

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF  
EXPERIENCES AND MEANING ATTRIBUTED  
TO THE DIVORCE OF ONE'S PARENTS

NTOMBINTOMBI CHRISTIAN NHLANGULELA

2011

**A phenomenological investigation of experiences and meaning  
attributed to the divorce of one's parents**

by

Ntombintombi Christian Nhlangulela

B. Psychology

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of arts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts (Counseling Psychology) in the Department of Psychology at the University of Zululand.

**FORMER SUPERVISOR: Professor R.M. Dhlomo-Sibiya**

BA (Hons)(UZ), HED(Unisa), MA(Clinical Psych), D.Phil(UZ)

**ACTUAL SUPERVISOR: Professor J.D. Thwala**

BA Hons (Univ North), MA Clinical Psych (Natal), Advance Holistic

Diploma (Western Australia), PhD Community Psychology

July 2011

## DECLARATION

I declare that this research study: *A phenomenological investigation of experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents*, submitted for the fulfillment of Masters Degree in Counseling Psychology is my own work in both conception and execution. All the theoretical information and related sources that have been used or quoted have been duly acknowledged by means of complete references. It further declared that this dissertation has not previously been submitted to any institution for degree purposes.

---

**Ntombintombi Christian Nhlangulela**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the following people who has contributed to the success of this research study:

I first like to acknowledge my Lord and my Savior, God the almighty who is always there for me and for keeping me physical and spiritually fit to do this work successfully.

I further acknowledge my supervisor Prof. J. D. Thwala at the Department of Psychology for his kindness, patience, guidance, support and for wholeheartedly helping me through the completion of this study.

My sincere appreciation to the former supervisor Prof. R.M. Dlomo-Sibiya for laying the foundation at the commencement of this study.

To the entire staff of the department of Psychology of the University of Zululand for their motivation and support they contributed for the completion of this study.

To my family, especially my mother Victress N. Ncayiyana, my brothers Sazi Nhlangulela, Siphesihle, and Asanda for all your sincere support, for believing in me and giving me love that kept me strong all the time.

A special appreciation to my best friend Khanyisani Mnqayi, for all the support, motivation, and his understanding he has been giving me. Thank you for listening during my trial times.

To all my other best friends and friends I didn't mention by their names, who has been there for me, helping me to reach the number of the sample, supporting me emotionally, motivating, and keeping me alive not only in this research, but through my entire career. If it wasn't for you I wouldn't finish this study.

It would be injustice to forget the pillars of this study, the participants without them I wouldn't embarked on this study. I like to say thank you for opening up about this, it has open healed wounds to some of you at the time of the interview, but I am grateful that that healed you even more after that. It didn't only heal you, but still to guide in helping others to heal.

I say thank you to you all, May God richly bless you. I have seen that Umuntu uwumuntu ngabantu I am here today because of you.

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to its participants and all those experiencing the divorce of their parents.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE	PAGE
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1. Introduction	.1
1.2. Theoretical background to the study	...1
1.3. Motivation for the study	4
1.4. Research question	... 5
1.5. Objectives	... 5
1.6. Significance of the study	... 5
1.7. Operational definitions of key terms	.. 6
1.8. Resumé	6
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
2.1. Introduction	... 8
2.2. Theoretical Framework	...8
2.3. Divorce of a Parent	. 9
2.4. Experiences and impacts of divorce to children	. 11
2.5. Children's age related experiences and reactions to divorce	.. 13
2.5.1. Birth to two years of age	.14
2.5.2. Two to three years of age	.16
2.5.3. Three to five years of age	17

2.5.4. Elementary school children	21
2.5.5. Age nine to twelve years	25
2.5.6. Adolescence	30
2.5.7. Young Adults	36
2.6. Gender and Reactions to Divorce	39
2.7. Long term adjustment to divorce	42
2.8. Resumé	45

**CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

3.1. Introduction	47
3.2. Research design	47
3.3. Sampling	51
3.4. Data collection	51
3.5. Data Analysis	53
3.6. Ethical considerations	53
3.7. Resumé	54

**CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS**

4.1. Introduction	55
4.2. Characteristics of the sample	55
4.3. Key Themes	56
4.4. Discussion of qualitative results	79
4.4.1. Emerging key themes	79

