.* (Tawiah)

*I buy medicine [when I fall sick].* (Ajoa)
When I am sick I go to the pharmacy shop to buy medicine. (Baako)

I go to buy medicine from a pharmacy shop at New Town. (Badu)

... We go and describe the symptoms to the pharmacist and then we are given medicine, which we take after eating and then sleep. (Efia)

I buy drugs [when I fall sick]. (Esi)

I go to buy medicine from the pharmacy shop [when I fall sick]. (Maame)

We go and buy medicine when we are sick. (Maana)

Because I don't have money to go to the hospital, I buy medicine from the pharmacy shop. (Meefua)

Because I don't have money to go to the hospital, I buy paracetamol tablets and chew to feel a bit better and then travel back home for some herbal medicine. (Kojo)

Those who do not have the money to buy drugs are assisted by their colleagues.

Also if someone is sick, we contribute money to buy medicine for that person. (Adusa)

If my friend does not have money to buy food, I am able to give him some money to buy food and if he is sick, I go to buy medicine for him. (Baako)

She added some money to what I had to buy the medicine for me. (Meefua)

Participants go to a hospital only when an illness becomes serious, as mentioned by these respondents:

You go to the hospital only when you're seriously ill. (Ajoa)

We only go to the hospital when we are severely ill, but as for headaches we go and buy medicine from the pharmacy shop. (Efia)

We go and buy medicine when we are ill. If you have health insurance, you can go to the hospital, because you will not pay money when you go to the hospital. However, if you don't have health insurance and you are seriously ill, you have to go to the hospital and spend money to be well again to work and make back the money spent. (Maana)

Others indicated that they go back home when they are seriously ill. Such respondents either financed the trip themselves, or were assisted with free financial contributions from their friends.

---

8 New Town is a neighbourhood in Accra.
A number of respondents confirmed that donating monies to finance the return trip of a sick colleague was standard practice among the homeless youth:

*When you are sick you have to go to the clinic for some medicine and if it becomes serious you have to go back home.* (Ago)

*If I fall [seriously] sick, I will have to go back home.* (Koku)

*If I am seriously sick, I just go to Kumasi [his hometown].* (Kuuku)

*When someone becomes sick, we contribute money to enable him to travel back home.* (Yoofi)

*Sometimes someone can be seriously sick and has no money, we would contribute [GHC1 (67 cents)], or [GHC2 (US$1.33)] and we will take her to the hospital and pay all expenses. When she comes back and recovers a little we give her money to go home; that is, when we think she is too weak to work.* (Sisi)

*If someone comes here and he is too young and falls sick out of mosquito bites, we contribute money and send him back home. Also when someone is sick and does not have money to travel back home, we contribute money; for example [GHC1 (67 cents)], or [GHC2 (US$1.33)] each to enable him to travel back home to seek medical attention.* (Manu)

*Yes he was sick, he had a problem with his hand and he is gone back home. Both of his hands were swollen and he cried at night always. One “burger” gave him [GHC20 (US$13.33)] to go to the hospital and then later, we had to contribute money for him to go home.* (Abeeku)

The recipient of such contributions is not expected to pay the money back as mentioned by Adusa:

*If I am the one who needs help, the others can contribute money to help me. We don’t take the money back from the person because it can happen that you will also find yourself in the same problem and will require help from others.* (Adusa)

The findings showed that the main reasons why participants preferred to buy drugs from a pharmacy and would only visit a hospital, or to return to their hometowns when they were seriously ill, was because they had either left their health insurance cards back home, or were not enrolled in the National Health Insurance Scheme\(^\text{10}\) at all. Only two (4.9\%) of the

---

9 A “burger” is a person who has spent time working abroad in a bid to escape poverty.

10 The National Health Insurance Scheme funds district mutual health schemes. Subscribers register in a district, but may transfer membership at will, as they change their domicile.
participants had their health insurance cards with them. Two others (4.9%) mentioned that their cards had expired, 31.7% had left theirs in their hometowns and villages, 26.8% had no health insurance because they could not afford it and one participant, 2.4% indicated there was no health insurance post in their hometown and she did not know where she could get one.

Some of their responses are as follows:

*It is because most of us did not bring our health insurance cards here, so instead of going to the hospital and paying huge bills, we rather prefer to go and buy medicine from the pharmacy.* (Ago)

*It is because we don’t bring our health insurance cards here and that is why we contribute money to enable him go back.* (Manu)

*My card has expired and I have not renewed it. They are now charging us €250,000 (25GH¢) each and I couldn’t afford that.* (Baako)

*No, I don’t have insurance. I don’t have the money to register.* (Kwesi)

*I don’t know where they write and pay for that card. We do not have it in my hometown.* (Abla)

When the researcher enquired about reasons for leaving their health insurance cards behind, some mentioned that they forgot to bring them. Others were afraid of losing them, and some said they did not have proper storage spaces and feared their cards might get wet when it rained, or be stolen. Below are some of their responses:

*I forgot to bring it.* (Adusa)

*I did not bring it because I forgot to bring it.* (Kwabena)

*I actually forgot to pack it among my things when I was coming. When I remembered about it, it was too late because I was on the bus to Accra.* (Efia)

*Yes but I don’t have it here with me. Over here our bags are kept outside and if it rains whiles we have gone to work, all our things get wet, so we did not bring it.* (Koku)

*Because we are here to struggle, if you keep it with you, it will be stolen. You can’t even get anybody to leave it with and someone will take it and destroy it for nothing.* (Mensah)

*We don’t have a proper place to keep such valuables. Our bags are kept in abandoned bathrooms, where they get wet when it rains.* (Yoofi)
Some respondents avoided going to the hospital and would go back home when seriously ill, because of lack of funds.

*Here, even the medicine we buy from the pharmacy is very expensive, so the hospital will cost a lot more.* (Joojo)

*When you are seriously sick, all you can do is to go and take your money and go back home, since we can’t afford the hospital bills here.* (Joojo)

*Going to the hospital is all about money.* (Oko)

*Because I don’t have money to go to the hospital, I buy medicine from the pharmacy shop.* (Meefua)

Another reason for going back home was for fear of inadequate care, in the absence of family members:

*Well, over here your friends may not have enough money to pay your health bills and you might not get the care you need. At home your mother or somebody will take care of you.* (Kuuku)

*Since none of our relatives are here, it will be very difficult if we are admitted at the hospital.* (Joojo)

One respondent indicated that he did not go to the hospital, because he thought his sickness could not be treated there:

*Yes there is a hospital here but the sickness may not be a hospital sickness. My eyes got swollen and at another time my hand also got swollen and on both occasions, I went back home.* (Yao)

### 4.6.4.1 Sources of Health Information

One of the challenges faced by youth in Ghana, as mentioned in the Ghana Youth Policy, is their high vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS. Thus the study also explored the knowledge and sources of information in order to inform stakeholders. The findings indicate that there is a general awareness of HIV/AIDS among all participants. However with regard to depth of knowledge, the male participants (as a result of their education) are more knowledgeable about the symptoms, acquisition and prevention of HIV/AIDS, and
STDs such as gonorrhea, vaginal thrush (Candidiasis infection commonly called white by Ghanaians), and syphilis as demonstrated by these respondents:

You can get a disease like HIV. There is also another one that is called gonorrhea. You can protect yourself by using a condom when having sex. But as far as I am concerned, it is not necessary to have a girlfriend if you are not old enough to marry. (Ago)

Syphilis and Gonorrhoea. I have seen someone who got Gonorrhoea after sleeping with a girl. I am really scared of it. HIV kills and destroys lives. It makes people distance themselves from you and leaves you thinking all the time and finally kills you. It is acquired through indiscriminate sex and being cut by an HIV contaminated blade. For protection, it is either you will stop chasing women or you will use condoms every time you have sex. (Baako)

Gonorrhoea. Is it the same as Babaso11? What I know about it (HIV) is that if you are infected and I touch you, I may also be infected. You will have skin rashes like boils all over your body. There are several ways of contracting the disease. These include having sex with a woman who is infected and kissing her while she has a bleeding gum. There is no medication to treat it. (Joojo)

I have heard about white (candidiasis) and HIV. That person should desist from womanizing and avoid contact with used blades, sponge and other things. But womanizing is the main cause of HIV and therefore if you desist from womanizing, you will be free of it. (Abeeku)

You can get HIV, ...Gonorrhoea (Adusa)

AIDS results in sickness and death. He has to use a CD [name for condoms, among the male participants]. (Kwesi)

I know of HIV. They also talk about Gonorrhoea. Because I want to protect myself from these diseases that is why I don’t have a girlfriend. (Oko)

You can contract HIV/AIDS. You have to use a condom [for protection]. (Kweku)

I heard about HIV when I was in the primary level in school and when I grew up I also heard about White [candidiasis]. You have to abstain from sex. (Abeeku)

AIDS results in sickness and death. It stays in the body for a long time and weakens the person. The person grows very lean and eventually dies, and people will not know the kind of disease that killed him. He has to use a CD [condom]. (Kwesi)

11 Babaso is the local name for gonorrhea.
The findings also indicate that in spite of their education some of the male participants have incorrect information about HIV/AIDS, such as getting infected through touch or coming into contact with a sponge used by an HIV infected person, prevention by avoiding mosquito bites, and availability of a cure. Below are some of the responses:

*What I know about it is that if you are infected [with HIV/AIDS] and I touch you, I may also be infected.* (Joojo)

*You don’t have to go after women; avoid mosquito bites by staying away from bushes; don’t share [a razor] blade with any other person.* (Kwabena)

*I know that it is a deadly disease which, when not properly cured, can kill anyone who is infected. I have heard on the radio that they have found a cure for it.* (Manu)

The findings indicate that the female participants are also aware of HIV/AIDS, and have basic knowledge that one can be infected with the disease through sex. However they do not seem to know about its symptoms, treatment, and the other ways by which one can be infected as illustrated by these responses:

*They said that when you see a man you should not just follow him because you may not know whether he has a sickness or not.* (Ajoa)

*If a girl sleeps around with boys sometimes you realize a change in her, her skin begins to change and you might not know the kind of disease she has.* (Akosua)

*We pray that no one gets that disease. If you do not mess around with boys you will not get that sickness.* (Sisi)

*Your tummy will be big and your skin will look bad* [describing symptoms of HIV/AIDS]. (Abena)

*I don’t know how one gets the disease, but I hear people mention it often.* (Esi)

*They say one gets bodily pains when one is infected and then if the person buys medicine to drink, he is healed.* (Maame)

The study participants were asked about their sources of information on HIV/AIDS. The findings indicate that their main sources of information are school (32%) and TV (28%). Others are radio
(16%), market women (12%), Hometown association (8%), friends (8%), grapevine (8%), and mother (4%). Below are some of their responses:

We learnt it in school as part of the curriculum. (Joojo)

It is part of the science [lessons] we learn in school. (Oko)

We learnt this in school. (Kwabena)

Yes, we were taught at school. (Kuuku)

I learnt it in school. (Tawiah)

We watched the advert on TV. (Ago)

From the TV; sometimes on Saturday evenings, because we don’t work on Sundays, we watch the TV. (Akosua)

From the TV or sometimes as we walk about, they will be saying it on someone’s radio, and then we listen to it. (Sisi)

I heard about it both at the market and on the radio. (Meefua)

I heard it from the market women. We hear them when they are talking about it. (Afua)

I learnt it from the radio. (Baako)

I learnt it from a schoolmate who liked going after women and is now infected with the disease. (Kwesi)

My mother told me. She said I should be careful and not play with boys because there is HIV/AIDS. (Abena)

4.6.4.2 Summary of Everyday Health and Health Information Seeking

The findings show that homeless youth generally seek health care from pharmacies for minor ailments. When they are seriously ill though, they either go to the hospital or travel back home for medical attention. Those who cannot afford healthcare are assisted with financial contributions from their friends.

Problems associated with seeking healthcare relate to funding and the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Some participants were not enrolled in the NHIS. Some of those enrolled in the scheme forgot to carry their NHIS membership cards with them, in travelling to
Accra. Others left them behind deliberately, for fear they might lose them through theft, or for lack of proper storage in their living spaces. Their lack of NHIS cards in the city hindered health seeking from the hospitals. They are not able to afford hospital-based healthcare without insurance coverage. Other occasional reasons for going home in the event of a serious sickness were fear of inadequate care in the absence of a family member and the perception that an ailment might not be treatable in hospital.

There was no indication that participants actively searched for health information. They learned about sexually transmitted diseases from the classroom, from friends, by watching television, listening to radio broadcasts and to the conversations of market women. Although they are aware that HIV/AIDS is a dangerous illness, some of the information they hold on it is incorrect, such as that HIV/AIDS is curable, or that it can be contracted through physical contact with infected persons, or by mosquito bites.

4.6.5 School Information Seeking Behaviour

The findings showed that the main sources of school information for the homeless youth were their lesson notes and textbooks.

I don’t have anywhere else apart from my books. (Kojo)

I get all the information from the books I read. (Oko)

In school, apart from the lesson time when the teacher teaches, we learn what we learnt in school again [re-read our lesson notes]. (Fiifi)

I pick a book and I read from 7pm and I close at 9pm and then sleep. (Badu)

When I was in school, I couldn’t get money to buy pamphlets and handouts, so I had to rely on what was taught by the teacher in class. (Abeeku)

Some participants mentioned that they had school libraries from which they borrowed books or used as reading rooms.

We had a library in the school so we went there to read. (Abeeku)
There is a library in the school and we are allowed to go and take books and study. I go to pick a book to study and when I am through with it, I go for another one and then another. (Adusa)

I go and read story books from the library and as I read, I look up words from the dictionary. (Kuuku)

I used to go there [the school library] when I was in forms 1 and 2, but I never stepped there when I got to form 3. When you go there, they give you some books to read till you are tired and you go home. (Kweku)

I borrow the books [from the library] and take them home to study and return them the next day. (Yoofi)

They also engaged in active information seeking for their school work, especially when they did not understand the lessons taught them. On such occasions they sought explanations or clarifications from their teachers, friends, siblings and, or seniors. Below are some of their responses:

I asked my friends for explanations and sometimes I asked the teachers too. (Abeeku)

I raise my hand and ask questions [in class]. (Kuuku)

I ask my teachers for explanations.
I ask my study partner to explain to me, if he understands [the lesson]. (Kweku)

I usually take the book to the teacher and ask him, or her to explain that particular topic to me, since I did not understand it when it was being taught. (Joojo)

I always went to my teacher for explanations and he explains [the lessons] to me. I was close to the teachers, because they took me as their errand boy, because they were strangers in the town and I also took the opportunity to learn a lot from them. (Baako)

If I don’t understand what I am learning, I ask the master for him to explain it to me. If I come home and I don’t understand anything, I go to my friend for him to teach me. (Tawiah)

I write it down and take it to school for the teacher to explain it to me. We help ourselves a lot. If you don’t know something, another person will help you. When we got to form two and our seniors were in form three, if we had any difficulty in solving an assignment in class, we asked our seniors for help. (Anane)

If I am in Kumasi I have friends who are better than I am in school, so if I don’t understand anything I go to them for explanation, or I could also go for explanation from one of our teachers who lives close by. (Oko)

I have a sibling who explains it to me. (Yoofi)
Problems encountered in their school information seeking included lack of money to buy textbooks.

*If we had money to buy books and uniforms, we wouldn’t come here; we would rather stay at home and attend extra classes during vacations.* (Kojo)

*Also, I didn’t have money to buy books.* (Tawiah)

*I liked education a lot, but due to financial constraints I couldn’t pay my fees and buy books.* (Baako)

One respondent mentioned that they sometimes lack understanding of the text they read:

*We are able to read the words but we don’t understand them and that is the problem. I don’t have one [a dictionary] personally, but there is one in the school.* (Adusa)

Further questioning revealed that he could not afford to buy a dictionary.

The need to raise money to fund their education was a distraction from their school information seeking, since they were not able to concentrate on their studies:

*Also when I come here I am not able to concentrate on my studies, because I keep thinking about making money and studying at the same time and it is my prayer that God will help me get money to go to school. Anytime I come here, I don’t take my studies serious.* (Oko)

*Because of the absence of money, my education is not going on smoothly as it should because I have to work to make money when I could have been studying.* (Kojo)

Another problem is inadequate school facilities/equipment such as too few computers that hamper their interest in, and understanding of ICT courses, lack of lights in the school making it impossible to study at night, and limited library facilities. Below are some of their responses.

*We don’t have a computer in the school and yet we learn ICT. If you are learning ICT without a computer, you won’t understand it so we need a computer in the school.* (Adusa)

*What disturbs my studies is the fact that we don’t have enough computers for ICT studies in my school and in effect, a lot of students get crowded around one computer making ICT studies not interesting.* (Oko)
We don’t have light in the school to study at night and so we will be happy if the government can help in that regard. (Abeeku)

We do have a library, but it is a very small place. Also, some people come to the library and make a lot of noise, disturbing those who are studying. Because of that I don’t enjoy going there. (Oko)

4.6.5.1 Summary of Everyday School Information Seeking

Participants who were students relied on their lesson notes and print sources, for their school information. Their print sources were textbooks and in some instances, books from their school libraries. They actively sought for information when they needed further explanations, by consulting human sources such as teachers, friends, siblings and their seniors.

Problems encountered in their school information seeking include lack of money to buy books, lack of concentration on studies when looking for money in the city, inadequate time to study because of working in the city to raise money, inadequate school infrastructure, such as library facilities, computers for ICT education, and lights in the school to be able to study in the evenings.

4.6.6 Financial Management

The findings revealed that more than half of the participants (53.7%) saved their daily earnings with local micro-financing agents called “susu” collectors. They withdrew their savings when they were ready to go back to their hometowns or villages. They also get financial advice from their friends.

We have a bank here where we keep our money. There is a “susu” man out there in a [shipping] container kiosk that collects and keeps the money. (Koku)

I save with the susu collector. (Adusa)

There is a susu collector here who saves the money for us when we come back from work. (Ago)

We save with a “susu” man at New Town. (Badu)

All I know is the susu operator to whom my friend took me. That is where we all save when we come here. (Fiifi)
No, we save the money we make during the day with the susu agency and when it is time for us to go, we go and take it from the susu agency and go. (Joojo)

I give the money I make to my sister to save with the susu people for me. (Kai)

When I make money, I save with the susu collector just behind us here. (Kobi)

We save at a bank on the way to New Town.
It is a building but not big; it is like a store. The person sells there and collects the money also. (Manu)

The micro savings processes are explained by the following respondents:

First you have to buy the card for [50Gp].
Yes, if you mark GHc1 [67 cents] for 31 days, at the end, his is GHc1 and if you pay GHc2 [US$1.33] daily, at the end, he will deduct GHc2 as his commission.
If you decide to stay for two years, you can continue to pay to the collector till it is time for you to go home then you go and collect the money. (Ago)

I save GHc1 [(67 cents) regularly].
... the card is numbered up to 31 so you can mark as many as you want in a day. So if you make GHc5 [US$3.33] in a day, you can mark 5 times. And the end, yours will be GHc30 [US$20] and the susu man’s commission is GHc1 [67 cents].
Yes, when it is time for you go home, then you go and collect it. (Badu)

There is a card with the front ruled up to [GHc31 (US$20.67)] and the back also [GHc31], if you are able to complete it, it amounts to [GHc62 (US$41.33)], he gives you [GHc60 (US$40)] and [GHc2 (US$1.33)] is his profit. You will have to determine how much you want to pay daily, it could be [GHc2], [GHc5 (US$3.33)], etc. If you pay [50Gp (33 cents)], at the end of the card, you will pay him [50Gp] and you earn [GHc15 (US$10)]. (Koku)

If you deposit [GHc1 (67 cents)] daily, it will amount to [GHc30 (US$20)] monthly. If it is time for you to go, you will be given [GHc29 (US$19.33)] and he will keep GHc1. If you save [GHc5 (US$3.33)] daily, it will amount to [GHc150 (US$100)] monthly and he will take [GHc5]. That is how it is done, if you save [50Gp (33 cents)] he will take [50Gp], if you save [GHc20 (US$13.33)] he will take [GHc20]. (Manu)

Some of the participants gave their monies to trusted customers, or family members for safe keeping, as indicated by the following respondents:

Some people give their monies to their customers, but those who have their [older] sisters here give their monies to them for safekeeping. (Maana)

I give it to my sister for safe keeping. (Fafa)

What some people do is that they give their monies to their customers to keep for them...
What we do is we have bags in the rooms of the customers, in which our monies are kept under lock and key and we keep the keys ourselves. (Maana)

I used to work with a certain Kenkey\textsuperscript{12} seller so my things are with her and that is where I keep my money. (Mansa)

The participants were asked to indicate how they obtained money on days when they earned nothing. The findings showed that on such occasions they borrowed money from their friends and paid it back as soon as possible.

You have to borrow money from your friend and pay back the next day when you return from work. (Mensah)

When I don’t have money, I borrow from a friend and pay back when I go to work and make some money. (Nsiah)

On days that you don’t get money, you borrow from your friend. (Tsoo)

If someone is not able to go to work on a particular day, he can borrow money from the others and pay back when he goes to work the next day. (Joojo)

Oh as for them [porters from her village] if you need something, maybe money, she will give it to you then when you get it, you pay back. (Sisi)

Those people who have been here for a long time, when new people come and do not get money for the day, they [the newcomers] will approach them and say, “my sister, today I did not get anything so if you have money please help me out”. (Akosua)

The one respondent, who saved with a bank, relied on her savings on days when she earned nothing:

You will draw on your savings, then as soon as you get the money, you pay back; that is what we do. (Sisi)

Some of the participants were asked to explain why they avoided using the formal banking system. Their reasons indicated a general preference for the susu system over the formal banking system, lack of knowledge of the procedures of the formal banking system and the inability to meet the initial deposit requirement of the banks:

\textsuperscript{12} Kenkey is a local delicacy made from corn dough.
With the banks we cannot afford the initial deposit amount, that is why we give it to the gentleman [the susu operator]. He is well known for keeping the monies of all shoeshine boys. That is why we all take our monies to him. (Nsiah)

I don’t know about the banks around here. All I know is the susu operator to whom my friend took me. That is where we all save when we come here. (Fiifi)

I don’t know if the bank will accept our kind of saving. We save the money with the susu collector right up here and then write our names. (Kwabena)

Opening a bank account involves money and the nature of our job does not earn us a lot of money. With the susu, if you make GH¢3 [US$2], you can decide to save GH¢2 [US$1.33] and it is acceptable. (Ago)

One respondent thought she would need someone’s help in opening a bank account.

We don’t have anybody to lead us to the bank and open accounts for us. (Maame)

There was no indication that participants had any problems with their chosen financial systems. Here is one respondent’s comment about the susu system, when he was asked to recount any problems associated with it:

Please there is no problem associated with the susu. When we go there, all he does is to write our names and give us a number. So if you go there and mention your number, he checks your name and he collects the money, and that’s it. (Kobi)

Those who saved with their customers also mentioned that they had ready access to their monies, especially in times of emergencies, such as when they needed to go home at short notice. They considered the opening hours of the banks too restrictive, as mentioned by this respondent:

Yes, because the banks close at a certain time and if I decide to leave tonight, I will not be able to access my money if it is saved in the bank, but if it is with my customer, I can have access to it. Usually when a relative dies, we are obligated to go back home at all cost. (Maana)

Another respondent who saved with a formal bank suggested that some homeless youth did not use the formal banking system, because they were in the city for short stays:
If you know you will stay longer in Accra, you keep it in a bank. Some are here for just two months and they keep their monies [outside the banking system]. I keep my money in the bank. (Sisi)

Two of the respondents indicated that they saved monies they earn in the city in bank accounts held in their hometowns.

When someone is going home I send the bulk of the money to my father to save in an account I have opened in my hometown. (Koku)

I give it to my father to put it in his bank account. (Anane)

The findings also indicate that they obtain financial advice and loans from their friends as indicated by these responses:

Because you might waste the little money you get on your girl friends and would not be able to send money home when needed or save any money at all. (Kuuku)

The boy you just spoke to is a good friend of mine, I needed to pay some money in school which I did not have, he gave me money to pay and I later refunded it to him. I also helped him pay for something and he later refunded the money to me. (Fiifi)

4.6.6.1 Summary of Everyday Life Information Seeking for Financial Management

A majority of the participants used a local microfinance “susu” system introduced to them by their friends, to save the monies they earned. They adjudged the susu system as flexible, user friendly and suitable for their everyday life financial management needs. Others saved their monies with trusted customers and family members. Participants’ reasons for not using the formal banking systems included lack of initial deposits, a perception that the bank would not accept small amounts of savings, and bank-imposed restrictions on access to their monies. They relied on their friends for financial support on days when they earned nothing.

4.6.7 Food

The findings show that participants normally feed themselves from their day’s earnings. On days when they do not have money to buy food, their friends or family members either share their meals with them, or give them money to feed themselves.
Sometimes when business is bad and I don’t have any money to buy food, my friends do help me out. (Koku)

If your friend goes to work but comes back with no money, you can invite him to eat with you when you buy food. (Kweku)

If my friend does not have money to buy food, I am able to give him some money to buy food. (Baako)

If I don’t get money for the day, she [sister] gives me money for food. (Mansa)

I asked her [cousin] for GH¢1 to buy food on a particular day when business was very bad for me. (Meefua)

When for a reason someone is not able to work on a particular day, we are able to give money to such a person to buy food. (Yoofi)

Sometime ago I came here and I got seriously injured and couldn’t walk. My friends bought me food till I was strong enough to go back home for further treatment. (Kojo)

If someone is unable to go to work and he does not have money to buy food, you can give him some money to buy food and he will pay you back. (Abeeku)

If someone does not have money for food and I have some money, I give her some to buy food, in the hope that when I also don’t have money to buy food, she will also give me money to buy food. (Maana)

The responses above suggest that the main barrier to obtaining food is lack of money to buy on days with no earnings.

4.6.8 Strategies for Addressing Issue of Security

The security problems encountered by participants were theft and, with respect to female participants, sexual assault. Both problems were related to their lack of access to secure shelters. The participants adopted personal and collective strategies to keep themselves safe, in the absence of any form of government protection. The strategies included holding minimal cash only for food and other emergencies, with the rest in a deposit box lodged with the susu collector.