4.4.1.1. What does it mean to you to be from a divorced family?.....	79
4.4.1.2. What were your experiences in this regard? í í í í í í í í í	.87
4.4.1.3. What has been the impact of such experiences to your psychological wellbeing?.....	94
4.4.1.4. What would you suggest as an intervention strategy that could empower individuals from divorced families and improve their wellbeing?.....	99
4.5 Resumé í	.105

**CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 Introduction í	..106
5.2. Conclusions about analyzed results í í í í í í í í í í í í í í	..... 106
5.3. Conclusion about overall objectives/aims... í í í í í í í í í í í	..... 107
5.4. Limitations of the Study í	..108
5.5. Recommendations for future research í í í í í í í í í í í í í	..... 110
5.6. Resumé í	...110
REFERENCES í	.. 111
APPENDIX A í	121
APPENDIX B í	124
APPENDIX C í	... 125

## **LIST OF TABLES**

- Table 1: Biographical information of participants
- Table 2: Key themes for the open-ended question one.
- Table 3: Key themes for the open-ended question two.
- Table 4: Key themes for the open-ended question three.
- Table 5: Key themes for the open-ended question four.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A: The questionnaire of the study

Appendix B: The letter requesting permission to conduct the research

Appendix C: Responses from participants

## ABSTRACT

The major objective of the study was to document the experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents.

The results emerged from this study undoubtedly pointed out that the majority of the experiences of children of divorce are negative experiences and had negative impacts to their well being (personally, psychologically, economically and even socially). The meaning attributed to these experiences, is mostly negative attributions and there were few positive. Some of the participants have benefited from their negative and painful experiences. That was by changed their thought orientation to be more focused and being responsible individuals, whereas, it has changed other's personality and self perception for the bad.

Based on the findings of this study and evidence from consulted literature on the experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents entails pain, abuse, development, loss, despair, responsibility, deprivation and lot more. Most of the literature reviewed concurred with findings of this study.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Introduction

Divorce is a legal action between a married couple to terminate their marriage relationship. It can be referred to as dissolution of marriage, and is basically the legal action that ends the marriage before the death of either spouse (Meyer, 2008). Divorce is becoming common in our society today. It is estimated that about a third of all marriages that now take place will end in divorce (Frude, 1990). The children are negatively affected by the separation of their families. This view is corroborated by Marta's (2003) assertion that children get affected by arguments and tension of their parents' feuding, and the general disruption of their lives. They also mourn the loss of the family life they once knew.

It is understandable that divorcing time is a difficult time and involves everyone in the family, but it seems more difficult for children who sometimes don't even understand the reason there is such conflict. This is evidenced in Amos's (1997) argument that children whose parents are divorcing are often moody and bad tempered and some find it hard to concentrate at school, they are often full of fears and feel that no one cares about them.

#### 1.2. Theoretical background to the study

The last statistical updates by Statistics South Africa, (2005), presented a divorce statistics of the year 2002, which reported a total of 31 370 divorces recorded in South Africa. In 2002, 7 050 divorces were recorded for black Africans, 3 581 for coloureds, 1 525 for Indians/Asians and 14 171 for Whites. The modified divorce rate for Whites was

1 361 per 100 000 married couples, followed by Indians/Asians (645 per 100 000 married couples) and coloureds (673 per 100 000 married couples). The modified divorce rate for black Africans was 174 per 100 000 married couples. A total of 34 212 minor children were involved by registered divorces in 2002. For black Africans, a total of 8 578 minor children were affected by divorce, for whites it was 14 031, for Coloureds 4 868, for Indians/Asians 1 794. This shows how high the rate of divorce is in South Africa and how many children suffer as a result.

As much as there are such high rates of divorce reported in South Africa, Cronje` and Heaton (1999) advocate the promotion of children's interests in divorced families. Children's interests in a divorced family include guardianship (which is described as a person's capacity to administer a minor's estate on his or her behalf, and to assist the minor in the performance of juristic acts); custody (the person's capacity to have actual physical "possession" of a minor, to live with the child, care for the child, and support and lead the child in his or her daily life). There is also a need for access (which refers to the right of the non-custodial parent to see or communicate with children); and maintenance (this refers to the duty of both parents to contribute and support children in proportion to the means of each parent). During the subsistence of the marriage both parents have guardianship, custody, access, and maintenance of the children born of the marriage.

In the event of divorce, Cronje` and Heaton (1999) argue that the children's interests are protected by two specific Acts which are Mediation in Certain Divorce matters Act 24 of 1979, and the section 6 of the Divorce Act 70 of 1979. In terms of the Mediation in

Certain Divorce matters Act, the Minister of Justice may appoint one or more family advocates at each division of the high court specifically in South Africa. In terms of the Divorce Act regarding custody, guardianship, or access, the advocate must institute an inquiry with the purpose of enabling the family advocate to furnish the court with a report and recommendations on any matter concerning the welfare of each minor or dependant of the marriage. Furthermore, section 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 108 of 1996 demands that the child's best interests must be of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child. These Acts can be helpful in the legal way, but on the other hand, they cannot help the emotional state of the child.

On the other hand, Amos (1997) and Robert, Buckingham, and Huggard (1991) also gave some written points as guidelines for children from divorced families that could help them cope with the situation. The following are some of the points they suggested

- i. They must not take sides and they must know it is important to keep in touch with both their parents (custodial and non-custodial).
- ii. They should remember that they are loved and that their parents are not divorcing them and that they are not the cause of the situation; and
- iii. They should keep the journal of their thoughts and feelings. This can help them to sort their feelings.

In their work, they encourage children to make sure that they have strategies to help them cope with any given situation. These are good and helpful points but they might not help children who cannot read. Similarly those who have no access to them will not use them.

### **1.3. Motivation for the study**

- i. Marta (2003) states that “For adults, who divorce, the event is a conclusion and for children it is often the beginning of unfinished business, of uncertainty, ongoing struggle with nagging questions and unresolved issues, tension and transition, anger, loneliness, and actually flashbacks.” It is against this background, therefore, that the researcher got motivated to embark on a study that would help establish ways of empowering those children.
- ii. The researcher was also motivated by the writings of Frude (1990), which emphasize that, there is frequently notation including denial, regression, helplessness and depression, abandonment fears, anxiety, lowered self-esteem and also the fact that many young children feel guilty as if they are in some way responsible for the divorce.
- iii. The researcher was further motivated by the high frequency of divorce, which results in a number of children who are suffering as Marta (2003) and Frude (1990) state. So the researcher saw the need to know divorce experiences and meaning attributed to them in order to understand better the challenges they face. This would lead to the establishment of intervention strategies that could improve or promote the wellbeing of children from divorced families.

#### **1.4. Research question**

The central research question is:

What are the experiences of individuals from divorced families and what meaning do they attribute to these experiences?

#### **1.5. Objectives**

The following were the objectives of the study:

- i. To find out the experiences of children from divorced families.
- ii. To find out what meaning they attribute to their experiences.
- iii. To find the impact of such experiences to their psychological wellbeing.
- iv. To find out the suggested effective intervention strategies that could empower them and improve their wellbeing.

#### **1.6. Significance of the study**

- i. The study gives a better insight of the challenges met by the children from divorced families, which would lead to the establishment of an effective intervention strategy. This would in turn help therapists in general in empowering such clients in practice, thus generating knowledge.
- ii. Edwards (2001) argues that phenomenology means to bring about beneficial change in the researcher, a therapist, a client and, research participant. This automatically implies interventions to help others live in new worlds: to solve, improve or accept problems in living, therefore this study would be the part of intervention to the participants.

## **1.7. Operational definitions of key terms**

### **Experience**

It is the observing, encountering, or undergoing of things generally as they occur in the course of time.

### **Meaning**

It is what is intended to be, or actually is, expressed or indicated; signification; import

### **Attribute**

Attribute is a word or phrase that is syntactically subordinate to another and serves to limit, identify, particularize, describe, or supplement the meaning of the form with which it is in construction.

### **Divorce**

Is a judicial declaration dissolving a marriage in whole or in part, especially one that releases the husband and wife from all matrimonial obligations or any formal separation of husband and wife according to established custom.

### **Parent**

Is a person who begets or brings forth offspring; especially the natural parents of a child born of their marriage

## **1.8. Resumé**

The main aim of this chapter was to introduce the study and to show what motivated the researcher to embark on phenomenological investigation of experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents. The researcher noted the objectives of this study, which served as a guideline throughout the investigation. The researcher also noted

the significance of the study to the South African community. In summary, this chapter has given a synopsis of what the investigation entails.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter reviews previous literature on the subject of the experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents. Discussions on relevant information of previous studies on, experiences and the meaning attributed to those experiences or challenges that are faced by children from divorced families will be put in perspective, and whether it corresponds with the findings of this study. This will give an insight to mental health care workers about the work they have on helping the struggling souls, which are the future of the nation.