We have no protection against them, except that we are advised to keep minimal cash only for emergencies on us and save with the susu agency, as and when we make the money. We also have a place near the susu agency where we keep the box and we pay [20Gp (13 cents)] everyday. The emergency money is kept in the box. (Baako)
So you save what you make for the day and only keep what you will use to buy food. (Fiifi)

Female participants protected themselves from thieves and sexual molesters by collectively assaulting anyone who tried to molest one of them, as narrated by these respondents:

Sometimes people come around to steal, or try to have sex with one of us. When we catch the person, we beat him or then he runs away. (Akosua)

Also sometimes, a boy may try to have sex with one of us and in such situations, we all gang up and beat this person up and if we can't beat him, we cry out for others to come to our aid to catch him and beat him up. Then he does not come again. (Ama)

We all wake and beat him up and then drive him away, so that he will not come again another time. (Efia)

When they attack you, you cry out and people will hear it and beat him. (Esi)

One respondent mentioned that they sometimes kept awake to guard their belongings, in reaction to reports of robbery in the neighbourhood:

No, but sometimes thieves try to steal our belongings and on such occasions, we have to stay awake in order to keep them away. (Meehua)

The findings show that they have no protection from law enforcement agencies so they provide their own security against thieves and sexual molesters by using both collective and individual strategies, such as coming together to assault an attacker and holding only minimal amounts of cash for emergencies.

4.6.9 Everyday Information Seeking Behaviour for the Administration of Justice

The findings also show that, in the administration of justice the homeless youth rely on friends, trusted elderly, parents, and Hometown Association Leaders for mediation and counselling. Other sources are self appointed arbitrators who charge the youth for mediation services rendered. For example Oko who was working as a mobile phone units vendor was robbed of $107 for purchase of more phone units. The owner of the business did not believe him. She became so furious that he feared she would hand him over to the police so he approached an
elderly man who mediated on his behalf after having a discussion on the matter with his parents via a phone call. Eventually the woman relented and agreed to a settlement that Oko must work and pay for the money which he did. Below is part of his story:

\[ I \text{ called my parents and I made them speak to the elderly person with whom I went to plead...} \]
\[ \text{From the way she was angry, if not because of the elderly person with whom I went to plead, she would have caused my arrest for sure. She asked me to pay the amount of } \text{¢1,500,000 (about $107) and so I started shining shoes and I saved money till I was able to pay the amount...} \ (\text{Oko}) \]

In the event of false accusation, they have to either rely on a trusted friend or an elderly person to prove their innocence.

\[ \text{They can accuse you of stealing if you don’t have a good friend who will support you in times like this, ... you will have to look for an elderly person to plead on your behalf and promise not to repeat it again.} \ (\text{Mensah}) \]

The findings also revealed that they have leaders who seek their welfare and also act as arbitrators and counsellors. One of the head porters mentioned that they have two leaders, a man and a woman who solved their problems and on one occasion hired a bus to transport all of them (the head porters) to a place (she did not know the name of the location) to meet other leaders. These are some of her responses:

\[ \text{Well most of us are from the same area so we know each other. We all have two leaders so if there is a problem they see to it. They will have a meeting with you and counsel you to stop because here such behaviours can bring you great trouble.} \]
\[ \text{Yes, a man and a woman. They all live at Malata [the name of the market].} \]
\[ \text{They also meet and discuss our welfare. There was a time, they took all of us in buses to a place (I don’t know the name) to meet the other leaders.} \ (\text{Sisi}) \]

They also engage in peer-to-peer mediation in the event of a fight as mentioned by one of the respondent:

\[ \text{...We talk to the parties involved to stop the fight.} \ (\text{Kojo}) \]
The findings also suggest that some of their townsmen take advantage of them and charge them for mediation services.

\[
\text{Some of the boys from our hometown are here. When you have a problem you will tell them but they will charge you for it. If someone is pestering or harassing or wanting to pick a quarrel with you, you can go to them for help but they would ask you to pay. (Ama)}
\]

When the researcher enquired about the status of the person here is the response received:

\[
I \text{ don’t know that. There is one called Haadi, if he catches you fighting, he will beat both of you up and you will still have to pay him. He will destroy all your things and if you drop your money in the process he will take it. The next day, he will call you and you will have to pay him. (Ama)}
\]

In seeking justice they use their leaders, friends, trusted elderly persons, parents, and self-appointed commercial arbitrators.

4.6.10 The Issue of Respect and Unfair Wages

Although homeless youth in the study complained of unfair wages and undeserved verbal insults, they felt powerless to address these problems; as one respondent explained:

\[
\text{Yes, sometimes there are some people who refuse to pay the agreed fee and on such occasions we don’t argue with them but leave the scene. If the person says her money is not up to the fee what can you do? (Efia)}
\]

\[
\text{Sometimes we get insults from people we have done nothing against, and we can’t do anything about it because we came to meet them here. (Meefua)}
\]

\[
I \text{ arrange them [products for sale in a shop] in the morning and pack them away in the evening for GH¢2, [US$1.33]. It’s not good, but you don’t have a choice. (Esi)}
\]

The respondent explained further that it was in her interest not to protest, because the offending customer may interpret her inaction as a sign of goodwill and continue doing business with her.

\[
\text{Next time when she sees you, she will know that you are a good girl and she may give you another job to do. (Efia)}
\]
Others had accepted the problem as part of the risks of their job, as suggested by these respondents:

*Every job has its own problems, when we carry the load, some will give us enough money, others will pay us little money.* (Akua)

A protest on such occasions may invite verbal or physical abuse, such as the following respondent experienced, when he complained to a defaulting customer:

*Yes I have been beaten before. I charged him [the customer] GHc1 [67 cents] and he also gave me [40Gp (27 cents)] and this resulted in an argument and I ended up being beaten.* (Adusa)

The findings showed that homeless youth are not able to address the verbal and physical abuse they encounter and the unfair wages customers sometimes pay them because they are powerless. The actions they took include ignoring the offence, accepting it as part of the risks of the job, and using the inaction to win the favour of customers. Actions such as complaining or protesting exposed them to further verbal or physical attacks.

### 4.6.11 The Mass Media and Everyday Life Information Seeking for Homeless Youth

The study explored radio and television as sources of information, in the everyday life information seeking behaviour of homeless youth. Participants were asked to indicate their patronage of radio and television and the purposes for which they used them. The findings showed a high patronage for television. Seventy-eight percent of participants indicated they watched television, compared with 48.8% who listened to the radio.

#### 4.6.11.1 Television as a Source of Information

The findings revealed that their favourite programmes were the news and sports broadcasts; mainly soccer matches. These broadcasts were popular among male respondents. Other well-patronized programmes are movies, a program focused on life issues, a comedy show and a phone-in quiz program. They watched television in their hometowns either in their homes or
neighbours’ houses. In the city they watched it at nearby shops. Below are some of their responses:

I have not watched television ever since I have been here. I watch it back home. (Badu)

No, unless I go to the roadside [In answer to a question, do you have TV where you sleep?] (Akua)

We watch it in a lady’s shop in the neighbourhood. (Joojo) [talking about Accra].

There is a records [music] store near where we sleep where we watch. (Ajoa)

There is a man from our hometown here who owns one and he allows us to watch a bit. (Kal)

I like watching football on TV. I also listen to a bit of news. Football is my favourite. (Abeeku)

I like watching football and news on TV. (Oko)

I usually watch the news. On my way home after studying; at about 8pm, I watch the news. (Anane)

If I will watch it, then it is either news or football. (Baako)

I only like to watch the news and after that, I don’t watch anything else. (Fiifi)

I like watching the news. When I was in school I watched the news at 6:30 [pm]. Apart from news, I don’t watch any programme on TV. (Kobi)

The programs were many, but I enjoyed watching movies and football matches. (Kuuku)

[I watch] Football and news.
I enjoy watching football matches and some learning programmes, where people are asked questions and they phone in to answer. (Kweku)

I like watching football and I also enjoy watching ‘Mmaa Nkomo’ [a discussion program with focus on life issues]. (Kwesi)

I enjoy watching film and when they are broadcasting the news. (Tawiah)

Sometimes it is African movie Agoro and Cantata [a comedy show]. (Kwabena)

The findings indicate that the male participants were purposeful in their television watching habits. They were able to articulate the main reasons why they watched their favourite programmes. Some of their reasons included: keeping informed on current issues in the country
and abroad, life lessons, health-related lessons and counselling. The responses below catalogue some of their reasons:

- The news informs us about what the government is doing to bring development that will improve upon our lives. After the news I don’t watch anything else. (Fiifi)

- Sometimes they show us certain things happening in other countries. (Ago)

- The reason is I get to hear what is going on in the country. (Oko)

- Sometimes the TV news shows children learning in school and when they come back home, they again take their books and read over their notes. I have learnt to do same which has really helped me. (Adusa)

- I like the way they talk about HIV and other issues. (Kwesi)

- I watch it because it transforms your mind and you get to hear preachings [of the gospel]. I also get a lot of advice from some of the programmes I watch on TV. (Manu)

- I learnt on TV that stealing can result in being killed by a mob, or being shot by the police. Because of this, I have vowed never to engage myself in stealing anybody’s property. (Nsiah)

- When someone does something wrong and is punished, I learn not to do anything like that. (Tawiah)

- They advise people as to how to live a moral and upright life which will lead to progress. They advise that one should be truthful at all times. They also talk about AIDS and give advice on how to protect ourselves from contracting it. (Yao)

Female participants who indicated that they watched television were not as selective in their patronage of televised programmes, but watched whatever was being broadcast, as indicated in these responses:

- I just watch anything they show. (Akua)

- I just browse the channels and watch anything interesting. (Maana)

- I just watch anything that is being shown. (Yaa)

- Well we just watch whatever is being shown; sometimes a [telecast] film, or then we watch videos. (Ajoa)

Only two female participants were able to articulate their reasons for watching television:
Watching TV will make you wise. Sometimes you learn something good from what you watch and that is why we watch. (Sisi)

Sometimes you will watch the TV and see a child insulting an adult and he is punished. When you see that you learn not to do it. (Alua)

A possible reason for female participants’ lack of selectivity and purpose in watching television might lie in the language of broadcasts. Most programmes are delivered in the English language, which can be a barrier to understanding the content:

I do not understand the language [English] so when we are watching TV, I ask the one who understands to translate what they are saying. (Akua)

As already indicated, the majority of the female participants were uneducated, in contrast with their male counterparts, who had higher levels of formal education.

Some of the participants were not able to watch television at all, or as often as they would like to, because of lack of time, fatigue after the day’s job, lack of access and a need to retire early, due to the nature of their jobs. Both the shoe shine and the head porter jobs which most participants performed require an early start time, to increase the prospect of getting any customers at all. Observations by the researcher revealed that most head porters start work at 4:30 am and shoe shine boys, at 6:30 am. The responses below express some of their reasons for not watching television:

Not often, only when I have time. (Akua)

Sometimes I do watch it and other times I come back too tired and sleepy to watch it. (Ama)

We [shoe shine workers] come home from work very tired and so after bathing, we sleep. We don’t go out. (Badu)

I feel sleepy anytime I watch it and because of that, I go to sleep after bathing. (Maana)

I don’t watch television. I go to bed immediately after eating. (Efia)

I watch it once in a while because I usually come home very tired. (Joojo)
Please I don’t know how to watch television. My father did not own a television so I am not used to watching television and I did not like going to other people’s homes to watch, where mostly kids are turned out. I don’t like such embarrassments. Growing up, I have not learnt to watch it; I will fall asleep if I watch it. (Kojo)

Because we don’t have one here we don’t watch TV. (Meefua)

Yes I don’t get television to watch. (Koku)

4.6.11.1 Summary of Television as a Source of Information

Homeless youth (especially male adolescents) watch television to keep current on national issues, for entertainment and for life lessons. Their favourite programmes include news, sports (mainly soccer) and movies. Male adolescents are selective in the programmes they watch, while female adolescents watch whatever is available. Barriers to patronage of television include lack of access, language, lack of time and fatigue due to their economic activities.

4.6.11.2 Radio as a Source of Information

The findings showed that 48.8% of participants listen to the radio. They listened to it from their own sets, their neighbours, or from radio sets of clients as they go about their jobs. Others have FM radios on their mobile phones. Below are some of their responses in their own words:

I listen to Sarkodie [a talk show on current affairs] on the phone. (Koku)

Yes I have a small one in my room [in his hometown]. (Kobi)

There is a gentleman near our place where you came to call us who has a radio and I usually go and sit there to listen. (Kwesi)

Their favourite programmes are the news, sports commentaries, and music:

I listen to radio a lot. I listen to the news. (Kojo)

When I am looking for clients and I get to a place where there is a radio and it is time for the news or football commentary, I stop and listen for a while. (Baako)

... I like the news; I don’t like music. (Fiifi)

I listen to Peace FM a lot. I listen to its morning show “Kokrokoo” [a news programme in a local language devoted to current issues in the country] everyday. (Abeeku)

I like to listen to football commentary. (Koku)
[I listen to] Music and news. (Kwabena)

I like the songs. (Kuuku)

I like to listen to sports commentary and gospel music on the radio. (Kwesi)

I like listening to sports. (Kweku)

They listen to the news to be informed about current issues in the country and the laws of the land, as indicated by these respondents:

The radio keeps me informed about issues going on in the country. (Koku)

It makes you know what is going on in the country. They also have a lot of programmes and they report the facts. (Abeeku)

I have learnt that if anything bad happens in the country, it is announced for everybody to know about it. (Badu)

I like it because I have a radio and it keeps me informed about events and the dos and don’ts in the country. I really love the radio. Yes, so that I will not fall foul of the law. I listen to news a lot. (Kojo)

One participant enjoyed only one particular programme, because it teaches life lessons.

I listen to “Abrabo mu nsem” [Issues in Life] every Friday in my hometown. It teaches how a child can take care of himself or herself when the parents are not around. Apart from this, I don’t listen to any other programme, unless of course they are playing music, which I may listen to. (Kobi)

Some participants (mostly head porters) could not listen to the radio because of the nature of their work, and language barriers as indicated by the respondents:

Because of the roaming nature of our work, we don’t have the time to sit at one place and listen. (Maana)

No, the problem is as you carry the load along, you may hear the radio, but you cannot stop to listen. (Ajoa)

I walk all day looking for clients and don’t have time to listen to the radio. (Ama)

No, as for the radio, we do not listen to it because of the nature of our job. (Sisi)
I did not understand what they were saying [in answer to what was the last thing you heard on the radio]. (Maame)

4.6.11.2.1 Summary of Radio as a Source of Information

Homeless youth use radio to educate themselves about life issues, sports news, current affairs and the laws of the country. It is also a source of entertainment for the sports enthusiasts and music lovers among them. Barriers to listening to the radio include lack of understanding of the language, and their economic activities, particularly among the head porters, who are in constant motion looking for clients, or carrying loads for them.

4.7 Summary of Findings

This section summarizes findings on the background of participants, their expressed information needs, sources and barriers to their everyday life information seeking.

4.7.1 Background of Participants

- The 22 male and 19 female participants of the study come from Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Northern and Upper East regions of Ghana.
- Their ages range from 15 to 18 years. However, 84% of female participants could not tell their ages, because their parents have no records of the participants’ dates of birth.
- The males are better educated than the females: 26.3% of females had primary education only (Grade 1 to 6), compared with 81.8% of males who had secondary education (grade 7 to 12).
- Two of the female participants had toddler-age children. One of the two is married, the other is not.
- Participants are from low socio-economic backgrounds. Their parents are largely uneducated, subsistent crop farmers. Parents of 68.4% of the female and 31.8% of the male participants had no formal education, and have large families.
• The main cause of participants’ homelessness is poverty; 98% of them migrated to the city primarily to look for money. Other causes are lack of job opportunities in their places of origin, death of a parent, and observed affluence of peers returning from the city.

• Participants are mainly short term migrants to the city. Sixty eight percent of females and 42% of males indicated they had been in the city for less than five months. The female participants tended to stay longer than their male counterparts, nevertheless.

4.7.2 The Expressed Needs of Homeless Youth

• The needs of participants were derived from their problem statements. The statements were mostly of complaints about personal and social concerns without suggestion of a need for information (68.7%). A minority (28.2%) suggested a need for assistance or help and only 3.1% suggested a need for information.

• Eleven categories of needs were identified, namely money, shelter, education, employment, respect, security, health, skills acquisition, fair wages, food, and justice.

• Participants sought money to address immediate needs, such as food and clothing. They also sought it for long term needs, including educational and vocational goals, capital for business, and with some female participants, preparation for marriage.

• Their shelter concerns relate to lack of proper accommodation. They sleep outdoors and are therefore vulnerable to bad weather, mosquito bites, disruptive vehicular noise and rainfall.

• The educational needs they seek to address are largely economic and include funds to pay fees, buy school materials, or enter better endowed schools.

• Their employment concerns include the need for more stable income sources.

• Female participants’ need for respect relate to the frequent, unearned insults they receive from market women.

• Their vocational needs relate to funding trade-related apprenticeship training.
• They are often cheated by employers and customers who refuse to pay them agreed wages.

• Security issues they encounter relate to the theft of their monies and valuables, and sexual or physical assault, especially at night.

• Food was an issue, because they sometimes earn too little, or nothing to feed themselves in successive days.

• Justice issues relate to false accusations by peers and collective punishment by law enforcement agencies, without proof of guilt, or proper judicial process.

• Health issues centre on work-related bodily pains and headaches and the risk of contracting malaria through mosquito bites, in sleeping unprotected outdoors.

• The information needs were found to include physiological, safety, esteem, cognitive and self-actualization needs, using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a basis for categorization.

4.7.3 Information Behaviours, Sources of Information, and Barriers to Everyday Life Information Seeking of Homeless Youth

4.7.3.1 Everyday Life Employment Seeking Behaviour

• The majority of participants are self employed as head porters, shoe shines, or truck pushers. They relied on themselves and their network of friends to learn the skills of their jobs.

• The shoe-shine workers share information about finding one’s way about in the city, handling customers, managing sexual relationships and avoiding drug abuse with newcomers, to increase their chances of success.

• Participants looking for alternate jobs employed active seeking through word of mouth, passive searching by responding to employers’ offers, or relied on siblings and friends to research opportunities for them. They relied on the grapevine too, for information on job opportunities.

• Barriers or problems in their everyday job information seeking include lack of information on alternate job opportunities, lack of confidence to inquire about opportunities, lack of capital
to start small businesses, employers’ preference for youth without babies, lack of qualifications for specified jobs, and lack of job advice.

4.7.3.2 Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour for Shelter

- They meet their shelter needs by seeking permission from shop owners to sleep in front of their shops after-hours, contacting friends or siblings already in the city by phone or face-to-face for information on available shelter, or in order to join them where those persons live.
- Barriers to their shelter seeking include the lack of affordable rental housing and the perception of potential landlords that homeless youth are thieves.

4.7.3.3 Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour for Vocational Training or Skills Development

- Apprenticeship was found to be the main mode for vocational training open to participants. Acquisition of skills and information during training is acquired by instruction and observation of the Master craftsman, plus hands-on practice.
- The barriers to their skills development are lack of money to pay apprenticeship fees and living expenses like food for the duration of training.

4.7.3.4 Everyday Health Information Seeking Behaviour

- Participants’ health information behaviours include self-medication, consulting the pharmacist, and going to the hospital or back home only when seriously sick, often with financial and evacuation assistance from peers.
- Sources of STD and HIV/AIDS information are schools, TV, radio, market women, friends, gossip and mothers.
- The main barriers to their health information seeking is the high cost of medical care, which they must pay for either because they are not enrolled in the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), or do not have access to their NHIS cards which they left at home inadvertently, or deliberately for fear of theft.
4.7.3.5  **Everyday School Information Seeking Behaviour**

- Participants’ sources of school information are lesson notes, textbooks, pamphlets, libraries, teachers, friends, senior students and siblings.
- Barriers to their school information seeking include lack of money to pay school fees, or buy school materials like books and uniforms; lack of understanding of unfamiliar English words coupled with lack of access to dictionaries; lack of time for extra classes and private studies as a result of working in the city, and inadequate school infrastructure, such as lights for studying at night, computers and libraries.

4.7.3.6  **Everyday Financial Management**

- Participants save their earnings with local microfinance agents (Susu agents), trusted customers and family members as part of their financial management behaviour. They obtain financial advice and loans from their friends.
- Barriers to using the formal banking system included lack of knowledge about banking procedures, lack of adequate funds to meet the initial deposit requirement of banks, and a perception that they would not have access to their monies when they most needed them, if they saved with the banks.

4.7.3.7  **Everyday Seeking for Food**

- They use some of their daily earnings to buy food.
- They rely on their friends or family members for food on days when they earn too little, or nothing.
- The main barrier to obtaining food is lack of money on days when they earn too little, or nothing.

4.7.3.8  **Addressing the Issue of Security**

- Participants adopt a communal approach to address their security needs by cooperating to attack sexual molesters, or thieves.
• The main barrier to addressing their security needs is lack of access to the services of law enforcement agents.

4.7.3.9  Everyday Information Seeking Behaviour for the Administration of Justice

• Participants relied on trusted friends and elders, parents, Hometown Association leaders, and self appointed arbitrators for mediation and counseling in the event of conflicts, fights, or false accusations, in the administration of justice.

4.7.3.10  Addressing the Issue of Respect and Unfair Wages

• Homeless youth are powerless in addressing the verbal insults and unfair wages they receive from market women and customers.

• They adopt coping strategies such as ignoring the offence, accepting them as risks of the job, and using inaction as a device for demonstrating tolerance, to win more custom.

• The main barrier to addressing these issues is the fear of provoking physical abuse, or more verbal attacks when they protest.

4.7.3.11  The Mass Media and Everyday Life Information Seeking

• Seventy-eight percent of participants watched television and 48.8% listened to the radio.

• They patronized the media for entertainment such as movies, comedy, music, and sports; current affairs, including international and local news; educational programmes such as phone-in-quizzes, and counselling or information on life lessons and health issues.

• The male participants were found to be more purposeful in their selection and patronage of media programs than their female counterparts.

• The barriers to their media use include language barriers, fatigue after work, lack of time, lack of access to TV or radio, and with female participants, lack of concentration to listen to radio, due constant movement in pursuit of business.

The next chapter will discuss these findings in relation to the literature.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

Introduction

This chapter discusses the background and information environment of participants, including:

- Regions of origin
- Educational and socio-economic status
- Expressed needs
- Sources of information
- Information seeking behaviours and
- Barriers they encounter in seeking information

It relates these attributes to prior work on information seeking by homeless youth, together with the theoretical foundations of the study.

Analysis of the data revealed that the information needs of participants operationalized as the issues, concerns and problems of study participants (based on Dervin’s (1976) approach) are largely focussed on their everyday life needs, with only 3% of their problem statements suggesting a need for information. Therefore the researcher has chosen to discuss the findings in the context of their everyday life needs to reflect their true expressions. In the context of the Library and Information Science literature, this approach favours Wilson’s (2006) assertion that the motivation for any search for information is to satisfy one or more of the human basic needs. Wilson further argued that it is preferable to do away with the phrase ‘information need’, since focussing on the term does not highlight the information seekers’ purpose or their motivation.

Participants’ life needs are closely related to their information needs. It will be noted in the discussions that follow that although they could not express their problems in terms of information needs, possibly because of their low socio-economic status, they sought or received information about their life needs or in relation to them, in their information seeking behaviours.
The approach will also inform stakeholders about the nature of participants’ everyday life needs and how those needs can be met. It will fulfill one of the purposes for which the interpretive tradition was adopted for the study; that is, to acknowledge and incorporate the perspectives of study participants in the study report. In other words, the focus of the homeless youth participating in the study is how to meet their everyday life needs. Therefore it is appropriate to focus the discussion in the context of their life needs, rather than information needs.

5.1 **Background of Participants**

Forty-one homeless youth participated in the study. Twenty-two (53.7%) of them were male and 19 (46.3%) of them female. This is relatively close to a representation of the national population, in which 48.7% are males and 51.3% are females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2011). Participants came from the Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Northern and Upper East regions of Ghana to Accra to look for jobs. Table 5.1 compares the percentages of participants by origin, to regional population figures (Ghana Statistical Service, 2011). It can be seen from the data that the percentages of participants from the four regions do not reflect the national population figures from the most recent population census.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% of participants</th>
<th>2010 national population census percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brong Ahafo</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper East</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 - Origin of homeless youth, by regional population share

The imbalances were introduced by the snowball sampling technique used for recruiting the study participants, though they may also reflect distributions among homeless youth (who do not reflect regional population proportions on a per capita basis). Youth migration from rural communities to Accra dates back to the pre-independence era of Ghana. It became significant
after the British colonial administration relocated its headquarters in 1877, from Cape Coast in the Central region to Accra. As a result of that move, Accra became the centre for both international and local trade, industries, transportation and finance, making it the preferred location for internal migrants in search of a better life. After Ghana attained independence from British rule in 1957, subsequent administrations maintained the status of Accra, building it as the best endowed regional capital in the country (Yankson, 2003, Konadu-Agyemang, 2001). This explains why the youth in the study regard Accra as the preferred destination when they are in search of jobs.

The female participants of the study come from two regions of the northern part of the country, namely, the upper east and the northern regions. This is consistent with the findings of the Ghana Child Labour Survey (GCLS) conducted by Ghana Statistical Services. A total of 2,314 street children participated in that study and the majority (66.6%) of youth in the 15-17 years age bracket were found to be girls from the Northern (58.1%) and Upper East (8.5%) regions alone (Ghana Statistical Service, 2003). The influx of girls from this region is partly explained by regional inequalities in development, often referred to as the North-South divide. (The regions in the north are the Upper East, Upper West and Northern regions; the remaining seven regions, Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti, Western, Eastern, Central, Volta and Greater Accra make up the South, see Figure 4.1). This divide has been ascribed to the poor climate and remote location of towns in the north, and to a colonial policy which subordinated northerners to southerners (Shepherd and Gyimah-Boadi, 2006). The bulk of agricultural activities and production of resources such as cocoa, which is the leading cash crop in Ghana, together with natural resources like forests and minerals (gold and diamonds) are concentrated in the south. The south also has more lush vegetation, because it experiences two rainy seasons annually. By contrast, the North is located in the savannah belt with poor soil conditions and erratic rainfall. There is only one rainy season and consequently, one cropping cycle. Therefore while the north makes up 40% of the total land mass of Ghana, it produces only 14% of the total agricultural output (Roe and Schneider, cited
by Langer and Stewart, 2008). The south received the bulk of both human and infrastructural developments (such as schools, railways, roads, ports, and harbours) during colonial rule by the British, primarily to facilitate the cheap export of cocoa, timber, gold and diamonds (Langer, 2007; Kwankye, Anarfi, Tagoe, and Castaldo, 2009). The north was virtually excluded from any capital investments by the colonial administration and as Harsh reiterates, the north is far from “the ports, roads, railways, markets, industrial centres and fertile farming areas that help stimulate greater economic and human development in southern Ghana” (Harsh, 2008, p. 4). Furthermore, the colonial administration perpetuated a policy that made the north “a labour reserve for the southern mines and forest economy” (Shepherd and Gyimah-Boadi, 2006, p. 2) and a recruiting ground for the army and police (Langer and Stewart, 2008). Consequently, the north did not benefit from any of the developments associated with colonisation and it remained the poorest area in the country. Despite subsequent government programmes to address regional disparities, such as the structural adjustment and trade liberalisation programmes and the influx of international NGOs into the north, the divide persists (Shepherd and Gyimah-Boadi, 2006). The government has been implementing the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) since 2002 to support growth and reduce poverty. The overall goal is:

To create wealth by transforming the nature of the economy to achieve growth, accelerated poverty reduction and the protection of the vulnerable and excluded within a decentralized, democratic environment (The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2002, p. i)

The poverty reduction strategy has yet to close the developmental gap between north and south. As an example, the Economist Intelligence Unit country report on Ghana indicates that although recent governments have made some capital investments in infrastructural developments by increasing expenditure on education, rehabilitating the north-south roads, and extending the national electricity grid, the bulk of development projects and programmes are still concentrated in the south (EIU, 2007 cited by Wolter, 2008). The consequences of these inequalities include limited opportunities for self improvement and advancement for youth in the
deprived areas. As long as these inequalities continue to be perpetuated, young people will continue to migrate to Accra to search for a better life, and the problem of youth homelessness will continue to grow.