#### **2.2. Theoretical Framework**

Attachment theory defines attachment as the relationship between children and their parents. In particular, children's attachment to their parents and their parents' attachments to each other provide them with an understanding of how to form relationships. These attachments also influence children's ability to adjust to various life experiences (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby (1969) stated that when family attachment is severed by divorce, children's attachment style is replaced by feelings of anger, resentment, and confusion. As children mature in age, their altered attachment style can prevent them from forming meaningful relationships. In addition, children begin to show maladaptive behaviors toward new, but pivotal, life experiences.

Freudian assumption asserts that a two-parent group constitutes the minimal unit for appropriate sex-typed identification. Anthropologists, sociologists, and social psychologists have long maintained the necessity of such a group for normal child development (Demo & Acock, 1988). Parsons and Bales (1955) cited in Demo and Acock (1988) argued that one of the basic functions of the family is to serve as a stable, organically integrated "factory" in which human personalities are formed. Based in these two views implies that without a family (two-parents) the normality of development might be distracted in terms of sexual identity and personality formation. This actually suggests that identity and personality disorders are more likely to develop as a result of parental divorce.

Similarly, social learning theory emphasizes the importance of role models, focusing on parents as the initial and primary reinforcers of child behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Much of the research adopting this perspective centers on parent-child similarities, analyzing the transmission of response patterns and the inhibitory or disinhibitory effect of parental models. The presence of the same-sex parent is assumed to be crucial in order for the child to learn appropriate sex-typed behavior. This assumption is shared by developmental and symbolic interactionist theories, various cognitive approaches to socialization, and confluence theory, as well as anthropological theories (Edwards, 1987).

### **2.3. Divorce of a Parent**

Divorce is one of the most traumatic and life changing events for children (Amato, 2000; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). Amato and Keith (1991) documented child-related

problems associated with the permanent separation of married parents. The research further indicated that children's responses to divorce are contingent upon factors that range from the parenting skills and approval from both parents to the level of comfort with discussing the issue with them. Divorce can also cause adolescents to experience severe problems with adjusting to school (Teachman, 2002). For example, middle school teachers noted that students of divorced parents show a decline in attendance, academic achievement, and social behavior. Seccombe and Warner (2003) reported that adolescents often use drugs and alcohol, sexual behavior, and violence as divorce-related coping mechanisms.

Seccombe and Warner (2003) proposed that divorce causes four major sources of stress for children that is; fear of change, loss of attachment, feelings of abandonment, and tension from exposure to hostile parents. They further noted that most children experience extreme difficulties with adjusting to the first year of the divorce. In addition, many children needed from two to ten years to adjust to the divorce. Some children even carried the effects of divorce into adulthood. Both Corak (2001) and Lang and Zagorsky (2001) extended this notion to indicate that adolescents are affected by divorce from their early childhood years.

Emery, Waldron, Kitzman and Aaron (1999) posited that some of the most prevalent adolescent responses to divorce are grief, loss, and anger. Many adolescents show feelings of abandonment and blame toward the nonresidential parent. In effect, their temperament is often sustained by the realization of the change in family structure, economic stability, and the poor relationship between both parents. The latter factor can

cause adolescent children to doubt their own abilities to achieve successful intimate relationships.

Freeman, Temples, and Hill (1999) related that the difficulties of divorce are sometimes evident before parents file for permanent separation. During the pre-divorce years, most parents experience marital discord. This discord is characterized with a high level of frustration and hostility between parents. The resulting stress and tension disrupts the household and children's academic and social development.

Scanlon and Devine (2001) reported that divorced parents often use their adolescent children to express negative verbal and nonverbal communication and feelings to each other. Consequently, these children become burdened with the stress of feeling that they must mediate the divorce between their parents. In addition, they lose the time needed to experience a healthy recovery from their parents' permanent separation.

#### **2.4. Experiences and impacts of divorce to children**

Almost all children experienced parental divorce, regardless of age; they experience divorce of their parents as a major stressful event (Hodges, 1986). A child's world is a small one where his or her father and mother are pillars. When one disappears, a child loses his or her bearings and sense of normality (Divorce Source, 2010). As children grow, their parents are perceived as the foundation of their lives. So seeing their parents arguing and splitting might really be a painful experience for them and it can shake the foundations of what children believe is true about the world.