Apart from the negative socio-economic impact of the divide, the migration of girls from the north to work as head porters in Accra has been ascribed to “limited educational levels and economic opportunities in the northern region” (SNV-Ghana, 2006, p. 11) for their gender. Opare (2003) explained that girls from this region see the head porter business in the city as the only viable economic opportunity for them, since it does not require any education, skill or initial capital.

5.2 **Age of Participants**

The findings revealed that the majority of female participants (84%) did not know their ages. By contrast, male participants readily disclosed their ages. This might be explained by the differences in adult literacy rates in the regions where the participants come from. Figure 5.4 (under section 5.6) shows that adult literacy rates in both the Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo regions where the male participants come from are higher than the Upper East and the Northern regions where the female participants originate. Because of high illiteracy among the adult population in the regions that are home to the female participants, parents are not able to record the birth dates of their children. An opinion leader and a chief from the regions where female participants originate also ascribed the lack of knowledge of their birth dates to childbirth in homes, rather than hospitals where the birth dates of children are registered. His statement is corroborated by a 2009 Ghana Health Service Report which indicated that 41.8% of births were supervised by health professionals in the north, compared with a national average of 45.6% (The Ghana Health Service Annual Report, 2009). This statistic suggests that supervised delivery in the country is generally low, so the lack of knowledge of birthdates among female participants can be ascribed to the illiteracy of their parents, coupled with unsupervised child delivery. The
problem of female participants’ lack of knowledge of their ages was corroborated by Yeboah (2008) in her study of the livelihoods and economic strategies of male and female porters in Accra. She reported that the majority of the women porters did not know their ages and they often had to guess.

5.3 Educational Level of Participants
The findings indicate that the majority of the male participants have formal education and are better educated than the female participants (Table 4.2). Poverty was the main reason given by the 36.6% of respondents who had never been to school. The findings are consistent with national indicators. The Ghana Living Standard Survey report indicates, for example, that many more females (36.3%) than males (22.3%) have never attended school. Likewise, 9.7% only of females, compared with 17.9% of males have had secondary, or higher education. National data on school attendance shows significant inequalities between regions (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). School attendance was relatively higher (95.8% for males and 91.9% for females) in the rural forest regions of Ashanti and Brong Ahafo, where the male participants come from, than in the rural savannah, which comprises the three northern regions.
Attendance was reported at 63.5% for males and 56.6% for females in the rural savannah. Since the female participants migrate from the rural savannah, it is not surprising that they have limited, or no education.

Findings in the current study on poverty as a barrier to school attendance are similar to the findings of a study conducted by de Lange (2007) titled “Deprived children and education”, in two districts in the northern part of Ghana. Parent participants insisted that poverty was the main reason why they did not send their children to school. They were unable to afford school uniforms, stationery and parent-teacher association dues. A 2007 report on poverty trends in Ghana from 1991 to 2006 indicated that the incidence of both poverty and extreme poverty were highest in the three northern regions (Ghana Statistical Service, cited in International Monetary Fund, 2009). Table 5.2 is an extract from the report, highlighting the high poverty rates, in percentage terms, for the three northern regions during the 2005/06 fiscal year.

School fees and other direct costs have been identified as a “significant obstacle to enrolment, especially for the poorest and vulnerable children” and some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa,

Table 5. 2 - Incidence of Poverty by region (2005/06) 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Poverty Rate (%)</th>
<th>Extreme Poverty Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brong Ahafo</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper East</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper West</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volta</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Accra</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

such as Uganda, Cameroun, Malawi and Tanzania, have abolished paying of school fees altogether (USAID, 2007, p. 2).

There has been a policy of free and compulsory universal basic education in Ghana since 1992. It has not yielded the desired results of increased enrolment, because parents are still required to pay school levies, such as contributions to the school building fund, textbook levies, cost of transportation to and from school, parent-teacher association and sports fees (Osei, Owusu, Asem, and Afutu-Kotey, 2009). Osei et al. (2009) explain that school fees are especially burdensome for low income households, who have to make tough choices “about how many and which children to send to school and how long” (p. 4).

The government has introduced a number of new educational policies since the 2005/2006 academic year, including the capitation grant, the Ghana schools feeding programme (GSFP), and a textbook development and availability policy for greater access to textbooks in public schools. These policies are aimed at mitigating the impact of poverty on school attendance and making basic education truly free for all Ghanaians.

Under the capitation policy the government pays public schools, i.e. kindergarten, primary, and junior secondary schools, $3.30 for every pupil enrolled, to eliminate levies on pupils. The government provides one hot, nutritious meal for kindergarten and primary school children in deprived regions of the country under the GSFP. Under the textbook policy, each student in basic schools must have access to three government designated core subject textbooks, mathematics, English and science (Educational Sector Performance Report, 2010). These policies have had a positive impact on primary Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) across the country, as indicated in Figure 5.1. The trend in primary gross enrolment ratios suggests that the education sector policies have been effective in making education free and accessible to all, including the poor.
If indeed the government policies have made education accessible to the poor, why are some youth enduring homelessness in the streets and without education at all, while others work to pay school-related costs, as revealed in the study? Is it because the policies are not being implemented in their schools? And for those who have never been enrolled in schools because of poverty, are their parents aware that education is now free? Or are there other factors besides parental poverty, which hinder school attendance? One female participant had this to say, in expressing her opinion about school:

*We like it, but there are some people who are children, but they are married and so they cannot go to school again. In my hometown, when that person wants to go to school, she is not permitted to go, because the husband would say they [her parents] want to take back his wife.*

This response suggests that there may be socio-cultural practices hindering school attendance. Several studies have in fact revealed that there are a number of socio-cultural beliefs and practices prevalent in the three northern regions that greatly affect the education of girls. For example, there is a long-held traditional belief in Ghanaian society that the role of a woman in society is to be a wife, cook, mother and subordinate to her husband. This belief is endemic in

---

14 Source: Educational Sector Performance Report, 2010
the northern regions and consequently, girls are overburdened with household and other domestic activities at the expense of school attendance (Opare, 2003). A report by SNV-Ghana (a Dutch based development organization with projects in the northern region) also reveals that the prevalent high levels of poverty in the region place enormous responsibilities on the girls. Apart from household chores, they also care for their younger siblings, while their mothers engage in economic activities such as petty trading or work as housekeepers to supplement the family income (SNV-Ghana, 2006). The consequences of these activities include tardiness in school, fatigue and lack of motivation for school work, all of which lead to poor performance and high drop-out rates.

There is also a general apathy toward the education of the girl child in the northern regions. A study conducted in one of the northern districts by Abdul-Rasheed et al. (2007) revealed that this apathy is caused by high levels of illiteracy among the heads of households and opinion leaders in the community. These leaders tend to be ignorant of the long-term benefits of higher education and prefer to engage the girls in economic activities for short-term gains. Those who are aware of the benefits of education favour the enrolment of boys over girls because in patrilineal societies, education of girls is seen as an unproductive investment since women become part of their husband’s household when they marry (Yeboah, 2008).

Another factor is the dependence of girls on older males for the supply of school uniforms and school materials, in exchange for sex. This leads to an increased incidence of teenage pregnancies, early marriages and poor academic performance. Furthermore, there is a dearth of female role models to inspire and motivate the girls to higher aspirations.

Another study conducted in the Bunkurugu / Yunyo district in the northern region to identify the cultural beliefs and practices that undermine access to education by girls reported polygamy, infant betrothal, wife swapping, false perceptions and negative attitudes towards the education of girls as factors that affect their access (Fant, 2008). The researcher found that polygamy is
‘glorified’ in the area and it is prestigious for a man to have large households with many women and children. In times of scarcity of financial resources, it is the education of girls that is sacrificed to make ends meet. Infant betrothal involves parents promising to give their daughters away in marriage when they become of age. Sometimes such promises are made even before the child is born. Wife swapping is the process whereby an elderly man without a son swaps a daughter for a wife, with the hope that the new wife will bear male children. Another significant socio-cultural attitude towards girls is that they belong to the home; therefore it is a mother’s responsibility to school her daughter in domestic activities, so that she does not bring disgrace to the family in future. Formal education of girls is not valued and is sometimes perceived as a “deviation from accepted societal norms and practices” (Fant, 2008, p.28).

There is a need for public education about the benefits of educating the girl child and its likely impact on the development of these regions. There is also a need for a dialogue with the heads of households, opinion leaders, chiefs and other stakeholders about the consequences of not educating girls, for a possible change in attitudes to increase the girls’ access to formal education.

5.4 **Marital Status of Participants**

The findings show that two of the female participants are married with a child each and another unmarried participant has a child. Although they are young, this finding is not surprising since, as discussed above, early marriages especially of girls is one of the cultural practices in the northern regions of Ghana where they come from. Apart from wife swapping and infant betrothal mentioned above, other practices are marriage exchanges and giving daughters in marriage to raise dowries which are then given to sons to enable them to marry their own wives (Kokutse, 2010). Exchange marriage involves a father offering “his daughter for marriage to another man’s son” so that his son would marry the daughter of the other (Abdul-Rasheed et al., 2007, p. 13). As a result of these practices, girls are forced into marriage at an early age (Harsch, 2008).
early marriage phenomenon might also explain why 26.8% of the participants (Table 4.4) indicated they would use their money to buy utensils in preparation for marriage.

5.5 **Socio-economic Status of Participants**

The participants are from low socio-economic backgrounds. In most cases their parents are subsistence or food crop farmers, with little or no education and with an average of five children. Parental poverty in the study may be related to their occupation as crop farmers. Agriculture is the main economic activity in Ghana, providing employment for over 60% of the population. It is the highest contributor to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The 2004 figures on GDP contributions by economic activity (Figure 5.2) indicated that the agricultural sector contributed 37.9% of GDP (International Monetary Fund, 2006). However available data on poverty incidence in the country reveal that it is highest among food crop farmers (International Fund for Agriculture (IFAD), n.d.; the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2003; Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). Figure 5.3 shows that the incidence of poverty was consistently high among food crop farmers from 1991 to 2006, compared with other forms of economic activity (UNDP, 2007). The findings of the current study indicate that 75.6% of the participants’ parents are food crop farmers. The low productivity of food crop farmers is ascribed to lack of irrigation-based techniques, lack of agricultural inputs such as insecticides, fertilizers, high yielding and improved seeds, lack of storage and processing facilities, inadequate financial services and inefficient marketing channels for the produce (IFAD, n.d.).

---

Findings on the educational status of parents of participants (Table 4.2) indicate that generally, they are uneducated, though parents of the male participants are better educated than parents of female participants. For example, 48.8% of participants indicated their parents were

---

16 Source: Ghana Statistical Service GLSS3, GLSS4 and GLSS5, from UNDP 2007
uneducated and 17.1% did not know their parents’ educational status. Participants with both parents educated comprised 12.2%, all of them males. This is similar to national statistics on literacy. For example, the results of the Ghana Living Standards Survey on adults with some form of education indicate that, in the rural areas of the country, literacy rates in all other regions are higher than in the northern regions, where the female participants originate. The relevant regional adult literacy rates are presented in Figure 5.4.

![Figure 5.4 - Adult Literacy Rates](image)

This finding is important, because education is known to play a significant role in poverty alleviation and economic empowerment, at both individual and national levels. A UNESCO report on education and poverty reduction in rich and poor countries states that “better educated people have greater probability of being employed, are economically more productive and therefore earn higher incomes” (van der Berg, 2008, p.3). Also, the theory of human capital “asserts that education creates skills which facilitate higher levels of productivity amongst those who possess them in comparison with those who do not” (Oxaal, 1997, p. 3). In Ghana, “education at household level is found to have notable effects on welfare and hence considerable poverty reducing potential” (Rolleston, 2011, p. 347). The implication of these statements is that the lack of education among parents of participants is a probable contributing
factor to the poverty of participants. Most of the parents are crop farmers with a high incidence of poverty, as discussed above. One way of mitigating poverty among farmers is by educating them, which has been found to influence agricultural productivity in different ways. For example, educated farmers acquire new attitudes, beliefs and habits which make them more willing to take risks, adopt new innovations and adapt to technologies for increased output. They save for investment, understand basic instructions about agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, gain better understanding of financial transactions, and keep records. Therefore they are able to interact effectively with credit agencies, with increased prospects of securing credit (Weir, 1999).

Primary education has also been shown to enhance productivity of peasant farmers, especially when they have access to the inputs needed for productivity (Oxaal, 1997).

The study participants are from large families with an average of five children per family. This is higher than the national average of four (Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, 2008). Generally, Ghanaians are attracted to large families for a number of socio-cultural reasons, including society’s perceptions about children. Having children is the main reason for marriage, and childlessness is considered a great tragedy and humiliation. To the Ghanaian woman, having a child is a sign of “normality, femininity and healthiness” (Ankomah, 2004, p. 468). Becker (1978) also mentions that children are a source of prestige, marital stability and support for the old. Apart from these reasons, subsistence farmers in rural areas tend to have larger families, because they are a source of labour on their farms. For example, a study of the technical efficiency of rice farmers in northern Ghana by Al-hassan (2008) explained that it is cost effective for them to employ their own children, instead of going through the process of hiring farm labourers each season, spending extra time to supervise them and extra money to pay them. Using children as unpaid family workers is a norm in rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana (Ashagrie, cited in Canagarajah, 1997). The fact that the participants come from large families is not surprising; most of their parents are farmers.
5.6 **Causes of Homelessness**

The findings of this study suggest that the homelessness of participants is caused by two primary push factors; parental poverty and lack of job opportunities in their places of origin. Other factors are the death of a parent leading to a single parent with a large number of children to care for, and influence by friends or family members who had returned from Accra with a good report and who lived affluent lives. The participants are from low socio-economic backgrounds, as discussed in Section 5.5. Their parents are subsistence farmers, who are characterized as being poor, mostly uneducated and have many children. Consequently they are not able to provide adequately for their children. The primary problem or concern participants identified during the study was their need for money (Figure 4.8). As young adults, they are in the process of preparing for responsible adulthood, as underlined by the purposes for which they are looking for money. These (Figure 4.12) include completing their education, paying school related costs, raising capital for business, acquiring vocational skills and preparing for marriage. They might have avoided homelessness by working in their hometowns, but there are no jobs available there, a result of government policies that have aggravated disparities in employment opportunities between Greater Accra and other regions of Ghana. Participants perceive no other choice than to come to Accra and endure homelessness in order to work to meet their aspirations.

These findings are consistent with a study on homeless youth in Ghana by Beauchemin (1999), who also reported that poverty and poor economic conditions in the rural communities are some of the causes of youth migration to the urban areas. However, the study reported other causes of youth homelessness which were not identified in the current study: such as polygamy, or poor school conditions which cause youth to dropout and relocate to the cities. Another reported cause is obsolete traditions, such as a higher regard for boys than girls, which results in girls being confined to homes to perform household chores and their eventual migration to the cities to look for menial jobs. Beauchemin (1999) reports that western influence on the traditional
family system is also a cause of youth homelessness, for instance, in cases where men refuse to educate their deceased brothers’ children as was once customary.

The findings on poverty as a cause of homeless are consistent with the reports of West (2003) and Kryder-Coe, Salamon and Molnar (1991) although the socio-economic conditions of those studies differ substantially from the current study. For example, in Asia and the Pacific, West (2003) reports that families are rendered poor as a result of natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and drought. Such catastrophic incidents lead to the selling or abandonment of children, sending them out to work, or the movement of whole families into the streets. Other causes of homelessness in Asia and the Pacific are violence and domestic abuse of children by step-parents, discrimination against children of prisoners (especially those convicted of murder) and desperate circumstances of children with HIV/AIDS parents. Kryder-Coe et al. (1991) explained that in America, apart from runaways and throwaways, most children and youth are homeless because they belong to homeless families. Homelessness there is a consequence of the low income housing ratio. It occurs when there are more poor households than housing units which they can afford.

The findings also suggest that homelessness is partly caused by the influence of friends and siblings who have been to Accra. Homeless youth from the city return to their villages with changed life styles (such as affluent dressing) and many new possessions. They also inform their peers at home about the opportunities to make money in the city which becomes a great source of motivation for those at home also to go to the city. This finding was corroborated by Kwankye, Anarfi, Tagoe, and Castaldo (2009) whose study explored the reasons for the phenomenon of independent child migration from the North to southern Ghana. Parents of child migrants interviewed in the study indicated that, when their children see their peers return back with items such as clothes and utensils, they also long to acquire these things. And as indicated by Mansa:
Even when your parents don’t want you to come, you’ll force to come, because you also want to acquire some of those things (Mansa).

Considering the poverty and lack of opportunities for self improvement in the rural areas where these youth come from, they are “pulled” to the city based on the evidence from their friends.

The causes of homelessness reported in the current study are inconsistent with reports of a number of other studies, especially those conducted in North America. For example, Canadian studies such as those by the Public Agency of Canada (2006) and Higgit, Wingert and Ristock (2003) identified other causes of homelessness, in addition to poverty, such as broken homes, parental substance abuse, sexual or emotional abuse, youth substance abuse, adolescent rebelliousness at home and school, trouble with law enforcement agencies, the quest for independence among youth and travel or moving to a larger city. Causes of youth homelessness in the United States include the failure of remedial programs such as juvenile correction, mental health and child welfare programs (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2006). Others causes are family conflict, single parenthood, conflicts over religious beliefs, sexual orientation, educational performance, and conflicts with parents over life style choices, such as hair colour and cut, body piercing and clothing (Hyde 2005).

The findings from this study suggest that causes of youth homelessness in Ghana are largely economic, in contrast with causes reported in studies of youth homelessness in other regions, especially North America, where the causes are sometimes related to the life style of the youth themselves.

5.7 Length of Stay in Accra

The findings indicate that for the majority of participants, their homelessness or stay in Accra is for a short term. This might be ascribed to the fact that they are basically economic migrants to the city to work to earn money to meet specific goals as discussed under Section 5.8.2.2.1.

They go back home when they meet their financial targets. The female participants are found to
stay longer than the males. This might be ascribed to their lack of school attendance and any engagement with vocational training compared to the males. As discussed under section 5.4, a majority of the males have formal education and therefore could only come to Accra during school vacation (which in Ghana ranges from four weeks to 12 weeks) to work. They come to work to earn money to pay for school-related costs and procure school materials. Some of the male participants have already started their skills training and come to the city as and when they need money to pay their training-related costs. For example Joojo who is training as an electric welder comes to Accra regularly to work to earn money for food and transportation related to his training. Some of the male participants who had stayed in Accra longer (a total of two years) were found to have limited or no education. For example Manu did not attend school because his father died (section 4.2.3) when he was very young. He is an apprenticed motor mechanic (section 4.6.3) and indicated that he visited the city regularly to work to pay transportation and food costs related to his training and also provide for his mother who is bed-ridden. Mensah who dropped out of school as a result of the death of his mother and neglect by his father had been visiting the city regularly to work and save to train as an electric welder.

The findings are different from the results of a metro Vancouver homeless count which indicated that homeless youth under age 19 have been homeless for one to six months (Regional Steering Committee on homelessness, 2012).

5.8 The Expressed Needs of Homeless Youth

The study recorded a total of 131 problem statements, with 68.7% representing personal/social complaints, 28.2% suggesting a need for help/assistance and only 3.1% suggesting a need for information or advice (Figure 4.9). These findings are similar to the findings of Dervin’s (1973) information needs survey in Seattle and Syracuse. Her findings suggest that individuals with high levels of education and socio-economic status, such as managers and professionals, are “least likely to articulate the problems in terms of complaints” and more likely to state their
problems as “needs for information or advice” (p.124). Therefore considering the low socio-economic status and educational level of participants of the current study, it is not surprising that the majority of the problem statements recorded are complaints. Dervin (1973) further mentioned that individuals are not likely to complain, if they see the solutions to their problems in terms of information. These homeless youth can be described as information poor. Britz (2004) defines information poverty as:

That situation in which individuals and communities, within a given context, do not have the requisite skills, abilities or material means to obtain efficient access to information, interpret it and apply it appropriately. It is further characterized by a lack of essential information and a poorly developed information infrastructure (Britz, 2004, p. 194).

Essential information, according to Britz (2004), is that needed for survival and development, and it includes information about basic human needs, and tools for economic development and trade. Britz further explained that essential information is for the public good and it includes information on backbone industries, education, welfare, survival services in health, etc. Homeless youth in Ghana have no access to essential information needed for their welfare and survival such as shelter facilities, food banks, soup kitchens, etc., in contrast with their counterparts in the United States and Canada. That explains why the majority of the problem statements given by study participants are complaints and lack suggestions of need for information or advice. The literature reveals that homeless youth in the United States and Canada have access to multiple information resources about both governmental and non-governmental programs such as shelter facilities, soup kitchens, youth resource centres, etc., which are designed specifically to meet their needs (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009; Evenson, 2009; Woelfer and Hendry, 2009). Comparable facilities and information resources are non-existent in Ghana. There are no government agencies tasked to meet the needs of homeless youth. A few NGOs, such as the Catholic Action for Street Children, whose services include daytime rest and recreation facilities for the street children, provide limited services. Information that may be useful to homeless youth, on topics such as job openings and
available housing, are advertised in public newspapers, but the sources they use in their everyday information seeking do not include newspapers. Another probable explanation for the high level of complaints which are not accompanied by suggestions on how information might help to resolve their dissatisfaction derives from the general attitude of the poor toward information and its potential to help them solve their problems. Chatman and Pendleton (1995) state that a fundamental attitude of the poor is that sources of information available in their world do not solve their problems. While this is a plausible explanation, the study did not specifically investigate this assertion. It can be concluded nevertheless that most of the problem statements of participants were complaints which lack any indications of information need, because of their low socio-economic and educational status and lack of access to the information resources.

5.8.1 Nature of Problem Statements by Type of Need

A total of eleven areas of need (Figure 4.10) were identified in the participants' problem statements. They are money, shelter, education, employment, respect, security, health, food, skills acquisition (vocational goals), fair wages and justice. Money was found to be an area of concern for 98% of the participants, which re-emphasizes poverty as the main cause of their homelessness. Figure 4.11 and Table 4.3 show that the need for information was expressed in problem statements relating to education and money. The relevant problem statements included need for advice, or information about sponsorship for participants' education. For example, one of the respondents was interested in finding someone to pay his fees, so that he could concentrate on his studies. Considering their vulnerabilities, the researcher expected participants to request assistance in their problem statements. However, only 28.2% requested assistance. Significantly, their requests for assistance were in direct response to a question about what they would like the government to do to improve their lives. The assistance they requested included the provision of shelter for homeless youth, creation of jobs and scholarships for continuing their education. The findings are similar to those of Dervin (1973).
Her study revealed that the poor had rather fewer needs than others in their society. She attributed this “to their resignation to a poor quality of life” (p. 126). The reluctance of the participants to seek assistance may be attributable to their suspicion of and lack of trust of outsiders. Lewis (1998) claimed that the poor are often not convinced about the effectiveness of existing institutions in serving their needs and interests. This view is corroborated by Chatman (1999), who noted that the poor generally have an insider worldview; that is, they maintain a general mistrust and suspicion of people outside their social network and therefore are least likely to seek help or assistance from such sources.

5.8.2 Categories of Need in Problem Statements

The eleven areas of need articulated in the problem statements can be aggregated in five main basic needs. Figure 5.5 is a categorization of these needs, using Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, namely; physiological needs, safety needs, esteem needs, belonging needs and self-actualization (Huit, 2000).

![Figure 5.5 - Categorization of needs of participants based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs](image-url)
The findings of the study indicated that 57.9% of the female participants (Figure 4.12) needed money to prepare for marriage. This suggests that marriage is something the female participants care about. Wilson (1997) in his interest-concern-caring model for everyday life information seeking explained ‘care’ as when an individual takes action to control or change a worrisome situation. Thus it is probable that the female participants cared about marriage but did not express it as a primary problem, mentioning it only when they were asked to indicate what they needed money for. Consequently marriage was not included in the above diagram as a belonging need because the participants did not express it as a primary information need.

Maslow postulated that the lower needs (i.e. physiological, safety, and esteem) must be met before the higher level cognitive and self actualization needs. The study however showed that participants were pursuing both lower and higher needs concurrently. This finding suggests that the goal of the everyday life information seeking of the homeless youth in the current study is to solve problems relating to their basic needs. It also supports Wilson’s (2002) assertion that the motive of any search for information is ultimately to satisfy one or more of the human basic needs. The eleven articulated needs are discussed in the sections that follow.

5.8.2.1 Physiological Needs

The physiological needs, or need for sustaining life identified in the study are food and shelter expressed by 15% and 61% of participants respectively.

5.8.2.1.1 Food

Food was one of the least pressing concerns of participants, with only (15%) expressing it as an issue. Food-related problems derived from participants’ unstable earnings. Some of the participants were not able to eat regularly. They occasionally went hungry for a day as result of inadequate or non-existent earnings. (Since services for homeless youth such as food banks and soup kitchens do not exist, the homeless youth rely solely on themselves or their peers for food).
5.8.2.1.2 Shelter

Shelter was found to be a major problem area and a source of dissatisfaction and complaints for many participants. The findings revealed that participants slept in the open, in front of shops in the markets and near the main road. Only four of the participants indicated they slept indoors, two in a classroom and the other two in a container and a kiosk. Their concerns included inadequate sleep as a result of rain and vehicular noise, and harassment by mosquitoes. Shop owners also assault them, threaten them with ejection and burn their clothes. One of the male participants (Kojo) who slept in a classroom with his friends also reported that he was threatened with ejection by a colleague.