In short Divorce Source (2010) asserted that anger, sadness, depression, opposition, aggression, non-compliance, perceived parental loss, interpersonal conflict, economic hardship, life stress, less parental supervision, inconsistent discipline, more negative sanctions, lower school achievement, acting out, lower self esteem, social adjustment problems, and increased dependency all may result during the days between separation and divorce. However, during the separation and after the divorce is final, positive steps by both parents can mitigate the intensity and reduce the duration of most adjustment problems. This technically means that the effects are short term; however; if they are not attended on time they may develop further to shape one's personality.

A child whose parents are divorcing may feel sucked into a vortex of loneliness, guilt and fear. When one parent leaves, he or she may fear that the other one will follow. Even when both parents reassure him or her of their love, the child may be tormented by the belief that he or she caused the break. Almost always, children worry about what is going to happen to them. Children react in different ways with the onset of divorce. Some will be extremely sad and show signs of depression and sleeplessness. Anxiety levels peak as they feel they are going to be abandoned or rejected by one or even both parents. Some divorce situations may make the child feel lonely. This may be due to a long absence of one of the parents. Divorce deranges the idea of order for a child. No matter what the situation, the child will be affected in some way by a divorce. Some children may become psychologically scarred from the experience, and still other children may not be affected emotionally at all. Much depends on how well the parents are able to handle the situation (Divorce Source, 2010).

In addition to that Maughan and McCarthy (1997) asserted that children in divorcing families are likely to face an accumulation of difficulties. This is because distressed parents, whose capacity to respond to their children's needs may be reduced; economic difficulties and loss of social status; ongoing conflict between parents; moving house and changing schools; and, in many instances, subsequent remarriage of one or both parents, requiring new relationships with these new partners, and possibly with step siblings.

### **2.5. Children's age related experiences and reactions to divorce**

Hodges (1986) and Kraynak (2006) emphasize the importance of evaluating the age related reactions to divorce in order to anticipate typical needs of children at different ages. According to Hodges (1986), such anticipation can provide guidelines for preventing and for assessment of reactions that require intervention because of their abnormality. This is the most important aspect that should be considered for intervention purposes. As children grew up they undergo different stages of development, which in turn forms part of their personalities. Considering age of the experience might help in understanding, preventing and/ intervening those abnormal personalities to develop further.

Hodges (1986) further postulates that children of different ages have different cognitive abilities to make sense out of what is happening to their lives. So this technically means that although all children experience divorce as a stressful event, the meaning attributed and the impact can be determined by the different emotional reactions depending on children's level of cognitive maturity. On the other side and in addition to age related effects Kraynak (2006); Hines (2007) felt that gender as well as other factors that may

serve a protective role such as cognitive ability and temperament could not be separated from understanding the effects of parental divorce.

### ***2.5.1. Birth to two years of age:***

Human development theories stress out that, children of this age develops sense of whether world is a good and safe place, and they gradually become able to organize activities in relation to environment through sensory and motor activities (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2004). According to Everett (1989) children of this age have little memory of intact family. They are absorbed in the drive towards mastering the basics of independence, such as walking, talking, and feeding themselves, and rudimentary social behaviours. However, the danger for children in this age group centers around their strong dependence on their basic survival and security. Robinson (2009) postulates that this is the phase where children focuses on developing trusting relationships with their parents that make them feel secure. This is achieved variously depending on temperament, experience with caretakers, and the level of security they feel in their world. If the infant has a secure attachment, the child has a stronger sense of trust, which makes it easier for the child to develop an attachment to another person (Robinson, 2009).

During times of divorce the mother may be overwhelmed with the burden of care taking, and father may be either unavailable to participate. When babies and young children sense parental distress, they lack the ability to articulate their concerns (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Hodges (1986) clarifies this point by saying that mothers who are upset will

upset the infant and as a result the routine and responsiveness to the infant may be extremely disruptive.

Kalter (1990) describes several behaviors that may be exhibited by an infant and toddler who is experiencing distress. These include (a) regressive changes in motor activity, language, toilet training, and emotional independence, (b) sleeping and eating issues and (c) emotional liability. The emotional liability may be manifested in more intense reactions to environmental events, difficulty managing frustration, anger due to disruptions in routines that typically fulfilled one or more of the child's needs, or fearful behaviors. Some infants/toddlers withdraw from active engagement with caregivers or from activities that they formerly enjoyed, they manifest changes in eating/sleeping behaviors or regression of developmental milestones might occur over a prolonged period of time.