A study by Yeboah (2008) to investigate the livelihood strategies of men and women porters in four other markets in Accra confirmed the finding of the current study that porters in Accra slept in front of shops. Other shelters not widely used by participants in the current study are pavements, kiosks and rented single rooms mostly used by male porters. Other studies indicate that homeless youth (especially those in developed countries) have multiple shelter options. In a study of health needs and issues of youth homelessness in Toronto involving 100 youth, Barnaby, Penn and Erickson (2010) reported five categories of shelter used by homeless youth. They include institutional shelter (e.g. hostels/shelters, police stations, hospitals and detention centres); non-institutional indoor shelter (e.g. own rented place, hotels/motels, and supportive housing); non-institutional housing based on relationships (e.g. living with boy/girlfriend, friend or acquaintance, client’s sex partner’s place, family of friend, and foster family); transient indoor shelter (e.g. bus/train station, restaurants, laundromats, and bath house); and outdoor shelter (e.g. street/alley way, stair well, abandoned building, park, under a bridge, vehicle). Participants expressed fears of robbery, police harassment and arrests, stabbing, sexual and physical abuse (Barnaby, Penn and Erickson, 2010). Other studies recruited participants from homeless persons resident in emergency shelters. For example, participants of the study of homeless parents by Hersberger (2001) in the cities of Indianapolis, Seattle and Greensboro in the United
States were recruited from five family shelters. Their concerns included coping with other residents, other shelter children, disciplining of children, shelter rules and regulations, and lack of privacy.

The outdoor shelter used by homeless youth in the study is not only hazardous to their health in terms of contracting diseases such as malaria as a result of mosquito bites but might also affect their developmental process as adolescents as a result of the inadequate and disruptive sleep they experience. For example studies have shown that adequate sleep is necessary for brain maturation during the adolescent years and teens function best with about nine hours of sleep (Giedd, 2009; Chamberlain, n.d.). As the brain matures, adolescents develop the capacity for advanced reasoning, abstract and critical thinking, understanding of why and how questions, analysis of complex issues and evaluation of alternatives before taking decisions (Chamberlain, n.d.). These developments might be undermined as a result of their inadequate sleep. Also inadequate sleep has been associated with fatigue and drowsiness, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity, poor grades, inability to perform cognitive and emotional tasks at the same time, and mood changes such as a tendency to become easily angry, aggressive and sad (Dahl and Lewin, 2002; Chamberlain, n.d.). Thus the finding that the homeless youth in the study are subject to disruptive or inadequate sleep as a result of rain, mosquitoes, or vehicular noise indicates a potential hazard to their cognitive, social and emotional development. It is incredible to note that they also live with the threat of ejection by shop owners even in the deplorable conditions under which they sleep. This underscores the precarious circumstances under which they live, the instability they experience in the city and the need for government, NGOs and other stakeholders to act to mitigate some of their problems. Unfortunately there is no policy on youth homelessness in Ghana and the National Youth Policy (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2010) does not include provision for sheltering homeless youth. By contrast, some developed nations such as the United States have comprehensive policies on homelessness. For example,
the Run Away and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) in the United States includes the Basic Centre Program, which provides shelter services for homeless and runaway youth.

5.8.2.2 Safety Needs

Most of the needs of participants related to safety. This was expected, because having left the safety net of their families, they have to deal with safety and security issues associated with homelessness. Their safety needs included concerns about money, employment, fair wages, shelter, health and justice.

5.8.2.2.1 Money

Money was found to be a fundamental concern for 98% of the participants. Their problem statements about money are largely complaints about personal issues, with only 10% suggesting a need for advice or assistance. The requests for assistance or advice on money issues focussed on how to obtain scholarships, or sponsorships for education. Other participants expressed their need for money to meet personal needs and aspirations, (Table 4.4 and Figure 4.12) which include acquiring vocational skills, or meeting life goals (53.7%), furthering their education (12.2%), procuring school related expenses (14.6%), raising capital to set up their own business (9.8%) and procuring items like utensils in preparation for marriage (26.8%). Acquiring utensils for marriage is an important cultural norm as indicated by Maana, one of the female participants:

*In our hometown if you don’t struggle to buy the cooking utensils, you will receive a lot of insults from others* (Maana).

Needs mentioned occasionally included buying clothes and saving for a child’s education. These findings are inconsistent with similar studies of information needs of homeless youth in other environments. For example, in a study of everyday life information needs and information sources of homeless parents, the financial problems of participants related to dealing with bad credit, problems with handling money and limited funds (Hersberger, 2001). Participants of a

The expressed needs for money revealed by the current study suggest that participants’ needs as adolescents, such as cognitive and educational competence, personal and social competence, and preparation for work (Carnegie Corporation, 1992) are not being met as a result of poverty. In other words, their normal way of life (Savolainen, 1995) is no longer meaningful, and they need to take practical steps to gain mastery over their situations. The main strategy they adopt to restore meaning, or maintain order in their everyday lives (Savolainen, 1995) is to come to the city to look for money to meet their needs.

5.8.2.2 Employment Needs

All the participants were economically engaged, with the males working as shoe-shine workers (46.3%) and truck pushers (7.3%), and the females working as head porters (43.9%). Three female participants were also engaged as a store help, a dish washer and a “laundry girl”, in addition to the head porter job they perform. Their employment concerns suggest a need for information about alternate and more secure jobs. For example, four of the participants, Kai, Tsoo (head porters), Kojo and Kwesi (shoe-shine workers) would have preferred alternate jobs, because they considered their current jobs very tiring and insecure. Similarly, Efua, Baako and Kai complained that they would prefer other jobs, since they sometimes walk long distances all day without getting any business. Observations of the researcher revealed that the shoe-shine workers normally begin work at about 6:30 am and finish at 5:30 pm, with about an hour’s break at noon. They walk in neighbourhoods across the city beating their tool boxes with sticks and knocking on doors to attract potential customers. The head porters start work as early as 5:00 am and close at about 6:00 pm. They have to get up early to carry loads for traders who bring bulk produce from the villages to the cities, or buy goods from wholesalers to retail in the market. After this initial work, they stroll through the market, lorry parks and shops to spot customers who may need their services in transporting goods to their private cars, omnibuses,
or to houses and shops nearby. Thus their work is labour intensive and involves continuous walking to scout for business. Generally, the problem statements suggest that participants do not like or enjoy the work they do and would prefer alternate and more secure jobs.

The library and information science literature does not include everyday life information needs related to employment needs of homeless youth, but a study to map the needs of homeless youth with programs and services in Ottawa lists some of the employment-related needs of homeless youth as assessment and career planning, referral to community employment programs, job search preparation, and co-op placement (Genmora Consulting, 2010). These needs are very different from the employment needs expressed by the participants in the current study.

5.8.2.2.3 Fair Wages

The findings indicate that 15% of the participants are concerned about being underpaid for their services by unscrupulous customers. For example, Meefua, Esi and Maana mentioned that sometimes their customers did not pay the agreed fees and when they complained, the customers insulted them. The society they operate in is aware that homeless youth are by themselves, with neither the protection of their parents nor support from city authorities and law enforcement agencies. Therefore some persons take advantage of the homeless youth and blatantly cheat and exploit them. This is consistent with findings of similar studies of street children. For example, a study by Boakye-Boaten (2008) in Accra to understand the phenomenon of street children reported that the children are often exploited by adults, who underpay them for the work they do. A study in Pakistan by Moazzam, Shahab, Ushijima, and De Muynck (2004) also revealed that street children are subjected to long working hours (eight to 12 hours) with inadequate wages. A Toronto study of homeless youth by Gaetz (2007) also reported a number of underpayment practices by both short term and long term employers. These included employers’ refusal to pay youth the agreed hourly wage or for their final few weeks of work, withholding of the last paycheck, and outright refusal to pay the youth any
money for work done. The study ascribed such fraudulent acts to employers’ assessment that young persons in those situations are “unwilling or unable to stand up for their rights” (Gaetz 2002, p. 34).

5.8.2.2.4 Security

The findings indicate that security is an issue and results from the lack of shelter for the homeless youth. Security issues included the theft of monies and valuables, sexual harassment and physical assault. They occurred most frequently during the participants’ sleep time. These issues were clearly expressed by Ama, who emphasized the need to provide accommodation for homeless youth, to mitigate the security threats:

> Also, as we sleep in front of the shops we don’t have a place to keep our monies and sometimes we are attacked by thieves, who steal our monies. Also, sometimes a boy may try to have sex with one of us … If we get a comfortable place to sleep without any worries of being raped, or our belongings being stolen at night, we will appreciate it very much. (Ama)

The threat posed by thieves is often perilous. It is frequently accompanied by physical assaults and reinforced with guns. One of the male participants (Baako) reported that sometimes, when the thieves did not find monies in the pockets of their victims, they beat them up in frustration. Akosua, a female participant, also mentioned that the male thieves sometimes beat the girls who raise an alarm. A male participant (Kojo) indicated that sometimes thieves come armed with guns, to steal their money. Some participants indicated that the thieves were oftentimes their own colleagues. For example, Abeeku complained that the older homeless boys often stole monies from the younger ones at night and sometimes took their money by force.

The findings are consistent with those of Kwankye, Anarfi, Tagoe, and Castaldo (2007), who investigated the coping strategies of child migrants from the Northern region of Ghana to Accra and Kumasi, the two largest cities in Ghana. They reported that street children are exposed to sexual harassment and criminal activities such as thefts and even murder. One of the participants in that study mentioned that a head porter’s baby was murdered. Homeless youth,
or street children in other countries face different kinds of security issues. A report by de Benitez (2007) on the state of the world’s children indicates that in Cambodia, street boys are sexually exploited by male tourists, for small fees. In other countries the security forces harass and abuse street children. For example a report entitled *Abuse and victimization of street children worldwide* by Berezina (n.d.) describes police brutality against street children in different countries. For example in Kenya the police are known to extort monies from street children and threaten to imprison them if they refuse to pay. In Honduras, police brutality against street children includes arbitrary arrests, detentions, torture, and even murder, all perpetuated under the pretext of re-uniting the youths with their families. In Guatemala, street girls are forced into sexual acts by police in exchange for their freedom, and threatened with imprisonment if they ever disclose such abuse (Berezina, n.d.). A study by Gaetz (2002) to evaluate the legal and justice issues of homeless and street involving youth ages 15 to 24 in Toronto, also indicated that the majority of participants were victims of physical and sexual assault and property theft.

There is a need for the government and other stakeholders to begin to provide shelters for homeless or street youth in Ghana to keep them safe at night.

5.8.2.2.5 Justice

The findings indicate that the issue of justice relates to false accusations by their peers, physical assault by garbage collectors for dumping soiled baby diapers in a garbage bin or littering of areas with no access to dustbins, and collective punishment by the police without proof of guilt. As Ama, one of the head porters, explained, sometimes the youth are rounded up and taken to the police station because one of them had carried away a customer’s goods. On such occasions they were made to pay for the goods even though they were not involved. This finding is rather surprising because Ghana was the first country to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (on February 5, 1990) which stipulates that the rights of children must be protected, respected, and fulfilled, including their legal rights. Apart from this the country has three legislative instruments, the Children’s Act of 1998, the Child Act of 2002 to address child
protection issues (UNICEF, 2009), and the Juvenile Act (Act 653) which is a framework for a juvenile justice system to protect the rights of juveniles. This legislation, according to a UNICEF briefing paper on social protection and children in Ghana, provides a very comprehensive legal framework but has not been effective because of “lax law enforcement, lack of clarity about mandates for social welfare services, low staff capacity, weak coordination and limited funding” (UNICEF, 2009, p. 4). These weaknesses in the country’s child protection laws might explain why innocent street youth are punished for the crimes of their colleagues by the very agents (the police) who are supposed to protect them.

Street youth in other parts of the world suffer other forms of injustice. For example a report by IRIN (2007) indicates that street youth in Nairobi are often arrested, detained and beaten by the police for no reason. The report explained that street children are often a target of police brutality and injustice because they are young, poor, ignorant of their rights and lack the support and help of any adult (IRIN, 2007). The findings are different from those in a Toronto study by Gaetz (2002), who reported that the issues of justice of homeless youth relate to problems with landlords such as unfair eviction, lack of maintenance of property, and illegal entry, raising rent without warning, withholding of damage deposits, and lack of rental agreements. Other problems found in the Toronto study are lack of contracts and job offer letters, being fired by employers without cause, racial discrimination and lack of payment.

5.8.2.6 Health

The health concerns of participants relate to bodily pains and headaches they suffer as a result of the nature of their work, and attacks by mosquitoes which infect them with malaria. The shoeshine job involves walking long distances in the scorching sun in search of customers. One of the male participants, Badu, indicated that he experienced severe headaches as a result of the hot sun. With regard to the head porters, the observations of the researcher were that they often tended to overwork themselves by carrying very heavy loads in their quest to earn money to meet their needs. Even when the customers comment on the heaviness of the loads, they
would insist they would be able to carry them. It is therefore not surprising that some of the participants such as Efia and Fafa complained that they often had headaches and bodily pains respectively as a result of the heavy loads. Some of the participants, Kojo, Koku, and Badua complained about mosquito bites especially in the rainy season. This finding is not surprising since the female Anopheles mosquito, the vector for malaria, completes its life cycle in water (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). Thus in the rainy seasons (Accra has two rainy seasons, May to July and September to November), there is a high influx of mosquitoes in the city as a result of the increase in their breeding grounds (such as water puddles, stagnant water in open gutters, water that has collected in tree trunks and empty cans etc.) Lack of shelter for the street youth exposes them to mosquito bites in the night, depriving them of a good rest and making them vulnerable to malaria infection.

These findings are different from those of other studies in other locations. For example a study of homeless youth in Greater Manchester in the United Kingdom by Reid and Klee (1999) revealed that their health information needs were largely drug related as 73% of the 200 participants were ‘injecting drug users’. A study of homeless youth in a south-western city in Ontario entitled, ‘homelessness and health in adolescents’, reported the health issues of participants (6 females and 7 males) as feminine hygiene and birth control, depression and fatigue (Haldenby, Berman, and Forchuk, 2007). In other studies, the health issues of homeless youth included more chronic health problems such as migraine headaches, asthma, meningitis (Hudson et al., 2010), respiratory illnesses, sexually transmitted diseases (excluding HIV AIDS and hepatitis), mental health condition such as bipolar disorder, anxiety, depression and schizophrenia (Barnaby, Penn, and Erickson, 2010). Such chronic problems were not cited in the current study.

The findings show that health information needs of homeless youth in the study relate only to their immediate health concerns. This is inconsistent with the health information needs reported in other ELIS studies such as need for information on disease prevention and control, and
personal wellness and fitness. For example a study by Saleh (2011) reported that the health information needs of rural women in Borno State, Nigeria relate to prevention and control of epidemics such as cholera and meningitis. Others relate to women and child health such as family planning, safe delivery, ante-natal and post-natal care, and child immunizations. Mooko (2005) also reported that the health information needs of rural women in Botswana included understanding of HIV/AIDS, mode of contacting the disease, and how to care for victims of the disease at home. Other information needs are how to manage common ailments of children in the villages, such as minor coughs and high temperature or fevers. Other studies investigating the internet as a source of health information for adolescents revealed that they looked for information on personal wellness and fitness. For example a cross-national study of adolescents in the United Kingdom and the United States by Gray, Klein, Sesselberg, and Cantrill (2005) reported that adolescents searched for information on diets and exercise. A similar study in Ghana by Borzekowski, Fobil, and Asante (2006) also revealed that, apart from information on STDs, teens searched the Internet for information on nutrition, diet and exercise.

It is probable that that the challenges of homelessness do not permit the study participants to seek information on disease prevention and personal wellness and fitness but rather they wait till they are sick before seeking medical help.

5.8.3 Esteem Need

Like all other human beings, street or homeless youth in Ghana desire to be respected for who they are. However the findings indicate that the head porters are often insulted by the very people they work for, namely the market women and some of the customers who come to buy groceries. Many of the study participants (31.7%) all of them females, complained about constant verbal abuse from their clients, often for no apparent reason. (The male participants did not cite any such abuses probably because they do not work in the market). Market women insult them when the girls come near their wares, are resting, soliciting for customers and sometimes even when they are simply walking by. Such anti-social behaviour is unwarranted
and unacceptable since the market women benefit most from the services of the street youth. Observations of the researcher indicate they do much of the hard and dirty work for the market women. Their services include washing vegetables and the gut of butchered goats, arranging the display of wares, offloading goods and foodstuffs from trucks, food processing such as roasting groundnuts and grinding grains, dish washing, sweeping shops and market stalls, carrying groceries for customers, etc. The street youth do in fact offer valuable service in the economy of marketplace. The markets would not function efficiently without their role. Therefore they deserve respect and recognition for their services, rather than insults.

Verbal abuse of street children has been reported in studies of street children in other places of the world such Ankara, Turkey (Celik and Baybuga 2005), Zambia (Muntingh 2006), and in Jaipur, India (Mathur, Rathore and Mathur, 2009). One difference is that the male participants in the study in India indicated significantly higher verbal abuse than their female counterparts.

Verbal or emotional abuse has been described as a “repeated pattern of behaviour that conveys to children that they are worthless, unloved, unwanted, or only of value in meeting another’s needs” (Brassard, Hart, and Hardy, cited in Goldsmith and Freyd, 2005, p. 98). Excessive verbal abuse of children has been associated with depression, anxiety, anger, hostility, insecure attachment relationships, poor social functions and coping strategies and low self esteem at different stages of their life (Teicher, Samson, Polcari, and McGreenery, 2006). There is therefore the need for the women to be educated about the effects of their verbal abuses on the street youth with the purpose of curtailing this antisocial behaviour so that these youths may develop normally in spite of their poverty.

5.8.4 Cognitive Need

The educational concerns expressed in the study were economic. The findings indicate that those participants (mostly males) expressing these concerns are constrained in many ways in their quest to be educated by lack of funds. Some are not able to procure basic school supplies.
such as uniforms and books, pay for their school and examination registration fees, buy food to eat, or attend good schools, and some had to drop out of school altogether. In spite of their financial limitations the findings suggest that they have a strong desire to be educated and are determined to pursue their educational goals at all cost. Thus they are willing to endure the perils of homelessness as they work in the city to earn the money to pay their school-related costs. Others were concerned about the quality of education they were receiving as a result of limited facilities. For example Adusa made the point that they are learning ICT in their school without a single computer making it difficult to understand the course. Oko also complained about the overcrowding of students around the few computers in their school during ICT lessons which undermined his interest in the course.

As discussed under Section 5.4, the government of Ghana has introduced some educational policies such as the capitation grant, the Ghana schools feeding programme (GSFP), and a textbook development and availability policy for greater access to textbooks in public schools to offset some of these problems and make education free for all Ghanaians.

There is no study about the everyday life information seeking behaviour of homeless youth that includes school-related information needs in the Library and Information literature but a study of educational needs of homeless children in New York City by Rafferty and Rollins (cited in Rafferty, 1998) indicated similar findings such as hunger and difficulty obtaining school clothes and supplies as some of their educational problems. Other problems not cited in the current study are transportation difficulties, shelter placements far removed from children’s original schools, noisy shelter environments hindering completion of home works, and “stigmatization, insensitivity and rejection by classmates and teacher” (Rafferty, 1998, p. 49). Other studies of adolescent everyday life information seeking behaviour revealed significant differences between the school-related information needs of normal and homeless youth. For example a United Kingdom study by Shenton and Dixon (2004) to investigate the information universes of youngsters comprising different age groups, i.e. 4 to 18 year olds reported some of the
concerns or information needs of participants as having to look for information on unnamed subjects and theme-based topics e.g. endangered animals, with no clear search terms, difficulty in locating sources for current events such as a volcanic eruption, broad subject areas which involved issues of information overload, and difficulty in finding a single source supplying all the information needed for a given assignment. Another study of eleventh grade high school honours students to investigate both personal and school-related information needs and behaviours (Latrobe and Havener, 1997) revealed they needed information for test preparations and completion of assignments. Although it is probable that homeless youth who are also students might experience some of the problems/information needs mentioned by Shenton and Dixon (2004) and Latrobe and Havener (1997), the findings of the current study suggest that the participants are more concerned with the economic issues of their education such as cost of tuition and school supplies. A further study to specifically address how homeless youth look for school-related information would establish the similarities and differences between youth living at home and homeless students.

5.8.5 Self Actualization

The findings indicate that the majority of the participants (87.8%) had clearly defined vocational goals and were working to raise money to pursue their vocations. This was true for both male (46.3%) and female (41.5%) participants. There were gender differences in the variety of choices with the males indicating many more choices than the females. The dominant choice of vocation for the females was to become a dressmaker (31.7%) with a few (4.9%) indicating food vendor and retail merchant (4.9% each) as their intended vocations. The males indicated 11 different vocational goals (Table 4.5) probably because they were literate with more choices open to them.
5.9  **Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviours of Homeless Youth**

This section discusses the sources, information behaviours and barriers to everyday life information seeking behaviour of homeless youth.

5.9.1  **Everyday Life Financial Management Behaviour of Homeless Youth**

Participants were particularly conscious of the need to save their earnings securely, given the absence of proper shelters. Therefore they sought information about where they could save their earnings. The findings showed that their preferred repository for savings is the ‘susu’ operator, the local micro-finance agent. One respondent (Fiifi) pointed out that it was the only repository mentioned by a friend, in response to his enquiry. All his fellow homeless youth use it for their savings. The susu system is so popular among the homeless youth that some refer to it as their bank:

*We have a bank here where we keep our money. There is a ‘susu’ man out there in a [shipping] container kiosk that collects and keeps the money (Koku).*

Its popularity among the homeless youth can be attributed to the ease of use, reliability and convenience of the system for managing their everyday life financial management needs, till they are ready to go back home. Other means of saving their earnings are individualized sources, such as trusted customers and family members. For example, Mansa kept her savings and valuable belongings with a kenkey\(^{17}\) seller she used to work for and Fafa gave her savings to her older sister for safe keeping. Only one respondent indicated she saved with a bank branch nearby.

One of the reasons the homeless youth use individualized sources over formal banks for their savings is the immediate access they have to their monies, in times of emergency. Other barriers to their using the formal banking system include lack of the initial deposit amounts demanded, short-term stays in the city, lack of knowledge of how to open bank accounts, or the

---

\(^{17}\) Kenkey is a local staple food made from fermented corn dough.
procedures followed by banks. For example, Ago was of the opinion that the banks might not accept small amounts as deposits.

The information behaviour of participants in their everyday life financial management is consistent with Chatman’s (1991) proposition that among the poor, acceptable information must derive from accessible, verified and familiar sources and Chatman’s (1999) small world concept that conditions for accepting information are trust and believability. Also, information is accepted because the source’s claims can easily be verified or researched. For example, the participants readily used the informal sources for their savings, based on trust, familiarity, accessibility, and verifiability. On the other hand, the formal banks remained remote, unfamiliar and therefore inaccessible to participants. They could not access, research or verify the suitability of banks in meeting their needs. Chatman (1999) also emphasized that if members of a social world are not using any information, it means their world is working without it. It was evident from discussions with participants that they are very comfortable with the informal and individualized sources for their savings. Those instruments met their needs and therefore they did not seek the services of banks.

The findings further revealed that they borrowed from their social network of friends on days when they earned nothing. One respondent explained that newcomers to the city tend to rely on the established homeless youth for money, in their time of need.

5.9.2 Everyday Employment Seeking Behaviour of Homeless Youth

The findings show that participants arrived in the city ready to be self-employed either as shoe-shine workers, or head porters. The researcher observed that the head porters carried their loads in large enamelled head pans. The only entry hurdle for them is to buy the head pan. With regard to the shoe-shine workers, most of the male participants were already skilled in mending shoes, before coming to the city. For example, Tawiah, Oko, and Adusa learned the basics by mending their own shoes at home. Anane was taught by his brother and Ago acquired the skill
by observing a friend as he repaired shoes. The findings suggest also that there is free sharing of information among the homeless youth about the nature of their jobs. For example, those already engaged as shoe-shines in the city freely provided orientation information to the newcomers. The orientation session includes directional information for navigating the city, counselling on how to treat or relate to customers, and other relevant information to ensure their success on the job. The process is described by Oko as follows:

_We talk to the person about how to be polite when dealing with clients. We also buy a box and stock it for him to start work. He is made to follow one person round the whole day and he is shown the rudiments of the work. After this, he is left on his own to do his work (Oko)._

Tawiah mentioned also that they are advised not to steal any valuables they might find in a customer’s shoe. The provision of information by friends is consistent with Chatman’s (1991) proposition that the poor become informed of important events in their social milieu through their peers; that is, people like themselves.

Participants followed three approaches in seeking alternate jobs. They engaged in active searching, passive searching, or used their social networks. Their active seeking involved approaching prospective employers to inquire about job opportunities, such as Koku did when he went round inquiring about available masonry work. The passive approach was employer initiated, such as when prospective employers approached homeless youth and invited them to take up available jobs. Maana and Meefua got jobs as ‘laundry girls’ through passive seeking. With regard to social networks, participants sometimes found jobs through their friends, as happened with Kweku, Kwabena, and Kobi. They obtained jobs as garbage collectors by accompanying friends who were already engaged in that vocation. Other participants, especially the head porters, used their jobs as a means of advertising for alternate vocations. Fafa was hired to wash dishes after providing excellent service as a head porter. Another way participants exploited their social network in job searches was by acting on information through informal
conversation. For example, Tawiah heard someone talking about a weeding job and decided to offer himself for it.

These findings are inconsistent with findings from a study by Alexander, Edwards, Fisher and Hersberger (2005) to identify the health and human services needs of homeless persons. That study focused on both youth and adults on the east side of King County, Washington. Their study participants used the print media, i.e. newspapers, rather than personal sources, for information on available jobs. A study by Spink and Cole (2001) to investigate the information environment, information needs and information seeking of 300 African American households at Wynnewood Parks in Dallas, Texas also reported that newspapers were used as sources of employment information.

The barriers to getting alternate jobs include cost, personal characteristics (such as shyness), situational barriers (e.g. nursing a baby), and educational barriers, such as lack of relevant qualifications and inexperience or lack of job-seeking skills. Some available jobs require initial capital outlays that are beyond the means of most of the homeless youth. Participant Joojo explained that most of his counterpart shoe-shine workers could not afford the initial capital of GH₵49.50 ($33) needed for selling sachet yogurt, water or chocolate drinks, so they remain shoe-shine workers, which requires much less initial capital. Nsiah was too shy to ask about job opportunities and Ama was not offered an alternate job, because she was nursing a baby. She mentioned also that customers tended to prefer head-porters without babies. Kobi thought he was not qualified for a garbage collection job, because he had not completed high school. He indicated also that his parents were not available to introduce him to prospective employers. It was obvious that Kobi lacked job searching skills and would benefit from the services of a resource centre for coaching and job advice. Akosua also mentioned that the city authorities seize their head pans for carrying loads when they are not able to pay their daily tax. This was confirmed by the observations of the researcher during the fieldwork. The city authorities tax the head porters’ everyday (10 pesewas or about two cents a day) and tend to seize their head
pans to force them to pay. The researcher had to pay this tax for two head porters on two occasions during her marketing session.

The finding of tax collection by city authorities from head porters is consistent with that of Bemah (2010) whose study of social protection of migrant workers in Kumasi, the capital city of the Ashanti region of Ghana, indicated that the Kumasi city authorities taxed the head porters daily under the pretext that the porters are workers.

These barriers to employment are very different from the findings of other studies. For example, Alexander, Edwards, Fisher and Hersberger (2005) reported the lack of suitable clothing as a barrier to job hunting of homeless youth. In her study of everyday information needs and sources of homeless parents, Hersberger (2001) also reported the lack of appropriate daycare, lack of job training programs and transportation problems, for example poor timing on bus routes and multiple bus changes, as barriers to homeless parents getting jobs. A report on youth homelessness in Australia mentioned the barriers to their employment seeking as: lack of certification and training, lack of knowledge of how the labour market works, for example, applying for jobs without regard for required qualifications, the high cost of transportation and inadequate public transport, and discrimination based on drug use, or mental illness even when it does not affect work performance (National Youth Commission, 2008).

5.9.3 Strategies Dealing with the Issues of Respect and Unfair Wages

The homeless youth feel powerless in addressing the verbal/physical abuse and unfair wages they often receive from some of their customers. The few who attempt to resolve these grievances by protesting only suffer further abuse. Adusa (a shoe-shine boy) complained about a customer who refused to pay the agreed fee for his service and who beat him, when he requested payment. Other homeless youth ignore the offense and leave the scene with the hope of winning over the offending customers for continuing patronage. Efia (a head porter) explained that they do not argue with customers who refuse to pay agreed fees, in the hope that
those customers will regard them favourably and continue doing business with them. Others, like Akua (a head porter) have simply accepted these issues as risks associated with their job, rationalizing their passive stance on the grounds that all jobs have their respective problems. The findings are consistent with those of van den Berg (2007), who studied the social capital and vulnerabilities of ‘Kayayei’ (head porters) in the city of Accra at locations different from the current study. She reported that the head porters are powerless when they are cheated by customers. Gaetz (2002) also mentioned that homeless youth who were exploited by employers would not take any action because of “a profound belief that they were powerless and that any action they took would be fruitless, and a waste of time and energy” (Gaetz, 2002, p.2). This might also explain why the participants in the current study refused to address the insults and wage exploitation they encountered in their work environments. Wilson (1999) also introduced the concept of self efficacy as motivation for seeking information. In other words people would not seek information if they know they would not achieve a desired outcome.

5.9.4 Strategies for Dealing with Issues of Security

The findings indicate that homeless youth provide their own security against thieves and sexual molesters, by adopting both personal and collective strategies. The male participants kept only a minimum amount of cash for food and other emergencies after saving with the susu collector, to secure their savings. This minimum was kept in a box lodged with the susu collector, who charges a fee for the custodial service. The head porters also tended to sleep together and would collectively attack any assailant. Esi explained that when a thief attacks someone, the person raises an alarm and the youth come together to beat the assailant. The findings are similar to those of Muntingh (2006), who reported that street children (ages seven to over 18 years) in Zambia stay together to keep safe and cry for help in times of trouble. Other minor strategies noted in his study include reporting to police, sharing money with older boys for protection, going to sleep early, and fighting back. Such defensive strategies were not witnessed in the current study.
5.9.5 Everyday Life Information Seeking for Justice

The findings reveal that study participants rely on informal sources such as friends, trusted elderly persons, parents, Hometown Association leaders, and self appointed mediators for support, counselling, resolution of conflicts and reconciliation in the event of false accusations by peers, fighting with peers, and problems with employers. Using elders for mediation, as in other multiethnic societies in Africa, is very much a part of the traditional norms and values in the Ghanaian society. The head of the extended family (made up of the nuclear family, uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents) is the eldest male. Each family belongs to a clan in the community. The head of the clan is the eldest male or an elected elder. Generally parents resolve disputes involving their children but within the extended family the family head takes up that role. Unresolved conflicts at the family level are referred to the head of the clan (Adjabeng, 2007). It is therefore not surprising that in the absence of a family or clan head, homeless youth would turn to trusted elders they know in the city for advice and help in resolving any conflicts they encounter. Hometown Associations are also very common among migrants in the major cities of Ghana. They are informal voluntary groups based on a common hometown “that bring members together for social, cultural, political empowerment and economic development goals” (Sommerville, Durana, and Terrazas, 2008). They also foster unity, and reinforce ethnic identities and hometown loyalty. The findings reveal that some of the head porters are knowledgeable about the activities of these associations. For example Sisi mentioned that the leaders of their Hometown Association seek their welfare, counsel and resolve their conflicts and on one occasion they took all of them (the head porters) by bus to another location in the city to meet other leaders. As already indicated, the study participants are short term migrants to the city and therefore see their parents regularly. While in the city, they keep in touch by mobile phone. Thus, they are able to seek their help and advice in conflict situations as happened in the case of Oko who linked his parents with a trusted elderly person to settle a robbery issue with regard to his work. Some unscrupulous persons assume the role of arbitrators and charge street youth, especially the head porters, for settling their conflicts/disputes. However as mentioned by Ama,
one such person also assaults them when they fight, destroys their goods, and steals their money. Obviously such persons take advantage of their naivety, inexperience, vulnerability and lack of adult protection to exploit them.

The strategies for dealing with issues of justice by homeless youth in the study are different from those reported in other studies. For example the Gaetz (2002) study of access to justice by street youth in Toronto reported that they use both formal and informal channels in addressing their need for justice. In dealing with the issues of housing, they primarily use lawyers, staff at street youth agencies, Rental Housing Tribunals, and also educate themselves with resource materials on landlord tenancy issues from street youth agencies. Others sources are friends and relatives. The study further indicated that street youth who lose custody of their children also gain access to legal representation and counsel, and education about the process from the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto, an NGO whose mission statement includes protecting children and youth from abuse and neglect (Gaetz, 2002).

The fact that no formal sources are available for the youth in Accra in their search for justice is a source of concern since it might increase their vulnerability to acts of injustice by unscrupulous individuals who know that the homeless youth have no adult or formal protection under the law. Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Children indicates that children have a right to be protected from all forms of violence, mistreatment and abuse. Ghana, as the first nation to ratify the convention, has an obligation to ensure the protection of these vulnerable youth.

5.9.6 Everyday Health Information Seeking Behaviours

The findings show that participants practice self-medication for the most part, buying drugs from nearby pharmacy shops for minor ailments such as headaches. Efia explained that they describe their symptoms to the Pharmacist, who then sells them the appropriate remedial drug. When they are seriously ill, they either go to the hospital, or travel back to their hometowns to seek medical attention.
There is a deep sense of community among the street youth. They care for and watch over each other. Therefore in their health information seeking, they sometimes adopt a community approach to address the health needs of a member. They make monetary contributions to pay for the medical expenses of a seriously sick member, or to pay for his trip back home. Such contributions are made when the afflicted member has no money to pay the bills. He/she is not required to pay the money back. When the patient is not strong enough to make the journey by himself, a volunteer accompanies him to assure his safe arrival in his/her hometown or village. The afflicted person receives the same support, if he opts to travel home directly without visiting a hospital. This statement from one of the participants illustrates the community approach to their health information seeking:

*If someone comes here and he is too young and falls sick out of mosquito bites, we contribute money and send him back home (Manu).*

The comment suggests that younger and new street youth benefit from this welfare system too. The motivation for this practice among the street youth might be to strengthen their social capital, as evidenced by Adusa’s response when he was asked whether the recipient refunded the money:

*If I am the one who needs help, the others can contribute money to help me. We don’t take the money back from the person, because it can happen that you will also find yourself in the same problem and will require help from others (Adusa).*

In other words, they recognize the benefit in maintaining this mutual insurance arrangement, because of their vulnerability as homeless persons.

Buying drugs from a pharmacy for minor ailments, as study participants do, is common practice among the Ghanaian populace. For example, the 2008 Ghana Living Standard Survey report indicated that 32 % of Ghanaians do not consult healthcare practitioners when they are sick, but simply buy drugs to treat their ailments (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). This finding is similar to that of Ensign and Panke’s (2002) study on reproductive health seeking behaviour of
adolescent homeless women (ages 14 to 23) in Seattle, in which participants practiced self-care by using painkillers such as Tylenol for their ailments, and went to the hospital as a last resort only.

Studies from other countries, especially developed countries, suggest that homeless youth there have access to more sources of health information and free healthcare than in the current study. For example, other sources of information mentioned by Ensign and Panke (2002) are ‘Ask-a-Nurse’ phone consulting services, herbalists, herbal reference books and alternative sources like naturopathic pharmacies. Another study by Ensign and Bell (2004) of recent illnesses of homeless youth (ages 12 to 24) in Seattle revealed that the participants used emergency departments, free services at drop-in centres and the ‘Medical Van’ to meet their health information needs. A study in Santa Monica, California, to assess the health seeking challenges of homeless youth, reported that homeless youth used free medical services in drop-in centres (Hudson et al., 2010). The preferred source of health information by homeless youth in Pakistan (Ali and De Muynck, 2005) is a spiritual healer. Others are a medical doctor and a traditional healer, or herbalist.

The findings are comparable to those of studies of the everyday life information seeking behaviour of other poor communities. For example, a study of everyday life information seeking behaviour of women in rural communities in Botswana by Mooko (2005), reported medical practitioners such as the village nurse as a source of health information. Another source (not mentioned by study participants) is the traditional doctor.

The practice of homeless youth accompanying their sick peers to seek medical attention was reported by Ensign and Panke (2002), Ensign and Bell (2004), and Ali and De Muynck (2005). What is unique in the findings of the current study is the elaborate ‘welfare strategy’ practiced by the study participants. The fact that some of the homeless youth travelled back to their
villages/towns to seek medical attention is also a finding unique to this study. It might also be the reason why they have the intention of returning home eventually.

Barriers to meeting the health information needs of study participants were found to be economic, personal, environmental, and situational. They include the high cost of hospital fees, lack of enrolment in the National Health Insurance Scheme, inadvertently leaving the health insurance card back home, lack of availability of a National Health Insurance post in their hometown, and fear of inadequate care in the absence of family members. Some participants (26.8%) were not enrolled in the health insurance scheme, because they could not afford the premium. Others (31.7%) were enrolled, but had left their health insurance cards in their hometowns or villages. One of the respondents (Koku) explained that they normally leave their belongings outside, so when it rains everything gets wet and that is why they leave their cards behind. This suggests that access to shelter is imperative. Among other benefits, it will facilitate their access to healthcare. In other words, access to proper shelter affords secure storage for their valuables, such as health insurance cards. The lack of health insurance means that the homeless youth pay high charges for any treatments they receive from the hospitals. They avoid the hospitals, because they do not think they could afford those charges. One of the respondents (Ago) confirmed that the lack of health insurance cards was the main reason why they buy medicine from the pharmacy, without going to the hospital.

The lack of enrolment in the National Health Insurance Scheme and lack of access to registration, as indicated by one of the participants, are confirmed by an Oxfam International (2011) report on achieving universal health care in Ghana, which indicates that the National Health Insurance Scheme is fraught with an inefficient administrative and registration system. The result is that 64% of the richest are registered while only 29% of the poorest are registered, and many Ghanaians do not have access to a National Health Insurance Scheme agent in their localities.
These findings indicate that the very purpose for which the Ghana National Health Insurance Act 2003 (Act 650) was passed is being defeated, with respect to this segment of the population. The purpose of the Act is “to secure the provision of basic healthcare services to persons resident in the country through mutual and private health insurance schemes” (Ghana Government, 2004, p. 4). The law mandates that all subscribers pay an annual premium of GHC 7.2 to GHC 48.0 (about US$4.3 to US$28.7), based on income. Persons under 18 years of age (with both parents enrolled in the scheme), senior citizens aged 70 and above and the poor with no identifiable sources of income are exempted from premium payments too. They need merely register at a National Health Insurance agency in their district to benefit from the scheme. The benefit package includes outpatient and inpatient services, oral health, eye care, emergency services and maternity care, such as deliveries (both normal and assisted) pre-natal and postnatal services and coverage for about 95% of the commonly occurring diseases in Ghana. The law was enacted to replace the ‘cash and carry’ system, which required patients to make immediate out-of-pocket payments for medical bills before, or after treatment. This system caused a lot of hardship, especially among the poor, who were refused medical attention because they could not pay the initial deposit required. Others avoided going to the hospital altogether (National Health Insurance Scheme, n.d.). The findings suggest that homeless youth are not benefiting from the scheme fully, because of the barriers cited above. Participants who, together with their parents, were not registered in the scheme due to cost considerations probably lack knowledge of the provisions for exemption from premium payments accorded the poor. There is a need for concerted efforts by government and other stakeholders to better educate street youth about the National Health Insurance Act (Act 650).

Other studies have reported cost (Munyck, 2005) and lack of health insurance (Hudson et al., 2010 and Ensign and Panke, 2002) as barriers to health information seeking by street, or homeless youth. The additional barriers to health information seeking of homeless youth reported in those studies are very different from barriers identified in the current study. For
example, Ensign and Panke (2002) identified structural issues such as unfavourable opening times of designated clinics for homeless youth (clinics are closed during weekends), questions about consent forms and identification cards, questions about confidential matters by front desk staff; the filling of multiple forms at the regular clinics, and individual issues, such as lack of transportation money and lack of social support (i.e., a friend or partner to accompany them to the clinic). Hudson et al. (2010) mentioned social barriers, including dismissive and discriminatory practices by some health professionals, and personal hygiene (such as the company of a ‘smelly’ homeless person) and a general perception by homeless youth that they are not wanted by society. Others are structural limitations such as priority care; i.e., homeless youth with drug related health issues and those who have been homeless for a longer period receive priority care (Hudson et al., 2010). The lack of a permanent address, the bureaucracy associated with seeing a General Practitioner, the perception that their sicknesses were not serious, and feelings of dissatisfaction that their sicknesses had not been properly diagnosed were reported also by Reid and Klee (1999).

ELIS studies of other poor communities reported different challenges to health information seeking. For example, Mooko (2005) reported that the rural women in her study were frustrated with the village nurse who was the sole provider of their health information, because her information was often inadequate, incorrect and unhelpful. Sligo and Jameson (2000) also reported cultural barriers as a hindrance to cervical screening among Pacific Island women in New Zealand, where it is a taboo among this population to discuss the female reproductive system.

5.9.6.1 Knowledge and Sources of Information of STDs and HIV/AIDS of Homeless Youth

The findings indicate that all participants have a general awareness of HIV/AIDS. Male participants were more knowledgeable about STDs and HIV/AIDS than female participants, including the different modes of transmission, symptoms and measures for preventing infection.
A few male participants, who had completed junior secondary school or grade 9, nevertheless offered inaccurate information on the subject, such as transmission of the diseases by using the sponge of, or touching an infected person, or infection through mosquito bites.

This was surprising, because the researcher expected those taught about the diseases in school to be well informed about the basics such as their transmission, symptoms and prevention. The study did not investigate the sources of this misinformation. Nevertheless the findings highlight participants’ need for accurate information, in order to make choices that enhance their health and safety. Generally, the female participants lacked knowledge of STDs other than HIV/AIDS. Also, other than knowing about getting infected through sex, they lacked knowledge about the symptoms and preventive measures and other modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS. This finding is not surprising, since the female participants are largely uneducated (as discussed in section 5.4). It is significant, particularly because other studies have shown that some street youth are sexually active (Anarfi and Antwi, 1995; Anarfi, 1997), have multiple sex partners and engage in sex for money (Tanle, cited in Awusabo-Asare, Abane, and Kumi-Kyereme, 2004). The lack of adequate and accurate information on the subject among the homeless youth poses an added risk to populations in the city and hometowns of the youth. A study to investigate knowledge about HIV/AIDS and sexually risky behaviour of street children in Takoradi, a major city in Ghana, indicated that more females than males reported forced sexual encounters in their hometowns and also, that the youths were more active sexually on the streets of the city (Wutoh et al., 2006). A USAID (2010) report indicated that Ghana’s HIV/AIDS epidemic is largely stable, with an estimated 1.9% adult prevalence and about 260,000 people living with the pandemic in 2007. It did mention, however, that one of the factors that might put the country at risk of a broader epidemic is risky sexual behaviour among the youth. Thus there is an urgent need to increase the provision of relevant STD and HIV/AIDS information among street youth, especially among the females, to heighten their awareness of risks, remedies and preventive measures. As emphasized by Anarfi and Antwi (1995), education and information is
the only viable means of averting the spread of HIV/AIDS, in the absence of a vaccine and widespread access to curative medicines.

These findings are corroborated by findings from other studies, with some differences in detail. For example, an earlier study in Accra by Anarfi (1995) to investigate sexual networking and its impact on the spread of HIV/AIDS among street youth reported 98% awareness of HIV/AIDS by study participants. The study also reported that a number of participants held inaccurate information about HIV/AIDS, such as its transmission by witchcraft, or an act of God. Participants in the current study did not make reference to such modes of transmission. Wutoh et al. (2006) also reported a general awareness of HIV/AIDS among street youth, with limited information on its mode of transmission. Their study indicated that the majority of respondents know about unprotected sex as a mode of transmission. A smaller proportion of both male and female respondents indicated infected razor blades and syringe needles as other modes of transmission. A Toronto study by Dematteo et al. (1999) entitled “Toronto street youth and HIV/AIDS: Prevalence, demographics and risks”, which involved 720 street youth ages 14 to 25, indicated that the responses of participants included both correct and incorrect information about HIV/AIDS. The majority of participants (68%) in their study correctly identified unprotected sex and the sharing of dirty syringe needles as two sources of infection. However, 16% cited incorrect modes of transmission, including mosquitoes, kissing, toilet seats, and touching infected persons.

The findings of the current study revealed two main sources of information on STDs and HIV/AIDS: schools (32%) and the media, particularly TV (28%) and radio (16%). The other identified sources are interpersonal, namely friends (8%), market women (8%), leaders of Hometown Associations (8%), the grapevine (8%) and mothers (4%). A few of the male participants identified friends as an interpersonal source. The other interpersonal sources, market women, mothers, and leaders of Hometown Associations were indicated by the female participants. The problem with young people using other people as sources of information is that
they are not able to assess the strengths and weakness of the people and do not question the 
accuracy of the information they receive (Shenton and Dixon, 2003b). This might partly explain 
the female participants’ limited knowledge about STDs and HIV/AIDS. Some female participants 
indicated the media as their source of HIV information, but the nature of their work does not 
permit them to benefit fully from that source. For example, female respondent Akosua 
mentioned that they watch TV occasionally, on Saturday evenings only, because Sunday is a 
rest day for them. They are not able to watch TV during the week, because of fatigue after work 
and the fact that they have to wake up early to start work. Sisi also mentioned that as they roam 
about, they sometimes hear a discussion of the topic on someone’s radio. The implication is that 
they watch TV sparingly and are also unlikely to fully concentrate on information from the radio 
while working. There is a need for an STD and HIV/AIDS educational campaign targeted at the 
street youth. A UNICEF report indicates that since 1996, Ireland Aid, in collaboration with 
UNICEF, has been supporting two NGOs in Ghana, namely Catholic Action for Street Children 
(CAS) and Street Girls Aid (SGAID), to offer healthcare, counselling, literacy, vocational skills 
and health education, including the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information, to street youth 
(UNICEF, Ghana, 2002). Their services are available in a few suburbs in Accra and do not 
include the location for the current study.

The findings are similar to other studies, but differ in some details. For example, a study by 
Leach, Wolitski, Goldbaum and Fishbein (2007) to examine the HIV risk characteristics and 
sources of HIV information among 430 sexually active street children in Seattle, Washington 
indicated small media (i.e., flyers and brochures), followed by interpersonal sources (i.e., 
physicians, friends and outreach staff) and mass media sources as serving their health 
information needs. Small media was not indicated as a source in the current study.

A number of African studies reported mostly interpersonal sources, but also the Internet as 
sources of health information for adolescents. For example, Nwagwu (2007) reported the 
sources of reproductive health information for both in-school and out-of school adolescent girls.
in Owerri, Nigeria as teachers, parents, friends, and health providers and the health class in school. Other sources are books and public health campaigns. The out-of school adolescents mentioned the Internet also, as a source of health information. A similar study in Ghana to investigate how teens in Ghana use the Internet for health information showed that both in-school and out-of school adolescents used the Internet as a source of health information. The in-school adolescents used parents, health providers and books additionally, as sources of health information (Borzekowski et al., 2006). A Ugandan study by Ybarra, Emenyonu, Nansera, Kiwanuka, and Bangsberg (2008) involving secondary school students reported similar results, but identified libraries too as a source of health information. These studies indicate that homeless youth, like other adolescents, tend to use interpersonal sources for their health information seeking; probably because of easy access. Other sources not recorded in the current study are libraries, public health campaigns and the internet.

5.9.7 Everyday School Information Seeking Behaviour of Homeless Youth

The findings indicate that student participants relied primarily on print sources, such as textbooks, pamphlets, books from their school libraries and lesson notes, to meet their school information needs. They use interpersonal sources like teachers, friends, their seniors, and siblings, when they need further explanation of what they learn at school. The researcher expected television to be cited as one of the sources of school information. The national television network, Ghana Television (GTV), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education broadcast educational programs for primary and secondary schools from the mid-sixties till the first quarter of 2003. The programs were transmitted between 9:30am and 12.00pm each day. They included mathematics, general science, English, geography, and history (Nuviadenu, 2005). The programs were replaced with the ‘President’s Special Initiative on Distance Learning’ (PSI-DL) in July 2003. PSI-DL includes three phases. The first phase started in July 2004 and has junior high and senior high school units designed to offer mathematics, sciences, English, and other subjects to youth both in and out of the school system. Its main purpose is to bridge
the gap between the well endowed and poorly endowed schools in the rural areas (Donkor and Mallet, 2006). The government has taken a number of measures to ensure that the program reaches its target population throughout the country. The measures include:

1. Directives to all heads of schools to restructure their time-tables, so that teachers and their students can to watch the lessons live and record the lessons for later use;
2. Distribution of television sets to schools and provision of solar power to junior high schools in communities without electricity, to enable them to access the programs.

It is, therefore, surprising that none of the participants mentioned that they watched these programs on the TV. The measures for assuring ready access to the broadcasts and the sustained effort of daily distance learning programming on GTV’s country-wide network over the six year period from 2004 do not appear to have met the information need of participants, who are part of the target audience. This is especially important, because most of the participants are not able to afford the textbooks needed for their school work. The study highlights a need to monitor and evaluate PSI-DL, to confirm its effectiveness.

The findings of the current study were found to be similar to Latrobe and Havener’s (1997) study of the information seeking behaviour of high school honours students. Their findings revealed that the students relied heavily on classroom instruction, followed by other personal sources (e.g. teachers, friends, parents and other relatives), organizations (e.g., libraries), print sources (such as books, newspapers and magazines), electronic media (such as TV and radio) and personal experience. Newspapers, electronic media and parents were not cited in the current study. Some studies (Shenton and Dixon, 2004; Shenton, 2008; Fidel, Davies, Douglas and Holder, 1999) also reported use of electronic sources such as CD-ROM and Internet sources by young adults in their school information seeking. These sources were not cited in the current study. Internet use is not prevalent in Ghana. Statistics on internet use in Africa indicate that Internet penetration in Ghana in December, 2011 was only 8.4% (Internet World Statistics, n.
Only 1% of the over 2,500 secondary and post-secondary schools in Ghana have access to the internet (Osiakwam, n.d.). It is not surprising, therefore, that the Internet was not cited by participants as a source of school-related information.

The main barriers to their school information seeking are poverty and inadequate school infrastructure. Poverty affects their information seeking in different ways. For example, Adusa mentioned that he did not understand some of the words taught in school, because he could not afford to buy a dictionary. Kojo emphasized that if they had the money to buy books and uniforms, they would have stayed at home to attend extra classes during the vacation, rather than travel to Accra to work. Extra classes, popularly known as ‘vacation classes’, are normally organised for examination candidates outside the normal school calendar. They are privately run by the teachers during the long vacation from August to September, to prepare students for their final examination (Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE)). They are very well patronized by students and supported by the Ministry of Education. The Accra Metropolitan Education Directorate, for example, has issued guidelines for the organization of extra classes. Students pay extra fees to attend these classes (Ghana News Agency, 2010). The homeless youths who work to fund their own education during holidays always miss out on the vacation classes, putting them at a disadvantage, especially when preparing for the BECE. Another impact of poverty is that they are not able to concentrate on their studies, because their focus is on making money, as mentioned by Oko.

Another barrier to their information seeking is limited educational facilities, such as computers, library facilities and lights. Oko mentioned that they had few computers in their school, causing many students to share one computer during their ICT lessons. Adusa complained that they were learning ICT without computers and so they did not understand the course. Oko seldom went to his school library to read, because it was small and often noisy. Other barriers are cognitive; for example, Adusa mentioned they had difficulty understanding and retaining the facts taught in class:
Learning is very difficult because the explanation in class does not come forthright. We do understand but easily forget afterwards and this really worries us (Adusa).

The fact that some of these youths are on the streets working to pay school related costs suggests that government policies (discussed under section 5.4), such as the capitation grant, the Ghana Schools Feeding Programme (GSFP) and a textbook development and availability policy for greater access to textbooks in public schools, which are designed to make education free for all, have not yielded the desired results. There is a need for the re-evaluation of these programs to ensure that the vulnerable, in particular, are benefiting from them. It is important that the government provide adequate infrastructure and school supplies for the needy schools in the rural areas where the homeless youth come from. It would be unacceptable for these youths to endure homelessness in the city to fund their education, only to fail their final examinations and trail their peers in the city as a result of government failures.

The nature of their school information problems suggest a need for their participation in public library teen programs such as Homework help for teens, book a librarian, and library and computer training to augment their learning. For example the Toronto Public Library teen programs include homework help for teens run by trained volunteers three hours a day, computer training programs, such as Move That Mouse, a basic training in keyboarding skills, Web basics and introduction to Microsoft Word 2007, editing and using templates etc. (Toronto Public Library, n.d.) Such programs made available to the youths in the public libraries in their hometowns would mitigate some of the barriers to their everyday school information seeking.

Findings of the current study are similar to a study in Niagara, Ontario to explore the causes and impact of youth homelessness among youth. Lack of money was found to be the main barrier to the continuance of education by participants of that study. Other barriers identified in the Niagara study, but not reported in the current study include housing, depression and stress, hanging out with the wrong people, drugs and mental health issues (Collins, 2010).
5.9.8 Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour for Shelter

The findings indicate that the participants sleep outdoors primarily, in front of shops in the marketplace. They secure these spaces by seeking permission from owners, or simply sleep in front of the shops when business closes for the day, without obtaining the consent of shop owners. The youths locate these spaces through their friends, or siblings who are already resident in Accra, by phone calls or going directly to the market to look for space. A few of the homeless youth in the study owned mobile phones. For example, Tsoo uses her phone to maintain contact with her customers who come to the market. She permits her friends to receive calls from home on it too.