Hodges (1986) presented the study that was taken by Kalter and Rembar (1981) that evident the effect of divorce on children of the above mentioned age. The study looked at the marital status of families of children in an outpatient psychiatric service across a wide age range and the diagnosis of the children. The result suggested that particular types of problems are created by earlier divorce. Separation of parents during infancy as compared to separation of parents at other ages was related to the child having problems with parents that did not involve aggression when the child was in latency. In addition, the adolescent boys with separation during infancy were less likely to have problems with peers around aggressive issues.

Regardless of the age of the child, the immediate crisis period initiates major changes in the life of the family as well as the structure of the family that begins when the parents separate and one parent, usually the father, leaves the residence (King & Goldman, 1988). Typically this stage involves disruption of daily routines, conflict between parents, and decreased availability of parents who are experiencing emotional upheaval. The impact of these changes in relationships and routines leads to disorientation and confusion for infants and toddlers (Kalter, 1990). They are unable to anticipate the changes and understand what is happening or why their lives are changing. Kalter (1990) suggested that the intense emotions that parents may exhibit may be overwhelming to the young child and impact his immature ability to regulate his own emotions. During the immediate aftermath stage, the young child may begin to experience a more predictable schedule. Those whose daily lives do not assume a more predictable nature may experience a shattered sense of security. The Long Range Aftermath stage is usually not reached until the infant and/or toddler has become a preschool-aged child. Typically they experience a sense of loss as the involvement of the father wanes over time (Kraynak, 2006).

### ***2.5.2. Two to three years of age***

Normally, a child of this age's thinking is still not logical, but they develop representational system and uses symbols to represent people, place, and events. On Erikson's theory this is the stage of autonomy versus shame and doubt, which is the stage when the child develops a balance of independence and self-sufficiency over shame and doubt (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). It has been discovered that the younger the child, the more adverse the impact of divorce on that child's life (Gardner, 1976 cited in Hodges,

1986). The literature collected in this case has suggested that preschool children may have particular difficulty handling the divorce of parents. In relation to Erikson's theory Robinson (2009) reports that at this age a child is setting out to test the world using his or her will power to try to be autonomous, and yet needing the security of holding on if necessary. Children of this age who are dealing with how safe it is to separate from a parent may find the partial or complete disappearance of a frightening experience.

A study on this age is the one by Wallerstein and Kelly (1975), cited in Hodges (1986) and Everett (1989), where children in the ages two to three were evaluated. In this study children were followed for ten years, providing a rich database. The study reported preschool age children from two to three showed regression, irritability, aggression, and tantrum behaviour. Regression included loss of toilet training, separation anxiety, masturbation and the use of transitional objects, sleep disturbances, bed wetting, clinginess, fear of any leave-taking, and aggressive fantasies. The parent's inappropriate response to these common reactions can interfere with the healthy development of the child's sexual identity as well as a result the child might become vulnerable to sexual acting-out behaviour in adolescence (Everett, 1989; Robinson, 2009 ). These reactions were noted most severe when children were not provided an explanation of the disappearance of the absent parent (Hodges, 1986).

### ***2.5.3. Three to five years of age***

Children of this age have a limited ability to cognitively make sense out of the loss of one parent. The loss of a parent through separation and divorce can lead to the ego-centrally orientated child to assume that it is his or her unlovability that led to the separation.

Robinson (2009), reports that by fantasy children of this age can mimic other people and events in their lives. They are better able to move away from their parents to pursue their own explorations, but have not yet developed the ability to think logically about certain situations. They have the capacity to reason in familiar contexts about situations that are known to them. They can perform well on memory tasks that depend on recognition and perform poorly on tasks that require deliberate recall. Children on this age are more likely to use magical thinking or to give inaccurate information when they do not know much about what they are being asked, if they feel confused or if they want to avoid telling what they do know. They may also respond as they think the adult wants them to respond. Therefore children of this age have difficulty understanding and appropriately coping with separation and divorce (Robinson, 2009).