... when my customers come, they will call me to come and carry their loads. Also I use it to call home and when someone gets a call from home I will give it to her to talk (Tsoo).

Barriers to their ability to rent suitable accommodation are cost, lack of such accommodation in the neighbourhood and the perception of landlords that homeless youths are thieves and a detriment to the community. This profile is applied to homeless boys in particular. The findings also suggest that some of the participants sleep in the open to maximize their savings and fulfil their goals within the shortest possible time. Kobi chose to sleep outside till he could make enough money to return to school, because he considered rented shelters too expensive. This finding is similar to Yeboah’s (2008) observation that porters in Accra use deplorable shelters in order to sustain themselves in the city and be able to afford to send remittances to their families back home. The affordable shelters offer only modest protection against the elements and in fact, leave the tenants’ health at risk. They are poorly ventilated and lack bathrooms, or waste disposal facilities (ModernGhana.com, n.d.). Yeboah (2008) described the shelters used by porters in her study as densely populated, with multiple uses; including storage, sleeping, drying of clothes and cooking, making them high risk zones with regard to the health of tenants.

The shelter seeking strategies identified in this study are not consistent with other studies. For example, Hersberger (2005) mentioned that two of her participants used yellow pages and a
brochure from a family member to find shelters. Reid and Klee (1999) also mentioned that homeless youth in the Greater Manchester area relied on the Department of Housing, social services, day centers, and friends or families for information on housing. Gaetz (2010) reported that homeless youth in Toronto arranged with friends and relatives for temporary housing (i.e., couch surfing), or adults, who provided them with shelter in exchange for sex. Some return home to parents and caregivers, but those tended to be short lived solutions, until the causes of their homelessness resurfaced.

Cost as a barrier to participants’ seeking shelter has been reported by other studies. For example, Gatz (2002) reported that as a result of poverty, homeless youth in his study could only rent houses which are poorly maintained, unsafe, unclean, infested with vermin and severely damaged (with broken windows, faulty appliances and holes in the walls and ceiling). Most findings of other studies are inconsistent with the current study, however; for instance, Barnaby, Penn, Erickson (2010) reported problems of shelter seeking by homeless youth as:

- discrimination by Landlords as a result of their age and any sign of drug use,
- lack of previous rental experience,
- unemployment,
- limited housing options and
- unwillingness to put up with persons with mental disability.

5.9.9 Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour for Skills Development

Findings from the current study indicate that participants relied on the traditional apprenticeship system in Ghana for skills development. They acquire information from the master craftsman through face-to-face instruction and observation. Traditional apprenticeship is the most prevalent means of skills acquisition in Ghana.

Palmer (2009) states that “it is responsible for about 80 to 90% of all basic skills training in Ghana, compared with 5 to 10% from public training institutions” (p. 68). It offers sector specific
training to young adults who move on to establish their own businesses, continue to work in the same firms where they were trained, or move to other firms (Monk, Sandefur and Teal, 2008). The reasons for its high use are two-fold; economically, it improves one’s chances of having a job and raises his/her potential earnings (Monk, Sandefur and Teal, 2008). Secondly, the entry requirements are low and the structure is flexible. For example, it is accessible to all, irrespective of age, ethnicity, or level of literacy. An apprentice may be required to pay for his training, or may forgo income for work done. Some master craftsmen offer free boarding and lodging, some pocket money and bonuses also (ILO, cited in Donkor and Mallet, 2006). Palmer (2009) noted that many persons who have only completed primary, or junior high school and are unable to further their education, early school drop-outs, as well as illiterates enter into apprenticeship training for these reasons. The reasons cited by Donkor and Mallet (2006) explain why some of the study participants indicated they are in the city to raise money to fund participation in different apprenticeship programmes, such as dressmaking, plumbing, auto-mechanics, welding and carpentry (Figure 4.14).

The main barrier to participants’ skills development is lack of money. Participants who are already pursuing apprenticeship training need money to pay apprenticeship fees and living expenses such as food and transportation. The lack of money interrupts their training. For example, in answer to an enquiry about how his apprenticeship can progress, Joojo mentions:

*If I can get some money to buy food and money for transport fare or perhaps a bicycle anytime I go to work, my apprenticeship will be smooth and I wouldn’t have to break and come here for a while. I have made up my mind not to stay very long because I have to go back and continue my apprenticeship after making some money. And if I become short of money again, I will come back and work for a while and then go back home* (Joojo).

Knowledge of and access to structured forms of financing from the private sector or the government would facilitate the apprenticeship training of such youths and obviate their need to migrate temporarily to and become homeless in the city.
Studies in the LIS literature on career-related, information seeking behaviour of adolescents focused on their future careers and jobs, such as the study by Julien (1999), who explored the difficulties adolescents in a mid-sized Canadian city experience in looking for information to make career related decisions. Barriers to their career decision making include lack of knowledge about grade and course requirements, difficulty in finding resources needed to make decisions and information about jobs, lack of confidence to seek appropriate help and also, information overload; that is, excessive amounts and variety of information needed to make informed decisions about their careers. These barriers are very different from those identified in this study.

5.9.10 Television and Radio as Sources of Information

The findings showed that 78% of participants watch television for entertainment, information on current affairs, moral lessons and counselling about life. The TV programs include news, sports (especially soccer), comedy shows, religious programmes, talk shows and discussion programs about life issues. The youths watch these programs in their homes, or neighbours’ homes, while in their hometowns. They watch them in shops near their living space, or in the homes of hometown members nearby. Some neighbours and shop owners regularly put out their television sets for public viewing in Ghana. They tend to do it in the evenings, or when a popular soccer match is on the air. The researcher observed many instances of ordinary people, both adults and children, taking advantage of such public viewing. Therefore, it is not surprising that these homeless youth are able to view broadcasts without owning television sets.

The male participants were selective and purposeful in their TV watching habits. They watched news broadcasts to keep abreast with current issues in Ghana and abroad. They watched selected programs also to be informed about health related issues, morality and life issues, as illustrated by the following response:
They advise people as to how to live a moral and upright life which will lead to progress. They advised that one should be truthful at all times. They also talk about AIDS and advise us on how to protect ourselves from contracting it (Yao).

On the other hand, the majority of the female participants who watched TV were not selective in the programs, but watched anything they found interesting. This lack of selectivity among female participants may be due to a language barrier, as indicated by Akua (one of the female adolescents), who indicated that she resolved her language problems when watching TV by asking someone to translate the English broadcast to her.

The main barrier to patronage of TV in the city is fatigue. For example, Ama, Badu, and Joojo did not watch it regularly because they often come back from work exhausted. Others were focussed on their jobs and money and treat TV as a poor second, as explained by Akosua:

*Our concern is to work and get money, so you have to sleep and wake up to work and that is why we don't watch TV everyday (Akosua).*

One respondent (Kojo) indicated that he avoids watching TV in neighbours’ homes, to spare himself the possible embarrassment of being turned away. Others like Badu and Meefua did not watch it in the city, because they did not have access to one near their living space.

With regard to radio, 48.8% of the participants indicated they listened to the radio for the same purposes as watching TV, namely, entertainment, current affairs and counselling on life issues. Their favourite programs include news, sports commentary, programs devoted to the discussion of life issues, or current affairs and musical programs.

These findings indicate that the male participants are very passionate and purposeful about their favourite programmes, such as Fiifi, who explained why he preferred listening to news rather than music:

*I like the news; I don't like music. There is nothing to benefit from listening to music. Yes, if you are listening to news and I am listening to music and there is an announcement from the government that everybody should come to Accra and all their needs will be
Although there are public radio boxes available in the markets (as observed by the researcher during the fieldwork), most of the head porters do not take advantage of this facility, due to the nature of their work and language barriers. Ajoa, Maana, Ama and Sisi explained that their work involved going about looking for customers and so they could not sit at one place to listen to the radio. Sometimes though, the language in which a program is broadcast on radio is the primary barrier to listening by the head porters. For example, Fafa and Maame indicated that although they listened to the radio they did not always understand the verbalised broadcasts. This finding is similar to Momodu's (2002) ELIS study of rural populations in the Ekpoma district of Nigeria, which reported that, because of the prevalence of illiteracy, most of the rural dwellers could not benefit from any media-based education campaign, because they were delivered in English to obviate the many ethnic languages spoken in the district.

Studies have shown that ethnic languages are used infrequently in the Ghanaian media, compared with English. For example, a study by Nuviadenu (2005) to analyze the flow of international programs on Ghana television (GTV) from 1969 to 2003 indicated that in 2003, out of the 206 programs aired weekly, 190 were in English and 16 only were in 5 of the 36 distinctive ethnic languages spoken in Ghana. Another study by Heath (2001) to analyze changes in regional radio broadcasts since constitutional governance was re-established in Ghana in 1998 indicated that English was the main language used by the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation in her two national services. Radio 1 is a non-commercial service which airs programs for women, children, the elderly and agricultural workers in 6 of the ethnic languages, as well as English. Radio 2 is an all-English-language commercial service. Heath concluded that the Radio 1 service was not efficient in serving the population and “could not be regarded as a medium for genuine social and economic development” (p. 92), since less than two hours was allocated to each language, and some language communities, especially in the
northern regions, were excluded from the service. It is noteworthy that the female participants of
the current study come from the northern regions of the country. Therefore, if their languages
are not used in the broadcasts of Radio 1 and the findings show that they do not understand the
English language, because of inadequate formal education, they have been effectively
marginalized from the national discourse and are not likely to benefit from any information
disseminated to the public through media broadcasts, such as personal health information. This
might explain why they are ill informed about HIV/AIDS (section 5.8.5.1), despite numerous
informational broadcasts on the pandemic.

Findings from other studies suggest that media use by youth in the current study, that is, use of
radio and television as a source of news (especially among male participants) is comparable to
use by youths in other parts of the world. For example, a study by Olander (2003) for the Center
for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) reported that in-
spite of the popularity of the internet among young people in America, radio and television are
still important sources of news for most of them. Over 25% of young people (ages 15 to 25) still
use television and 22.9% use radio as sources of their daily news. Another study by Francais
(2007) involving 10 special focus groups of young people ages 15 to 24 from 10 different
countries, namely, the United States, United Kingdom and the Philippines, Japan, Serbia,
Spain, Sweden, Columbia, South Africa and Lebanon reported that the participants still regard
traditional media sources (i.e., radio, TV and newspapers) as more reliable, accurate and
trustworthy than new media such as the internet and social media. In a study of media use by
teens, Nielson (2009) emphasized that although teens are considered as “digital natives, super-
communicators and multi-taskers”, their media habits are still similar to the total population.
Using a variety of studies, Nielson (2009) concluded also that teens do not patronize new media
at the expense of traditional media, but to supplement it. They still watch television and listen to
the radio. The difference is that homeless youth in the current study watched traditional TV,
whilst teens in the US watched TV both on the traditional screen and via the internet. They also
watched online video through YouTube and social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace together with video library websites. With regard to radio as a source of music, Nielson reported that globally, only 16% of teens still use radio as a primary source of music. Other methods for music consumption by teens are MP3 format players (39%) and home computers (33%). Use of the internet, MP3 players and home computers were not investigated by the current study. The focus of the study was on use of radio and television as sources of information.

The findings are also comparable to findings from Dervin’s (1972) study of the communication behaviour of the urban poor. For example, both low income white and low income black participants of her study were found to use more TV than higher income urban dwellers and it was their preferred source for both local and international news. However, the findings also indicated that low income black participants believed news from television over radio, an observation which was not evident in the current study. In Chatman’s (1991) theory of gratification she postulated that the poor view the mass media as a medium of fantasy, escape, and stimulation. In this study however, though the participants used TV as a source of entertainment, such as watching football matches and movies, the male participants in particular used it more cognitively and not merely as a means of escape. For example, they used it to learn about the laws of the land, life and health issues and to keep abreast of international and local events.

5.10 Patterns in their Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviours (ELIS)
Savolainen (2004) refers to ELIS as the seeking of problem-specific information, such as finding a fact and seeking for information that is relevant to everyday events, by using various sources and channels. Figure 5.6 is a diagrammatic representation of the categories of expressed information needs, sources and barriers to information seeking of homeless youth who participated in the study. This section describes the categories/patterns in the everyday life
information seeking behaviour of homeless youth in the study and how they compare to those identified in similar studies on youth, and the information seeking behaviour literature in general, including their information needs, sources of information, range of sources, factors that determine the choice of sources, channels of communication, modes of information seeking, and barriers to their information seeking.
Figure 5.6 - ELIS diagnostic chart, showing the basic and information needs, categories of sources, and intervening variables of homeless youth.
**Life needs:** The 11 categories of needs, or problems in their everyday life (money, shelter, employment, education, health, skills development, security, respect, unfair wages, justice and food) were all found to relate to basic needs. They are physiological, safety, esteem, or cognitive/self-actualization needs. Some of the information needs identified in the current study are a consequence of the participants’ homelessness. Shelter, security, unfair wages, respect, justice and food information needs match that description. The needs for health, money, education, employment and vocational skills are comparable to the universal needs of adolescents identified by a Carnegie Corporation report, including cognitive and educational competence, health and physical well being, preparation for work, personal and social competence, and leadership and citizenship (Carnegie Corporation, 1992). In other words, in spite of their limitations as poor and homeless youth, they have an inner desire to meet their developmental goals to become successful and responsible adults. However, the 11 categories of needs expressed by study participants were found to be fewer than the categories identified in a similar study. For example, a study of the everyday life information seeking behaviour of urban young adults in Philadelphia by Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) yielded 28 categories of information needs. Apart from the need for information on jobs and school homework noted both in their study and the current study, the majority of information needs identified by Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005), including information about meal selection, date of an event, shopping, clothing selection, television schedule, leisure activity, traffic/transportation etc., were not evident in the current study. The probable cause of this inconsistency is the situational difference between the two groups of study participants. Participants of the current study are homeless and therefore, their information needs are geared towards meeting their immediate or basic needs. They do not have the luxury of looking for information on the other needs identified by Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005). As Hersberger (2005) explained, for persons in transitional crisis situations, such as homeless persons, basic living needs such as food and shelter take precedence over other information concerns. This assertion is confirmed by other studies of everyday life information seeking behaviour of homeless youth, such as those of
Alexander et al. (2005), Reid and Klee (1999) and Ensign and Panke (2002) which indicate that the information needs of homeless youth relate to basic needs such as shelter, clothing, food, healthcare and money. Homeless youth in the current study were in the city to address concerns about their education and vocational skills also, pursuits which shaped their everyday life information seeking behaviour.

**Sources of Information:** The study revealed 20 sources of information, categorised as:

- Print sources (books, pamphlets, lesson notes),
- Media sources (television and radio),
- Institutional sources (libraries and hospitals), and
- Interpersonal sources which include family members (parents, siblings), experts (teachers, pharmacists), business people (microfinance agent, market women, employers), opinion leaders (Hometown Association leaders, arbitrators), colleagues (friends and school seniors), and members of the public (customers, elderly people).

Participants tended to rely on interpersonal sources as their primary sources of information. This assertion is based on the finding that participants of the study relied solely on interpersonal sources to meet eight of the information needs identified in the study, namely, money, shelter, unfair wages, security, justice, employment, skills development and food. They did not rely as much on interpersonal sources for school and health information needs. They relied on institutional (hospitals) and media sources in addition to interpersonal ones for their health information. Their sources of school information included print sources and libraries, in addition to interpersonal sources.

The most frequently used interpersonal source of information among the study participants was their social network of friends. Friends were cited as a source of information for eight out of the eleven information needs identified in the study. The eight are financial management, shelter, education, employment, security, health, justice and food. Participants’ decision to migrate to
Accra was based on information about prospects for making financial gains while living in Accra, which they gleaned from friends returning home from the city, either by verbal exchanges, or observing their life styles.

The primary use of interpersonal sources noted in the study is consistent with other ELIS studies of young people, such as Shenton and Dixon (2004), Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005), and Ybarra, Emenyonu, Nansera, Kiwanuka, and Bangsberg (2008). The implication is that the information seeking behaviours of participants of the study are consistent with those of other young people, in spite of their homelessness. The reason why young people rely on other persons as primary sources is mainly because of convenience, according to Shenton and Dixon (2003). Additionally, reliance on interpersonal sources often involves conversation, which is a natural human activity. Fisher, Marcoux, Miller, Sanchez, and Cunningham (2004) mention also that the reasons for interpersonal preference are familiarity and ease of communication, ease of access, and reliability.

**Range of sources:** The range of sources used by participants in the current study was limited, compared especially with homeless youth in developed countries. For example, their sources for health information include self, the pharmacy, hospitals, friends, TV and radio. By contrast, homeless youth in the United States use other sources such as medical vans, free medical services at drop-in centres, emergency departments, herbal reference books, naturopathic pharmacies, and Ask-a-Nurse phone services (Ensign and Panke, 2002; Ensign and Bell, 2004; and Hudson et al., 2010). In their school information seeking also, participants in the current study relied on interpersonal and print sources only. Studies such as Shenton and Dixon (2004), Shenton, (2008) and Fidel, Davis, Douglas and Holder (1999) reported that, apart from print and interpersonal sources, young people in other countries also use electronic sources such as CD-ROM and the internet in their school information seeking. Other everyday life information studies on other populations, such as rural communities, also reported other sources which are not available to the homeless youth in the current study. For example, Mooko
(2005) reported that besides interpersonal and media sources, community welfare officers, women’s organizations, the village chief, church, and political leaders served as additional sources of information for women in rural communities in Botswana. Momodu (2002) in her study of rural communities of the Ekpoma district of Nigeria also mentioned postmasters, officials of co-operatives, traditional council of elders, and adult education campaigns as sources of information for the rural dwellers. In spite of the limited range of sources available to the homeless youth in the study, they were able to meet their everyday needs in large part by relying on their social network of friends.

Factors that determine choice of information sources: The findings suggest that the choice of sources by study participants was based on accessibility, credibility, convenience, and cost. For example, most of the interpersonal sources identified in the study, namely, friends, parents, siblings, market women and customers, are sources that are readily and easily accessible to the participants, because of relationships and proximity.

Their primary dependence on the ‘susu’, or microfinance agents for financial management services is clearly based on accessibility, convenience and trust. People tend to save their monies with banks, because they trust that their monies will be safe there and they will have access to them when needed. These microfinance agents are shop owners located in, or near the market where the homeless youth live. Making deposits or withdrawing savings are made convenient by this proximity. The requirements for opening an account are convenient and straightforward. For example, unlike the banks, the susu does not require any references, identification cards or a specified initial deposit. Each depositor determines how much he will deposit each day. The agents’ credibility is attested to by the fact that no stories of default circulate in the community of homeless youths. Access and credibility is also demonstrated in their use of trusted customers and family members in their financial management and use of elders they trust to mediate their conflicts.
Cost as a factor was demonstrated in their everyday health information seeking. They practiced self medication primarily, or described their illness to the Pharmacist, who sold them the appropriate drug, rather than follow the more expensive route of hospital visits.

The finding that accessibility is a factor in determining choice of information source is consistent with Harris and Dewdney’s (1994) theory of information habits, which asserts that people prefer to use interpersonal sources rather than institutions or organization in looking for information because of ease of access. They use institutional sources as a last resort or when it is absolutely necessary to do so.

Channels of communication: The study revealed that the primary mode of communication by participants is face-to-face interaction, such as in employment seeking, financial management, skills development, and seeking justice. They use the media and telephones less frequently. Examples of such infrequent usage are watching TV, or listening to the radio to be informed about life and health issues, such as HIV/AIDS, and interest driven programmes, such as sports, current affairs and music. A male participant who was accused of theft on the job communicated with his parents using a mobile phone, to resolve the problem.

Modes of information seeking: The study revealed four modes of information seeking by participants. They employed active search, passive search, passive attention and community approach in their ELIS behaviour.

- Active search is the acquisition of relevant information through some form of active behaviour. This was identified in their everyday life employment seeking behaviour when they sought alternate jobs. For example, Koku looked for a masonry or shoe-making job by asking prospective employers. Another behaviour related to their everyday life school information seeking occurs when they seek out their seniors, teacher, siblings, or friends for explanations of some facts in their lesson notes.
• Passive search is the acquisition of information that is relevant to an individual at a time when he is looking for something else, or engaged in another errand (Wilson, 1977). This mode of information seeking was identified in the participants’ employment seeking behaviour, on occasions when employers approached study participants and made job offers as they engaged in their self-employed activities. For example, Fafa got a job as a dish washer while carrying a load for a food vendor, who was impressed with her services, Meefua got a job as a laundry girl while running an errand and Ajoa opted to work in a chop bar (local eatery) when an employer approached a group with an offer, during a rest time.

• Passive attention – In passive attention, information seeking is not intended, but information is nevertheless acquired (Wilson, 1997). This mode of information seeking was identified in participants’ everyday use of the media. The information they acquired as they patronized their favourite radio and TV programs includes current affairs, laws of the country, life and moral lessons and health-related issues, such as the nature of HIV/AIDS and how one can avoid contacting it.

**The role of social capital in everyday life information seeking:** The findings revealed a deep sense of community among homeless youth in the city. Apart from living and sleeping together, their communities are characterized by free sharing of information, trust and specific norms and values that facilitate mutual care and support for one another. In other words, they rely on the social capital embedded within their community of friends to facilitate information seeking for resolving their everyday problems, such as problems associated with their health and employments.

The findings indicate that in their everyday health information seeking, for example when one person becomes seriously ill, they make non-refundable monetary contributions to pay the hospital bills, or the transportation cost in cases where the sick person decides to return home. In addition to the contributions, a volunteer may accompany the sick person. This norm within the community is a very important coping mechanism, especially since most of the study
participants did not have their health insurance cards with them and could not, therefore, access insurance-covered health delivery services.

Among the male participants, especially the shoe shine workers, new entrants are provided with complete orientation to enable them to succeed, on arriving in the city. The orientation includes an offer of working tools where needed, on the job training for three days, guidance on finding one’s way in the city, counselling on interacting with customers, how to stay out of trouble, and financial advice. This arrangement is very helpful; it enables newcomers to settle down quickly and begin to pursue their goals for coming to the city.

The study revealed that the homeless youth provide their own security during the night. One of the strategies the female participants use to protect themselves from thieves and sexual molesters is to raise an alarm when threatened, for all others to join in combatting the assailant.

Besides these examples, they freely share their food with their peers, or lend them money on days when their peers earn nothing. They provide such support and help for each other on a mutual basis, as indicated in the responses of Baako, one of the male participants:

*If a colleague needs something that you have, you are obliged to offer him help and also if you are in trouble, it is his duty to help you out* (Baako).

*If my friend does not have money to buy food, I am able to give him some money to buy food and if he is sick, I go to buy medicine for him* (Baako).

*He also does the same thing for me. If I need anything that he has, he gives me* (Baako).

The findings are consistent with Coleman’s (1988) observation that the useful capital resources embedded in social capital are obligations, expectations, trustworthiness of structures and norms, and sanctions. (However, the current study did not reveal any incidence of non-adherence to norms and sanctions).
The sense of community revealed in the current study is consistent with those observed by Alexander, Edwards, Fisher and Hersberger (2005). They reported a similar finding in their study of homeless persons in the King County area of Washington and concluded that it is a valuable information dissemination strategy.

Access to the social capital embedded in their social network of peers is indeed a major help in meeting their everyday information needs, considering that they have no assistance from government or non-governmental sources and must depend on themselves to master their developmental challenges and the problems associated with being homeless in an urban city like Accra.

**Barriers to their information seeking:** Wilson (1981) identified three factors that can hinder a person’s information seeking: social barriers, personal barriers, and role-related barriers. These barriers were expanded into eight factors he called intervening variables after critically reviewing studies from several disciplines including personality, health communication, consumer research, and innovative studies. The eight intervening variables include social/interpersonal variables, personal characteristics, emotional variables, demographic variables, educational variables, economic variables, environmental variables, and source characteristics (Wilson, 1997).

Analysis of the findings of this study revealed six of Wilson’s eight intervening variables as follows:

**Economic variables:** Cost was found to be a major intervening variable in the everyday life information seeking behaviour of the youth in this study, accounting for seven of the eleven information seeking behaviours. Cost factors include lack of money to pay for school-related costs, healthcare and health insurance, apprenticeship fees and living expenses during training, the initial deposit for opening an account in a bank, rents, start-up funds for alternate jobs, and money to buy food on days without any earnings.
**Personal characteristics:** Personal characteristics as an intervening variable relate to the youth’s everyday employment and health information seeking, addressing the issues of respect and unfair wages, and in the use of media. Their information seeking was impacted because the majority did not have health insurance cards, which they had either deliberately left behind or forgotten at home causing them to resort to self-medication or go home to avoid paying high medical bills at the hospital. In their employment seeking, one person indicated he felt shy about inquiring about job opportunities. Some could not benefit from media use such as watching TV because of fatigue after work. Lastly they were powerless or unwilling to address the continuous insults and unfair wages they encountered in their jobs.

**Educational variables:** The educational variables were identified in everyday financial management, employment and school information behaviours. They include lack of knowledge about formal banking procedures, for example the amount needed for an initial deposit, resulting in an exclusive use of informal microfinance agents in their everyday financial management, and lack of understanding of their lesson notes and unfamiliar English words in their everyday school information seeking. Also as a result of their limited educational qualifications, usually up to grade 9 in the case of the male participants, they are not able to apply for jobs that require qualifications above their educational level.

**Social/Interpersonal variables:** In their everyday employment seeking some of the head porters could not find employment because they had a baby. Potential employers and some customers preferred to use the services of head porters without babies. Some of the male participants who would have liked to rent kiosks for accommodation also claimed that kiosk owners perceive them as thieves and therefore avoided hiring out their kiosks to them.

**Environmental/situational variables:** Situational barriers were identified as an impediment to their media patronage. Some of the study participants indicated they are not able to watch television because of lack of time or fatigue after the day’s work. Others, particularly the head
porters indicated that their work required continuous movement and therefore they could not stop to listen to radio broadcasts.

**Source characteristics:** Source characteristics include access and credibility of information sources. Wilson (1977) explained that a source that is not easily accessible, and is unreliable in terms of quality and accuracy, may hinder information seeking. The findings revealed that in their school information seeking, some of the youth have inadequate access to computers and library facilities. They may also lack access to National Health Insurance, physical access to radio and television, and also as a result of the use of English as the main broadcast language, head porters lacked ability to benefit from media information.

In spite of these limitations and barriers the findings indicate that the youth in this study were able to meet their information needs, primarily through informal exchange among their social network of friends.

5.12 Theoretical Interpretations

The study was informed by Savolainen’s (1995) concepts of ‘way of life’ and ‘mastery of life’, and Chatman’s (1991) theory of gratification (Chatman, 1991) and the theory of normative behaviour (Burnett, Besant, and Chatman, 2001). The study findings will be discussed in the context of each of these theories to see what they have contributed to their interpretation.

5.12.1 Theoretical Interpretations of the Findings in the Context of Chatman’s Theory of Normative Behaviour

Chatman’s theory of Normative Behaviour is defined by Chatman (2000) as “that behaviour which is viewed by inhabitants of a social world as most appropriate for that particular context” (p.13). The purpose of Chatman’s theory is to explain the routine events that occur in a small world (Chatman, 2000). Small worlds have been described as “social environments where individuals live and work, bound together by shared interests and expectations, information
needs and behaviours and often economic status and geographic proximity as well” (Burnett, Jaeger, and Thompson (2008, p. 57).

Chatman (1999) defines a small world as “a community of like-minded individuals who share co-ownership of social reality” (p. 213). Thus, its members reflect common language, customs, and mutual opinions and concerns; members know the status of each other and those who are trustworthy and information that are trivial or relevant; resources available to members, both intellectual and material are easily accessible and well known (Chatman, 1999). In the context of these definitions and descriptions, homeless youth in the study can be described as living in a small world, since for example, they are poor, homeless, have common information needs and behaviours, live in the same market area and have shared interests and expectations such as working purposefully to earn money to meet their basic needs.

Chatman’s theory of normative behaviour comprises four concepts, social norms, world view, social types and information behaviour (Chatman, 2000).

**Social norms:** “Social norms are the standards with which members of a social world comply in order to exhibit desirable expressions of public behaviour” (Burnett, Besant and Chatman, 2001, p. 538). The purpose of social norms according to Chatman (1999) is to provide a collective sense of balance, order and direction in a social world. It also establishes “acceptable standards and codes of behaviour” (Chatman, 2000, p.11). The findings revealed that homeless youth in the city of Accra have created their own social norms or codes of conduct that they must adhere to in order to survive in the city and to meet their goals. For example to enable them to meet their health needs in the absence of health insurance and limited financial resources, they practice self-medication or visit the pharmacy to buy drugs suggested by the pharmacist, while in the event of a serious ailment, they have instituted a form of mutual fund to pay for medical and travel expenses of very sick colleagues.
To meet their financial goals, they have a culture of daily savings with either the ‘susu’ agent or a trusted customer after setting aside monies for their daily expenses. With regard to their employment in the city, the shoe workers for example, have a tradition of helping newcomers settle down quickly by providing them with the necessary tools, skills, way-finding information and counselling on customer relations and some life skills to ensure their success. In the absence of the ability to make a 911 call in the event of a threat of assault or robbery in the night, they have instituted a security system whereby anyone who perceives a security threat raises an alarm to initiate a community attack on the intruder. Other norms are sharing food with colleagues without money or lending them money to meet their immediate needs on days with no earnings. It is obvious that it is these social norms and adherence to them that sustains their community living in the city, confirming Chatman’s (2000) assertion that the prominent role of the social norms is to hold the small world together.

**Worldview:** Worldview is "a collective set of beliefs held by members who live within a small world" (Chatman, 1999, p. 213). It is a taken-for-granted attitude which determines what events members of a small world must ignore or pay attention to (Chatman, 2000). Goffman (cited in Burnett, Besant, and Chatman, 2001) also mentions that a worldview provides a sense of belonging and allows members to adopt a community approach to activities and events in their small world. The findings suggest that the worldview of homeless youth in the study is that everyone is likely to face a needy situation, therefore it is good to respond to your friend in need so that in your time of need you will also get help. This worldview is reflected in the following responses explaining why the homeless youth do not expect return of their money when they make contributions to a sick colleague:

*If I am the one who needs help, the others can contribute money to help me. We don’t take the money back from the person because it can happen that you will also find yourself in the same problem and will require help from others (Abeeku).*

*No, it is just to help him out so that when you find yourself in similar circumstances, you will also get help from others (Kojo)*
It is this worldview that causes them to comply with the norms of their small worlds by sharing information and supporting members in their small world without holding back. For example without this worldview, they would neither have imparted the skills of their trade freely to the newcomers nor gone out of their way to provide them with way-finding information with the aim of ensuring their success in the city. The communal contributions to buy tools for newcomers without any expectation of return and to pay for the medical expenses of very sick colleagues would also have been impossible without such a worldview. It can be argued that the newcomers, having benefited from such a worldview, are likely to adopt it and pass it on to other newcomers, thus maintaining the sense of community and belonging in their small world. These findings from this study establish the importance of the worldview in influencing or shaping the information behaviours in the small world of the market youths in Accra

**Social types:** Social types “refers to the ways in which individuals are perceived and defined within the context of their small world” (Burnett and Jaeger, 2008, Small world and information behaviour, para. 7). Chatman (2000) explained that this classification of persons is based on their behaviours and the roles they play within their small world. Chatman (1999) indicates that:

> We identify persons by types to assist us in anticipating how they will behave towards us and how we can expect to act toward them. Most of us tend to reveal and exchange information among peers of “our own type”. Conversely, the further removed persons are from our own typology, the less likely are they to become sharers of mutual interest or information (p. 124).

The process of social typing according to Burnett and Jaeger (2008) occurs both within the boundaries of the small world and the society at large. They also suggest that the most important members of the small world are the insiders.

Based on these explanations the two main groups of social types identified in the study are insiders and outsiders. The insiders are the homeless youth made up of shoe shine workers, truck pushers and head porters. Among the head porters, there are also the Hometown
Association leaders. The outsiders include prospective employers, customers, market women and arbitrators.

The normative theory proposes that members in a small world would readily accept and disseminate resources (including information) from a social type whose behaviours and interactions within the small world are desirable (that is they conform to the worldview and norms within their world). The reverse is also true. Members of a small world would not readily accept or believe any information coming from a social type whose behaviours and interactions are deemed undesirable or whose behaviours are in conflict with their norms and worldview (Burnett et al., 2001). The findings of the study support the first part of the above proposition, in that the homeless youth in the study readily accept resources (such as monetary contributions and peer support in times of serious ailments, peer mediation) and information (such as financial advice, counselling and job information) from their peers based on their collective worldview, social norms, believability and trust. However, the findings do not support the second part of this proposition since the homeless youth also accept information, especially job information, from social types (outsiders) with ‘undesirable behaviours’ such as market women or customers who often insult and cheat them and arbitrators who physically assault them when they fight and also steal their monies. In this case, they do not have a choice since refusing to do business with undesirable types like market women would mean limited job opportunities and earnings. As Chatman (1999) explained, members in a small world cross information boundaries when the information is considered critical and relevant.

The use of their friends as sources of information corroborates Chatman’s (1999) explanation of the role of social types, i.e., that “most of us tend to reveal and exchange information among peers of our own type” (p. 124). In the city the homeless youth are largely by themselves and therefore it is not surprising that they rely for the most part on each other for relevant information to meet their everyday needs.
**Information behaviour**: Information behaviour is defined as “a state in which one may or may not act on available or offered information” (Burnett, Beasant, and Chatman, 2001, p. 537). Burnett and Jaeger (2008) explained information behaviour as “the full spectrum of normative behaviour (as regards information) available to members of a small world” including formal information seeking in the traditional library and information science context, such as presenting a query at the reference desk in a library; informal exchange of information among peers; distribution of fliers; and avoidance of information considered dangerous or inappropriate (Small worlds and information behaviour, para. 8).

The findings did not indicate any formal information seeking in the traditional Library and Information Science context. Although some of the male participants indicated they visited the library in their home environment to either read, borrow books or study, it was not evident that they presented any queries for which they needed information. However as described under Section 5.11, the modes of information behaviours used by study participants included active seeking such as searching for alternate jobs or customers, passive search such as a situation in which employers come to offer them jobs in the course of their everyday activities, passive attention such as when they watch TV or listen to the radio to learn life lessons, sports news, and health related information or current affairs.

The informal exchange of information within their social network of friends includes free sharing of information such as information about jobs, way-finding, mediation, counselling, financial management, and reproductive health information including HIV and AIDS with members of their small world.

Burnett and Jaeger (2008) have pointed out that, generally Chatman’s small world theories are very useful for examining information behaviours within specific social contexts or small worlds, but are not applicable to information behaviours beyond the boundaries of those small worlds. In the current study, information seeking behaviours of homeless youth beyond the scope of the
Normative theory include sharing of information about the prospects of living in the city with friends back home, everyday school information seeking behaviours such as seeking explanation of lesson notes from teachers, seniors, and siblings, and acquisition of trade skills from master craftsmen by observation and hands on practice for participants who are also apprentices but are in the city to look for money to continue their training.

With regard to information avoidance, the findings indicated that they avoided consulting medical doctors until they are very sick, for various reasons such as a preference for self-medication, the ability to buy drugs from the pharmacy, and the high cost of medical care. As already indicated, a majority of the study participants have no health insurance. The findings also indicated that they avoided the resolution of their need for fair wages and respect as a result of their powerlessness and the fear of assault and further insults from the offenders.

According to Pollock (2002), Chatman presented the Theory of Normative Behaviour as a general theory of information behaviour. The strength of the theory is that it provides a context for analysing information behaviours as well as the social norms, worldviews and social types influencing these behaviours. Since its inception, it has been applied in the study of information rich environments such as virtual communities and Feminist Booksellers (Burnett, Besant and Chatman, 2001). The fact that it has successfully been used to analyze the information behaviours of the homeless youth in this study, who had limited information resources (i.e., are information poor), demonstrates its viability as a general theory of information behaviour applicable to both information rich and information poor environments.

5.12.2 Theoretical Interpretations of the Findings in the Context of Savolainen concepts of way of life and mastery of life

The concepts of ‘way of life’ and ‘mastery of life were introduced by Savolainen (1995) to explain everyday life information seeking behaviour. ‘Way of life’ refers to the order of things, and things stand for the various activities (both job and non-job) that occur in an individual’s daily life. Order refers to the prioritization of one’s daily activities (Savolainen, 1995). The
findings show that the activities of the homeless youth in the study involved nine areas of information needs in descending order of prioritization as, money, shelter, education, employment, security, health, vocational goals, justice, and food (Section 4.4). The findings suggest that working to earn money was their main pre-occupation and daily activity in the city. This assertion is based on the following factors: the youth came to the city because of poverty and lack of job opportunities in their hometowns; in the city they work long hours. They also have a strong culture of daily savings of fixed amounts of their earnings with the susu agent or trusted customers. The pursuit of money also enables them to address other activities of importance to their way of life, such as apprenticeship training or skills development, pursuit of education and preparation for marriage (with regard to the head porters).

Savolainen (1995) emphasized that analysis of hobbies such as sports and watching of television is a good indicator of the substance of way of life since it informs us about the things people find pleasant and reveals their informational interests. The findings indicated that the majority of the participants (78%) also watched TV, and the male participants were especially passionate and purposeful about their favourite television programs such as sports, current affairs and educational programs discussing life lessons and health issues. The findings imply that in spite of the limitations of long working hours coupled with fatigue, the youth still manage to have some normality in their way of life, or what Savolainen (1995) refers to as a ‘meaningful order of things’ (p. 264) pursuing both work and non-work activities such as leisure.

‘Mastery of life’ is the care an individual takes to ensure there is a meaningful order of things in his/her life. Mastery of life can be passive, a situation where everything is moving as expected, or active, “pragmatic problem solving in cases where the order of things has been shaken or threatened” (Savolainen, 1995, p. 264). The findings suggest that the homeless youth in the study are engaged in active mastery of life. This is because their way of life has been threatened in different ways as demonstrated by their expressed information needs. For example, as adolescents, the completion of their education and pursuit of vocational training
needed to become successful adults are threatened as a result of poverty and lack of opportunities in the rural areas where they originate; in the city they face the challenges of homelessness such as lack of shelter and security, social injustice such as insults and unfair wages, and limited healthcare (primarily self-medication) because of lack of health insurance. Thus, the focus of their everyday life information seeking is to look for practical ways of meeting these needs in order to gain mastery over their lives. For example, their everyday school information seeking behaviour is hampered by lack of money to purchase the necessary textbooks, and pay school and examination fees. Similarly, they are handicapped in their pursuit of vocation as a result of lack of money to pay for the cost of training and transportation and food while training. Their practical way of meeting these information needs is to come and work in the city to get the money they need in order to address these issues. They have also adopted practical ways of meeting their job information needs such as self employment, mutual self-help such as the shoe shine workers helping each other to become established in their work in the city, and finding jobs through their social network of friends. Their everyday health information seeking, and how they address their security issues, manage their finances, and administer justice also demonstrate an active mastery of life.

Savolainen (1995) mentioned that in a problematic situation, an individual can exhibit either a cognitive orientation, that is, problem solving that emphasizes an analytic and systematic approach, or an affective orientation, one based on emotions and unpredictable reactions to the issues at hand. He further specified four types of mastery of life based on the two dimensions to problem solving as:

**Optimistic-cognitive mastery of life:** This is “characterized by strong reliance on positive outcomes to problem solving” (p. 265). The individual conceives problems as positive and is confident that by using detailed analysis and systematic information seeking, any problem can be solved. Consequently the most effective sources/channels for solving the problem are selected.
The analysis of the findings suggests that, generally, the homeless youth in the study are very optimistic about the solvability of their problems and that is what drives them to the city to engage in economic activities to enable them achieve their goals. In the absence of formal government interventions and the limited range of sources available to them, they have identified the most effective ways of solving their daily problems as demonstrated in their everyday financial management, employment and health information seeking behaviours, as discussed under Sections 5.10.1, 5.10.2, and 5.10.6.

The analysis suggests that the shoeshine workers among the homeless youth are especially systematic in their everyday employment information seeking, demonstrated by the way they provide newcomers to the city with information on the skills of the job, tools, way-finding, counseling about handling customers, and some life lessons all meant to ensure success of the new entrants to the city.

**Pessimistic-cognitive mastery of life:** The individual does not envisage the problem to be solvable, but nevertheless engages in systematic information activities to solve it.

Pessimistic-cognitive mastery of life was not identified in the everyday life information seeking behaviour of the youth.

**Defensive-affective mastery of life:** The individual is optimistic about the solvability of the problem. However information seeking activities are dominated by affective factors, such as unrealistic considerations and avoidance of situations that imply risk of failure.

Defensive-affective mastery of life was partly identified in the strategies the homeless youth used to address the issues of respect and unfair wages. The findings showed that they avoided dealing with these situations because of their powerlessness and the risk of further verbal or physical attack upon protest. A strategy used by one of the female participants, Efia may be described as ‘wishful thinking’. She indicated that it was in her
interest not to protest when she was underpaid because the offender might interpret it as a sign of goodwill and continue doing business with her.

_Pessimistic-affective mastery of life:_ This type is characterized by absence of systematic information seeking, dominance of emotional reactions and short-sightedness and search of instant pleasures. There is no indication that the individual is ready or willing to solve the problem; instead, he/she simply avoids it. This mastery of life strategy was not identified in the study.

The above discussions indicate that the everyday life information seeking behaviour of the homeless youth in the study is directed towards exercising control or gaining mastery over their daily life.

### 5.12.3 Theoretical Interpretation of the Findings in the Context of Chatman’s Theory of Gratification

Chatman’s (1991) theory of gratification is made up of six theoretical propositions about how the poor perceive social reality and how their physical, social and intellectual needs are satisfied. She applied this theory to her study of information needs and information seeking behaviours of janitors in a Southern University. This section will discuss how the findings of the current study relate to each of the propositions. The six propositions are as follows:

*Life in a small world:* Lower class people have a narrower and “local view of the world”, to the effect that “information that originates outside of their social world is not of great interest to them” (p. 438).

The above proposition was inconsistent with the findings of the study. The findings revealed that, generally, the homeless youth in the study patronized information from outside of their social world as demonstrated in the analysis of the findings of their everyday information seeking behaviour for health, administration of justice and media use. In their health information seeking, in spite of their culture of self-medication, they also consulted the pharmacist and
visited the hospital when they felt very sick. In their everyday administration of justice, apart from peer to peer mediation, they also consulted trusted elders and self-appointed arbitrators. The shoe shine workers in the study especially patronized TV and radio programs such as sports, current affairs and life lessons. With regard to their everyday financial management, their lack of patronage of the formal banks was not because of lack of interest but rather reasons such as lack of initial deposit and a general lack of knowledge about the banking procedures.

Lower expectations and the belief in luck: “Poor people have a lower expectation of their chances to succeed in unfamiliar endeavours” (Chatman, 1991, p. 438). This prevents them from seeking new opportunities and inclines them to attribute every success to luck, fate or chance.

The findings did not support the above proposition. In contrast, the homeless youth came to the city to seek opportunities to work and earn money to enable them to fulfill their personal needs and aspirations including: acquiring vocational skills or meeting life goals, furthering their education, and raising capital to set up their own business (Table 4.4). These findings suggest that the homeless youth in the study have high expectations of their chances to succeed. There was no reference to fate or luck but a willingness to work hard to improve on their lives.

First level lifestyle: They become informed of important events in their social milieu through their peers (that is, people like themselves). Chatman (1999) explained that the conditions required to legitimize first-level information are trust and believability.

This proposition is supported by the findings of the study. As discussed under Section 5.11, their social network of friends played a significant role in their everyday life information seeking behaviour. Friends were cited as sources of information for eight of the eleven information needs identified in the study.
Limited time horizon: Their time horizon is different from that of the middle class, that is directed towards the immediate, present and the very recent past. In Chatman’s (1991) study, the janitors focused on the performance of their daily routines with little hope of any advancement.

This proposition is inconsistent with the findings. The personal and vocational goals the youth have set for themselves suggest that they have long term plans to ensure they have a better future. The following response by one the male participants clearly demonstrates that they plan for the long term:

*If I get money to take care of myself whilst I am learning the trade, I will finish my apprenticeship in time to be able to open my own shop and life will be good. I could not continue my education and if I am not able to finish my apprenticeship, life will not be worth living* (Joojo).

An insider’s world view: They view their social world as very local, unpredictable and often hostile. Chatman (1996) explained that an insider’s worldview is characterized by common culture, social norms and values, and a general mistrust of information from outsiders. The basis for this mistrust is a doubt over the ability of outsiders to understand their world. The implication of this perception of outsiders with regard to information acquisition according to Chatman (1996) is that insiders might deny themselves information resources that would help them just because they originate from outsiders.

The above proposition is partly supported by the findings in that the youth in the study have their own worldview and norms they adhere to, and rely primarily on each other as sources of information. Their expressed information needs regarding security, respect and unfair wages (Sections 4.4.3, 4.4.5 and 4.4.9) suggest that they view their social world as unpredictable and hostile. However, the findings did not indicate any mistrust of information from outside their social world. Generally they are disposed to information that would meet their everyday information needs irrespective of their sources, provided it is accessible and credible. Thus they
also used information from sources outside their social world, such as pharmacists, libraries, elders, teachers, etc., as discussed above under *life in a small world*.

*Use of the mass media:* The “mass media is viewed as a medium of escape, stimulation and fantasy” (Chatman, 1991, p. 438).

The findings suggest that the youth view the media (television and radio) not only as a source of entertainment (for sports, music and movies), but also as an important source of information for current affairs, life and moral lessons, and health issues.

Applicability of each of the three theoretical frameworks to the study has contributed to the understanding of the findings of the study in different ways. For example, Chatman’s (2000) theory of Normative Behaviour aided in identification of the underlining worldview and social norms that influence their information seeking behaviours, the appropriateness of their information behaviours to meeting their everyday needs, and the social types and their roles in their everyday life information seeking behaviour.

The applicability of Savolainen’s (1995) concepts of ‘Way of life’ and Mastery of life’ clearly demonstrate that the youth in the study have lost control over their lives. In other words their normal way of life (as adolescents transitioning to adulthood), such as completing their education and pursuing a vocation, is threatened by parental poverty and lack of opportunities in their places of origin. However, they are very optimistic about bringing order into their lives and the main objective of their everyday life information behaviours is to gain mastery over their lives.

The applicability of Chatman’s (1991) Theory of Gratification revealed that, generally, the mindset or outlook of the youth in the study does not conform to that of the average lower class. Their view of their situation as transitional differentiates them from the subjects of Chatman’s study. For example, they have high expectations for success, have long term plans such as
pursuit of vocational goals, and their media use is not only for the purposes of entertainment, but also for keeping informed about current affairs, life lessons and health issues. These observations suggest that Chatman’s (1991) theory of gratification is not applicable to all low income populations.

5.13 **Summary of the Discussions**

This chapter has discussed the background of participants, expressed information needs, information sources, information seeking behaviours, and barriers to the everyday life information seeking behaviours of homeless youth in the city of Accra. The findings have been further viewed through the lenses of several theories of information behaviours.

The findings indicate that the participants originate from the rural areas of Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Northern, and Upper East regions of Ghana. The literature suggests that the main cause of youth migration from the rural areas to Accra is to benefit from the better economic opportunities in Accra resulting from the concentration of trade and industry, administration, transportation, and finance at the expense of other regions, especially the three Northern regions since the colonial era (Yankson, 2003).

The findings suggest that, comparatively, the male participants have a formal education and are better educated than the female participants. Some of the causes for this disparity identified in the literature include obsolete socio-cultural beliefs endemic in the northern regions where the female participants originate, such as the role of the woman as a wife, cook, mother and subordinate to her husband as a result of which girls are burdened with domestic chores instead of going to school (Opare 2003), apathy towards girl-child education by household heads (Yeboah, 2008), and infant betrothal and wife swapping (Fant, 2008). Also, unlike the male participants, the female participants did not know their ages. Data from national statistics (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008) suggest that this is a consequence of the high adult illiteracy
rates coupled with higher unsupervised delivery and therefore non-registration of births in the northern regions. Thus parents could not tell the ages of their children.

The participants are from poor socio-economic backgrounds, that is, their parents are mainly crop farmers found to be the poorest in the country (Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2003), largely uneducated, and with a large number of children, more than the national average (Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, 2008). The literature suggests that the large family size is attributable to the prestige attached to having children in the Ghanaian culture (Ankomah, 2004) and the use of children as a source of labour by crop farmers (Al-hassan, 2008).

Thus the causes of the homelessness of the study participants, which are also their reason for coming to the city, were found to be largely economic, that is parental poverty and lack of job opportunities rather than factors such as family conflicts and contrary life styles of youth such as hair colour, body piercing and clothing (Hyde 2005), program failures such as mental health child welfare, and juvenile correction programs in the United States, or parental substance abuse, emotional abuse, or youth’s quest for independence (Public Agency of Canada, 2006).

With regard to the theoretical interpretations of the study, application of Chatman’s (2000) theory of Normative Behaviour to the findings of the study demonstrates that the everyday life information seeking behaviour of the homeless youth is enhanced or facilitated by adherence to the appropriate worldview, social norms which hold their world together, and the free exchange of information with their peers, and the use of other social types such as the susu agent, trusted customers and elders, prospective employers, and hometown Association Leaders as sources of information.

The application of Savolainen’s (1995) concepts of ‘Way of Life’ and ‘Mastery of Life’ showed that the way of life of the youth is not moving as expected as a result of poverty. However, they are very positive about taking control over their lives and steering them in the right direction.
Therefore they are actively engaged in information behaviours that would enable them to gain mastery over their lives.

The findings did not support three of the six propositions of Chatman’s Theory of Gratification, namely small world, lower expectations and belief in luck, and limited horizons. An insider’s worldview and use of the mass media as a medium for fantasy and escape were partly supported by the findings. The only proposition fully supported by the findings is first level life style in that they primarily relied on their social network of friends as sources of information in their everyday life information seeking behaviour.

The next chapter will include a summary of the major findings and implications for libraries and other stakeholders, limitations of the study, contributions to knowledge, suggestions for future research and conclusion of the study.
Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the major findings of the study, discusses the implications of the findings to policy, theory and professional practice, indicates the significance of the study and its contribution to knowledge, and makes suggestions for future research.

6.1 Summary of the Major Findings

The purpose of the study was to investigate the ELIS behaviour of homeless youth in the city of Accra in order to inform information providers, government agencies and other stakeholders about the information needs of homeless youth, contribute to knowledge and understanding of youth information seeking, especially the ELIS behaviour of homeless youth, and based on the findings, offer suggestions on ways in which their needs can be met. The study sought answers to the following research questions:

- What are the expressed everyday information needs of urban homeless youth?
- What sources do they use to satisfy their information needs?
- What challenges/barriers hinder their information seeking?
- What are the patterns in their information seeking behaviour?
- How can the information needs of homeless youth be better satisfied by libraries and other appropriate agencies?

To seek answers to the research questions, the study adopted an ethnographic methodology, snowball sampling and observations and in-depth interviews as data collection instruments. The data was transcribed and analyzed with the aid of NVivo qualitative data analysis software and Microsoft Excel. The major findings are presented as follows:

- What are the expressed everyday information needs of urban homeless youth?
The homeless youth in the study expressed eleven types of information needs: shelter, employment, money, fair wages, respect, security, skills development, justice, health, and education. These needs were found to relate to their basic needs based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Huit, 2000).

These findings are significant in two ways: First, they are consistent with those of other studies of homeless youth such as Hersberger (2005), Alexander et al. (2005), Reid and Klee (1999), and Ensign and Panke (2002), which indicate that the information needs of homeless youth relate to their basic needs. The difference however is that they include higher needs of self-actualization and cognition. These are education and skills development which were not identified in the earlier studies. Second, although the information needs of the homeless youth in the study are limited (in terms of variety and numbers) compared to other studies of ELIS behaviour of youth, such as the study of young adults in Philadelphia by Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) which identified 28 categories of information needs, including meal selection, date of an event, shopping, clothing selection, etc., they are still comparable to the universal needs of adolescents which include health, social and personal competence, and cognitive and educational competence, preparation for work, etc., as identified by a Carnegie Corporation (1992) report. The implication is that, although the youth are homeless, they are still adolescents working to meet their developmental challenges in order to become successful adults.

- **What sources do they use to satisfy their information needs?**

The youth in the current study used mainly interpersonal sources, especially their network of friends in their everyday life information seeking behaviours. They exclusively used interpersonal sources to meet eight of the eleven information needs identified. These findings are consistent with those of other youth information behaviour studies such as those of Shenton and Dixon (2004), Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005), and Ybarra, Emenyonu, Nansera,
Kiwanuka, and Bangsberg (2008), which also reported that young people have a preference for interpersonal sources in their information seeking. Their range of sources are however limited compared to sources available to homeless youth from the developed countries as reported by Woelfer and Hendry (2009), Reid and Klee (1999), Ensign and Panke (2002), Ensign and Bell (2004), Hersberger (2005), and Hudson et al. (2010). This limitation is also evident when the findings are compared to ELIS studies involving other populations, such as rural communities, by Mooko (2005), Njoku (2004), Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2003), and Momodu (2002).

- **What challenges/barriers hinder their information seeking?**

The main barrier or challenge to the ELIS behaviour of homeless youth in the study is cost (or economic variables) accounting for seven of the eleven ELIS behaviours identified in the study. They include school, health, employment, financial management, food, shelter, and skills development. Available studies of ELIS behaviour of youth seldom reported cost as a barrier to youth information seeking. For example, Shenton and Dixon (2004), Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005), and Gray et. al (2004) did not report cost as a barrier to ELIS behaviour of the youth who participated in their studies. However some studies do identify cost as a factor in certain situations: for instance, cost (of transportation) was a barrier to employment seeking by homeless youth in Australia (National Youth Commission, 2008), to continuing education by homeless youth in Ontario (Collins, 2010), and to renting well-maintained housing by homeless youth in Toronto (Gaetz, 2002). In a related study, Hersberger (2001) also mentioned bad credit as a barrier to finding accommodation by homeless parents. Cost appears as a major barrier to the ELIS of youth in the current study and is ascribed mainly to parental poverty.

Generally the barriers to ELIS recorded in the study are largely different from those of other studies, especially in the area of health and employment. For example, barriers to employment seeking include lack of capital to start an alternate business, shyness preventing youth from enquiring about jobs, lack of relevant qualification and reluctance of employers/customers to use the services of youth with babies. In contrast, barriers to employment mentioned in the
literature include lack of suitable clothing (Alexander, Edwards, Fisher and Hersberger, 2005), lack of appropriate daycare and job training, and transportation problems, such as poor timing of bus routes (Hersberger, 2001) and lack of knowledge about how the labour market works, discrimination based on drug use and mental illness and high cost of transportation (National Youth Commission, 2008).

Barriers to acquisition of health information by youth in this study include lack of health insurance, fear of inadequate care and high cost of medical fees. However, barriers to everyday health information seeking of homeless youth reported in the literature, in addition to cost and lack of health insurance (Munyck, 2005), include unfavourable opening times of homeless youth clinics, questions about consent forms and identification cards, questions about confidential matters by front desk staff (Ensign and Panke, 2002), social barriers, including dismissive and discriminatory practices by some health professionals, and personal hygiene (such as the company of a ‘smelly’ homeless person) and a general perception by homeless youth that they are not wanted by society (Hudson et al., 2010).

In ELIS studies of other populations, Mooko (2005) and Sligo and Jameson (2000) also mentioned barriers which are different from those in the current study. There are also differences with the school information seeking reported in the literature. For example Collins (2010) reported housing, depression and stress, hanging out with the wrong people, drugs and mental health issues while the current study reported inability to pay school related costs, lack of educational infrastructure and lack of understanding of lesson notes and unfamiliar English words as barriers to school information seeking.

- **What are the patterns in their information seeking behaviour?**

The most significant information seeking pattern revealed in the study is the deep sense of community coupled with free sharing of information among the homeless youth. In other words, the resolution of their everyday problems or information needs such as health, employment,
financial management, and security were highly facilitated by relying on the social capital embedded within their community of friends. Alexander, Edwards, Fisher and Hersberger (2005) reported a similar finding and adjudged the sense of community among the homeless youth in their study as an important information disseminating tool. Another pattern (already mentioned above) is their preference for interpersonal sources in their information seeking. As Harris and Dewdney (1994) have commented, people tend to use interpersonal sources because they are easily accessible.

6.2 **Significance of the Study/Contributions to Knowledge**

The findings from this study make several contributions to the literature of youth information seeking, ELIS behaviour in general, ELIS of homeless youth, theories of ELIS and concepts of information seeking as follows:

- The findings contribute to research in youth information seeking which has been acknowledged by Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) as limited, and adds to the knowledge base of youth information seeking, described by Shenton and Dixon (2004) as scanty and piecemeal.

- The literature on youth information seeking, which is overly focussed on the library/school context, has led to gaps in the understanding of youth and erroneous perceptions of youth, according to Chelton and Cool (2007), as one-dimensional student beings and individual information seekers. The finding of a deep sense of community and information sharing among the youth in the current study contradicts the notion that they are individual information seekers and confirms the fact that during adolescence, peers are very important to youth and so they tend to work in groups. The finding that the youth have ten other information seeking behaviours apart from school information seeking contradicts the perception in the literature that they are one-dimensional student beings.
The present study confirms previous findings such as the preference for interpersonal sources in ELIS and choice of sources based on credibility and ease of access, and everyday information needs of homeless youth relating to lower basic needs such as food and shelter. However the information needs of the homeless youth in the study also include higher needs such as education and skills development. Categorization of the information needs of the present study using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs showed that the information needs of the homeless youth relate to their basic needs confirming Wilson's (2002) assertion that the motive of any search for information is ultimately to satisfy one or more of the human basic needs.

The literature reveals limited study of youth information seeking behaviour and ELIS studies of youth in developing countries, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, with available studies focused mostly on health information seeking of youth and ELIS of rural communities. Thus the findings of the current study contribute to the body of knowledge on ELIS of youth and youth information seeking behaviour in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The study is highly significant because it is the first ELIS study of homeless youth in Africa and it contributes to knowledge of ELIS of homeless youth with a limited range of information sources (that is, over-reliance on their network of friends) to meet their information needs. Available studies, mostly in North America, reveal that homeless youth in that part of the world have access to many information services and resources (Woelfer and Hendry, 2009). Thus based on the findings, it can be proposed that, in an environment of limited information resources people rely on their social networks to meet their information needs.

Theories of ELIS behaviour

With regard to ELIS theories, the findings corroborated Savolainen’s (1995) concepts of ‘way of life’ and ‘mastery of life’ including the suggestion by the findings, that the purpose of the ELIS behaviours of the youth in the study is to gain mastery over their lives.
• The successful use of Chatman’s (2000) Theory of Normative Behaviour in the interpretation of the homeless youth within the context of an information poor environment potentially strengthens the theory’s viability as general theory of information behaviour since it had been already been applied to studies of information rich environments.

• The findings of the study were inconsistent with some of the propositional statements about the poor made by Chatman (1991) in her theory of gratification, including: *use of the mass media as medium of escape, stimulation and fantasy, life in a small world, lower expectations and belief in luck, an insider’s world view, and limited time horizon.* It however confirms the *first level life style*, that is, relying on peers for important information in their social world. The implication of this finding is that Chatman’s theory of gratification cannot be generalized to the information seeking experiences of the poor.

6.3 **Implications of the Findings for Policy and Practice**

The findings of the study have significant implications for policy and practices regarding homeless youth in Accra, Ghana:

• They indicate that the information environment of the homeless youth is characterized by a deep sense of community, trust and free sharing of information in an informal way. Their social network of friends is their main source of information. Therefore, it is preferable for stakeholders (such as information professionals, NGOs and governmental agencies; including the Ministries of Youth and Sports, Social welfare, Education and health) to disseminate information to the youth through their peers. Other sources with potential for information dissemination are Hometown Association leaders, particularly for female youth and for male youth, the media (TV and radio).

• The main causes of their homelessness were parental poverty and lack of jobs in their communities of origin. The findings suggest that alleviating parental poverty, or creating jobs for youth in their originating communities may substantially reduce youth
homelessness in the city of Accra. The prevalence of parental poverty also suggests that the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy which has been in place since 2002 has not impacted sufficiently on the lives of parents of these youth.

- The findings indicate that the majority of the female participants do not have formal education, with the explanation that their parents could not afford the cost of their education. This suggests that the national policy of free and compulsory universal basic education has not made any difference in their lives, and should be re-examined to find ways to make it more effective.

- Sources for their school information seeking surprisingly excluded television, implying that these disadvantaged youth are not benefiting from the President’s Special Initiative on Distance Education transmitted on TV. It is designed to augment classroom instruction in Mathematics, English and Science lessons, in order to bridge the gap between the well endowed schools and poorly endowed schools in the rural communities.

- Barriers to their school information seeking include lack of money to buy books, food, and uniforms, suggesting that policies that have been instituted to mitigate such barriers have yet to benefit students in their places of origin. The policies include the capitation grant, the Ghana Schools Feeding Programme (GSFP) and a textbook development and availability policy for greater access to textbooks in public schools. Another barrier to their school information seeking is limited school infrastructure, such as libraries, computers and school lighting, implying a need for more infrastructural development in their schools, to enhance their learning experience.

- The main barrier to their skills development was found to be lack of money to pay for the cost of training, transportation and meals while training. A suitably designed financial aid program will make skills development more accessible to the youth and keep many of them off the streets.

- A major barrier to their health information seeking is the lack of health insurance and access to the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), caused by problems such as the
transfer of registration from their originating communities. This implies that the youth are not benefiting from the National Health Insurance (NHS) Act (Act 650) which was enacted to make basic health services available to all Ghanaians. It also suggests that they are not aware of the provisions in the NHS Act that mandate the free enrolment of the poor.

- The findings revealed a deficiency in the youth’s knowledge of HIV/AIDS. Some have inaccurate information about the symptoms, prevention and cure of HIV/AIDS. Female participants in particular lacked adequate knowledge of STDs. This implies a need for targeted reproductive health information campaigns among this vulnerable segment of the population, to enable them to make the right choices to reduce their risk of infection.

- One of the barriers to patronage of TV as an information source by the female participants was the prevalent use of the English in TV broadcasts. It denies them access to free and relevant information, such as health information. More programming in familiar local languages may increase their patronage of this source of public educational information.

- The barriers to their employment seeking included shyness, which keeps them from enquiring about opportunities and the perception among some of them that they do not have requisite qualifications to apply for certain jobs, or will need their parents to introduce them to prospective employers. A targeted job searching program may empower them to take advantage of alternative employment opportunities.

- Finally, the findings revealed that the homeless youth have no access to shelter. They sleep outdoors, making them vulnerable to diseases such as malaria, robbery of their valuables and the sexual assault of females. Shelter programs for homeless youth, such as those found in countries like the United States and Canada will significantly enhance the well being of these youths.

6.4 **Recommendations**

The findings of the study are intended to inform stakeholders, such as governmental and non-governmental public libraries and other agencies that work with homeless youth, to facilitate
effective information service to the youth. The following recommendations are intended to mitigate or solve some of the problems these youths encounter:

**Ending homelessness**

- The government of Ghana should re-evaluate the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy to ensure its effectiveness in alleviating parental poverty, as a long term measure for reducing youth homelessness. It should also formulate and implement policies that facilitate the creation of youth centered jobs in those regions so that the youths do not have to travel to the cities to seek job opportunities and endure homelessness as a result.

**Education**

- The Ministry of Information should collaborate with NGOs in the Northern regions to launch a public education programme about the advantages/benefits of girl-child education in the Northern regions for a possible change in attitude toward early marriages of girls which might lead to an increase in enrolment of girls in the region.
- The government should re-evaluate the implementation of the country’s educational policies in the poorer regions of the country, to ensure greater access to formal education among the poor, adequate textbooks, and food for them during the school day. The more effective implementation of policies such as Free and Compulsory Universal Basic Education, the Capitation Grant, the Ghana Schools Feeding Program, and the Textbook Development and Availability policy will enable youths in these regions to focus on their studies, rather than seeking work in the cities to finance their school-related materials and food.
- The government should improve on school infrastructure, such as libraries, school lights and the availability of computers in schools of the less endowed regions, to facilitate learning.
• The Ministry of Education should work with Ghana Television to make the President’s Special Initiative on Distance Education more accessible to children/youth attending poorly endowed schools, especially those in deprived regions. Broadcasts under the Initiative can make up for inadequate textbooks and libraries in these schools in the short term.

• Public libraries should have adequate stocks of textbooks in their reference section for use by homeless youth. They should also be equipped to organize after school study programs, such as Teens Homework Help, Teen Reading Programs and Library and Computer Training programs for homeless youth who are also students, to mitigate some of the barriers to their everyday school information seeking.

**Employment**

• The Ministries of Youth and Sports and Employment and Social Welfare should collaborate with NGOs working with street children to offer workshops/training in job searching skills, and to give them access to small scale loans to enable them to pursue alternate jobs; and to provide day care centers for children of head porters where they can leave their children to increase their chances of gaining employment.

**Health**

• The Ministry of Health should re-evaluate the implementation of provisions of the National Health Insurance Scheme that mandate free enrolment of the poor, to ensure that all disadvantaged youth, including homeless youth, have access to health insurance, and thus increased access to healthcare to prevent out of pocket cost to them.

• The Ministry of Health should designate some clinics in the city for use by homeless youth where they can also leave their health insurance cards. This will encourage those with health cards to bring them to the city instead of leaving them behind and might also encourage increased attendance at the clinic, instead of waiting for a difficult or crisis situation before seeing a doctor.
The Ministries of Information and Health should collaborate with NGOs to re-launch a public campaign to equip the youth with correct information about HIV/AIDS and other STDS using peer-to-peer education and the media.

Skills development

The government should make skills development/vocational training more accessible to homeless youth by adopting a scholarship scheme that would provide them with funds to pay for the cost of training, transportation and food.

Shelter

The Ministries of Social Welfare and Employment, Youth and Sports, and Women and Children Affairs should work with NGOs to formulate a policy that would mandate the provision of shelters for homeless youth for the long term to alleviate their vulnerabilities as a result of sleeping outdoors. In the short-term, the government should work with NGOs to provide youth resource centres where they can rest during the day and relax and socialize in the evenings. They could be equipped with TV sets for their entertainment and a study room for the students among them to learn and to watch videos of the lessons of the President’s Special Initiative on Distant Education, while in the city.

6.5 Transferability and Limitations of the Study

Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings of a study in one context (A) to another context (B). The degree of transferability according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is directly related to the similarity between the two contexts. Lincoln and Guba further indicated that judgement on transferability (often by the reader) requires sufficient information (or thick description) about the context in which the study was carried out. This study investigated the everyday life information seeking behaviour of urban homeless youth in Accra, Ghana. It provides thick descriptions of the research setting, methods, and demographic characteristics of
study participants. Although it reports significant findings about the everyday life information seeking behaviours of the youth with implications on theory, policy and practices relating to these youths, the main limitation is that the findings are applicable to the 41 homeless youth who participated in the study. They may however be transferable to homeless youth in similar settings or the contexts described in the study.

Other limitations of the study are as follows:

- The study included youths in Accra only. It will be necessary to replicate the study in other urban cities of the country, to confirm the findings.
- The study included participants from only one of the many markets in Accra only. This limit resulted from the requirement by the UBC Ethical Review Board that the researcher necessarily work with a service organization. The service organization which agreed to work with the researcher at the time of the study was based in the Ayowa market, the venue for the data collection. As already indicated, the Director of this organization was instrumental in gaining access to the study participants.
- There are different categories of homeless or street youth. UNICEF (cited in Scanlon, Tomkins, and Lynch, 1998) identifies two categories of street youth as ‘children on the street’ (those with family support who return home after spending much of their day on the street) and ‘children of the street’ (those without family support who live and sleep on the streets). The study focused on ‘children of the street’. There is a need for a similar study on ‘children on the street’. The study focused on teenagers or adolescents (ages 15 to 18). To satisfy the UBC ethical requirement of seeking consent, it excluded youths of ages 13 and 14, whose participation would require parental consent. Parents of the study participants lived so far away from the site of the study that it was impractical to seek documented consent from them.
• The study did not address leisure information needs such as sports and current affairs which may contribute to their interest in the broadcast media.

• The study relied on self-reporting by the participants. However the researcher had no reason to doubt the truthfulness of the findings. She first gained the trust of participants before conducting the interviews and validated some of their claims by direct observations in the field, through the use of participants’ services and by confirming some of the representations with opinion leaders. Some researchers, such as Aptekar and Heinonen (2003) and Aptekar (1994) have indicated that some of the methodological implications of working with street children are that they have the tendency to lie about their family background, ages, current circumstances, and reasons for being on the street. Therefore it is possible that some of this study’s findings in that regard may be false; the participants may not have told the whole truth about themselves. For example, the issue of drug abuse among homeless youths is extensively reported in the literature (Ensign and Bell, 2004; Gaetz, 2002; and Haldenby, Berma, and Forchuk, 2007). However none of the study participants acknowledged it as an issue. It will be informative to study the sources of drug-related information and the impact of such information on their behaviours to validate these findings.

6.6 Suggestions for Future Studies

The researcher would like to replicate the study in other markets in Accra and cities in Ghana, to confirm the findings of the current study and formulate generalizations on the homeless youth population in Ghana. Such a study would also include ‘children on the street’, to identify any differences and similarities in their everyday life information seeking behaviours.

Although the literature on homeless youth clearly reveals drug/substance use as an issue among homeless youth, it was not reported in this study. The researcher would like to investigate the sources and barriers to information on the health risks of substance use among
street youth in Ghana. The main objectives of the study would be to investigate their awareness or knowledge of the harmful effects/health risks of substance use; their sources of information and the effectiveness of these sources in informing the youth, the barriers that hinder their access to information on these health risks, the extent to which their behaviours have been influenced by knowledge of these health risks, and the best strategies for educating homeless youth about the harmful effects of substance use. The study would use questionnaires and in-depth interviews as data collection instruments. The researcher would work together with NGOs who work with the youth to identify potential study participants using purposive sampling. Data collection would be done in the evenings at selected market places where they sleep to facilitate access to potential participants. The data would be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the NVivo qualitative data analysis software to identify relationships, categories and themes relevant to the objectives of the study.

The problems with the school ELIS behaviour of the street youth in the study who are students suggest that, they could benefit from Public library youth after school programs. The researcher would like to explore youth library services including after school programs available in public libraries in Ghana. The purpose of the study would be to identify the types of youth services, patronage of services and barriers/problems associated with the delivery of youth library services with the aim of making recommendations for improved youth library services especially after school programs for youth and at-risk youth such as street youth. The survey methodology would be used for the study and the population would be all youth librarians in both urban and rural libraries in Ghana. The researcher would also make observations of delivery of youth services at participating libraries to confirm the findings of the survey.

During the interviews, the researcher discovered that a few of the study participants owned mobile phones which she used to contact them when their interviews were due. Others were contacted using phone numbers of mobile phone vendors nearby. In fact, one of the head porters mentioned that her customers called to request her services on her phone whenever
they come to the market. The literature reveals a rich body of knowledge on young people’s use of mobile technology. The researcher would like to investigate the impact of use of mobile phones on the lives of homeless youth in Ghana and compare it with findings of similar studies. The main objectives of the study would be to identify the prevalence of mobile phone use among street youth, the features they often use, the purposes for use, their perception of the importance of the phones to their lives on the streets, and any problems they encounter with mobile phone usage. The study would use purposive sampling to recruit participants for the study. Data collection would be by questionnaire and the critical incident technique. Participants would be asked to describe in detail at least one incident of their use of a mobile phone in the week preceding the day of the data collection.

6.7 Concluding Remarks
Youth homelessness is a growing phenomenon in the cities of Ghana. Youth from the rural areas of the country travel to the cities to improve their lives. They support themselves by doing menial jobs such as shop and restaurant help, load carriers, shoe shine work, truck-pushing etc. They fend for themselves in the cities without support from government or from the type of social services common in other parts of the world, such as food banks, soup kitchens or shelter services. In addition to enduring deplorable living conditions and the associated risks such as theft and disease, they are often cheated and insulted, sometimes physically, by the very people they serve. Above all the city authorities who ought to promote the safety and well being of the youth often consider them as a nuisance in the city. They harass the youth by driving them off the streets and appropriating their wares and work tools.

The findings of this study are highly significant in indicating the nature and needs of these homeless youth, and suggesting government actions to improve their lives. First, they reveal that the fundamental causes of this growing phenomenon of youth homelessness in Ghana are parental poverty and the lack of job opportunities, suggesting that a reduction in parental
poverty and creation of jobs in the rural areas where the youth originate may substantially reduce the influx of youth to the cities.

Second, the findings show that these homeless youth, in spite of their limitations as the poor and disadvantaged in society, are disciplined, resilient, and possess clearly defined goals and aspirations. They choose to endure homelessness in the city to pursue realistic goals which will make them successful adults and responsible citizens.

Since youth are the future of any nation, the government of Ghana should no longer remain indifferent to the plight of homeless youth in the country. It must pay attention to the everyday life information needs of the youth revealed in this study and work with other stakeholders to formulate and execute the recommended policies that make it possible for the youth to access relevant information resources and help in order to enhance their chances of developing into successful and well integrated adults who will contribute to the growth of the nation.
Bibliography


Youth Services in Libraries, winter, 155-166.


Teacher, 8(3), 207-215. doi:10.3109/01421598609036857

Dutta, R. (2009). Information needs and information seeking behaviour in developing countries: 

Inc.

adolescent girls: Concerns about education and jobs. Library and Information Research, 


Ensign, J., & Panke, E. (2002). Barriers and bridges to care: Voices of homeless female 
166-172. Retrieved September 12, 2009, from 
http://www.brown.uk.com/homeless/ensign.pdf


district in Northern Ghana. Retrieved, November 1, 2011 from 
http://www.ub.uit.no/munin/bitstream/handle/10037/1541/thesis.pdf?sequence=1

study of Bunkpurugu Yunyoo and east Manprusi districts (Master’s thesis). Kwame 
Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. Retrieved, October 21, 
2011 
http://dspace.knust.edu:8080/jspui/bitstream/123456789/156/1/JAMON%20FEIGBEN 
.pdf

information flow studies. In S. Martin (Ed.), Proceedings of the 38th annual meeting of 
the American Society for information science (pp. 1–10). Washington, DC: ASIS.

August 17, 2007, from 
http://projects.ischool.washington.edu/harryb/courses/LIS510/Assign_2/Team_10_Home 
less.pdf


Genmora Consulting (2010). *Mapping homeless youth needs with programs and services, Ottawa*. Retrieved December 16, 2011 from https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:jTbYI0IYmHQJ:www.operationcomehome.ca/PDF/Map%2520of%2520Programs%2520and%2520Services_Final.pdf+financial+information+needs+of+homeless+youth&hl=en&gl=ca&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESiHP6ohx-pAxPeMlu6DWI9XKO5l3QdfyntyTViwmNbyCV2S9jk4zDD1FpRMwC5x-cluSlb2EOKWhSY-WuZMzs-NOV8xdR9bEf5AUEIKG9ccgbndrc_k7GuY8Nng4_6O48a85Lb&sig=AHIEtbSirYVmnQt2J_cayKF0QEKT1r54cQ


327


doi:10.1080/13548509708400570


doi:10.1007/BF02838122


doi:10.1108/00220410310457993


Appendix A – Letter of Consent to Participate in Research

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY ARCHIVAL AND INFORMATION STUDIES

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Everyday Life Information Seeking Behaviour of Homeless Youth in the City of Accra

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Edie Rasmussen, Supervisor and Evelyn D. Markwei, a PhD student from the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. The results of the study will contribute to a PhD dissertation.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to learn about the problems you face daily in your life, how you solve them and the things that prevent you from solving your problems. The study is for street children who are between 12 to 18 years of age, come from a village outside Accra, do not have any good place to sleep and do not have any relative at all in Accra.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- You will be interviewed for about 30 to 60 minutes.
- The interviews will be recorded

You will be asked to give information about:

- All the problems you face every day in your life.
- A big problem you faced a few weeks or months ago and how you were able to come out of it.
- A big problem you faced a few weeks or months ago and you have still not been able to solve it and the reasons why you have not been able to solve it.
- The kind of help you will need to improve on your life.

You can speak ‘twi’ or English or your own language and it will be translated for you.

If you will like me to tell you about the results, you can give me a telephone number that is near where you live or your friend’s telephone number and your name. I will call you and tell you when we can meet in the school so that you listen to what I have found out from the study.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study will not harm you in any way except that you will probably have to share some
secrets with me if you choose to do so.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

What I will find out will let the government and all the people who will like to help you know about your problems so that they can help in ways that will make you a better person to Ghana and your family in your village.

**REMUNERATION**

For leaving your work to come and do this interview you will be given GHC2.50 to compensate for your time and the money you could have earned at the time you spend doing your interviews.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to ensure that what you have said will be private and will not be identified with you. Nobody will know that you said this or that because the documents will be identified only by code and will be kept in a locked cabinet. You can listen to what you said again and make sure you are satisfied with all the information you have given.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time and I will accept your decision without any trouble of any kind. You may also decide to remove your information from the recorder. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if you are not able to answer the questions probably for some reason or you behave in a way that is not respectful.

**CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY**

The researcher will answer any questions you may have about how you will be interviewed. If you need more information about the study you may contact my boss Professor Edie Rasmussen at the iSchool@ubc.

**CONTACT FOR CONCERNS ABOUT RIGHTS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

If you have any problem with the way the researcher is treating you or have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Professor Harry Akussah of the Department of Information Studies, University of Ghana. You may also contact the Research Subject Information Line in University of British Columbia Office of Research Services at 1-604-822-8598 or email to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I have understood the information provided for the study “Everyday life Information Seeking Behaviour of Urban Homeless Youth”. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.
Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant  Date
Appendix B – Letter of Support from Institution

Home For Women And Children Foundation

The Executive Director
HOMWAC
Accra-Ghana
31-1-10

Evelyn D. Markwei
2637 Melta Lane
Vancouver, BC V6T 2C5
CANADA

Dear Mrs. Markwei,

Re: VOLUNTEER AND RESEARCH SERVICE

It gives us great pleasure for you to contact us and to want to work with us. We consider
the area you intend to work in very pertinent to what we as an organization have set
out to do.

We wish to intimate our unreserved acceptance to have you work with us. We would
be glad to be of assistance to you as you also serve humanity with your vast experience
and knowledge.

We look forward to hearing from you again and ultimately to seeing and working with
you.

Thanks.

Yours faithfully,

Albert Adogla
(Executive Director)

Changing the destiny of women and children
Appendix C – Interview Schedule

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you come from?
3. How old are you?
4. How many months have you been in Accra?
5. Why did you leave your hometown to come to Accra?
6. Do you live with your parents back home?
7. What work do they do?
8. What is their level of education?
9. What is your level of education?
10. How many siblings do you have?
11. What work do you do in Accra?
12. How do you get jobs?
13. What problems do you encounter in your daily life?
14. How do you solve them?
15. What kind of help do you offer each other?
16. What would you like to do in future?
17. Tell me about any sexually transmitted diseases you know about?
18. What do you know about these diseases (e.g. symptoms, cure, and prevention)?
19. How did you know about them?
20. Do you usually watch TV or listen to radio?
21. Where do you watch TV or listen to the radio?
22. What programs do you like and why?
23. If the government (President) or someone wants to help you what will you tell them to do for you?
24. Do you have anything you would want to ask me?
(Note that Questions 13 and 14 is an adaptation of the critical incident technique, in which participants are asked to describe problems they encounter in their daily lives and how they resolve them.)