Reactions to distress may manifest themselves in loss of developmental milestones, failure to achieve developmental accomplishments, and emotional liability as well as a range of diverse emotions including anger, fear, sadness, and withdrawal (Kalter, 1990). These reactions to distress may be expressed behaviorally through changes in sleeping and/or eating habits as well as regression of skills in the motor, language, and social-emotional areas. Some children lose their independence with respect to toilet training while others exhibit fears in situations where they were formerly comfortable.

In the short-term aftermath stage, a preschool child may use his idiosyncratic logic to explain the changes resulting from parental separation/divorce. Much of this logic may involve transductive reasoning, reasoning from event to event, (Ginsberg & Opper, 1969). Some children construct their own version of social reality that includes thoughts

about what might happen next. The reasons provided by the child's understanding of the social and economic changes in the family following separation/divorce may contribute to the development of diverse emotions including anger, feelings of loss (grief), loneliness, rejection, damaged self-esteem, guilt, and anxiety (Kalter, 1990). Some of the angry feelings which the child exhibits may result from the vicarious experience of witnessing parental conflict and hostility. Some preschoolers transfer anger toward their parents on to teachers, peers or toys. Intense emotions felt by the child may produce sleeping issues such as difficulty falling asleep, toilet accidents at night, or nightmares. It may be difficult for a preschool-aged child to articulate these diverse feelings. As a means of coping, some preschool children will distance themselves from parental conflict by going outside to play or playing in their room.

By the long range period, preschool aged children's construction of reality may be more realistic and they have recovered their sense of trust in the custodial parent (Kalter, 1990). At this stage, the initial disengagement of the father from the parent-child relationship may affect a male child's gender identity especially if he has little contact with other males as role models. The lack of attachment to the estranged father may cause the child to be anxious during visits and disrupt the tenuous father-child relationship. Moreover, the child may perceive the visits with the father as the mother's attempt to send him/her away.

According to Hodges (1986), several research studies have looked at reaction of children of this age to their parents. One of the studies that Hodges cited is of McDemott (1968), which reported on the earliest study done on preschool age children. In his study sixteen

children were evaluated. Ten of the sixteen children were acute management problems, eight showed sad, angry feelings, two seemed lost and detached, and three of the girls showed pseudo-adult behaviour involving constricted and bossy behaviour. Regression was commonly observed and boys showed more aggression and distractive behaviour.

The other study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1975), cited by Hodges (1986) findings indicated aggressive behaviour, irritability, and whiny and tearful behaviour were common in children of age three to five years old. Fantasy developed as a coping skill. Out of eleven children in the study, seven were evaluated as worse. One year later and for almost all those who were worse it was in the direction of lowered self-esteem, greater inhibition, sadness, and neediness. Robinson (2009), mentioned symptoms that are often found in this age group such as high level of frustration and anger, self destructive behaviour such as head banging and hitting themselves, high levels of anxiety, panic and stress; feelings of emotional detachment and deprivation, regressive behavioral patterns, developed defense mechanisms such as denial, rationalization, projections; fear and feeling scared and alone.

The other study is by Hetherington (1979) that was cited in Hodges (1986). The study looked at twenty-four boys and twenty-four girls from divorced families and compared them with the matched set of twenty-four boys and girls from intact homes. The children from homes of divorce were matched by selecting children from intact homes who were similar on parental age, parental education, and length of marriage, sex of child, age, and birth order. Extreme care was taken to gather information on the children as was gathered through interviews, structured diaries, observation in the laboratory, observation in the

home, parent rating, personality battery for parents, observation of the child in the preschool, peer nominations, teacher ratings, and assessment of the child's sex role, cognitive performance, and social development. They were assessed two months after separation, one year later, and two years after the separation.

This was a good study as even the participants were not aware that they were being assessed, it helped a lot to get the rich information. The findings of this study suggested that preschool age children develop more negative behaviour than children from intact families. Boys had statistically significantly more trouble handling the divorce than girls. It was also common that children of this age assume they are responsible for the divorce of their parents. Hodges (1986) gave two reasons why this happens. He said, since children are relatively egocentric and tends to see things as revolving around them; it is easy for them to personalize everything to them. The second reason is that the assumption of responsibility may be an attempt to gain control over the situation. If the child had done something that caused the divorce, then the child could undo the divorce by reversing the behaviour. Thus, some children become unusually good after the divorce in an attempt to reverse the cause of the non custodial parent leaving home.

#### ***2.5.4. Elementary school children***

Robinson (2009) postulates that children at age six to nine years are moving towards mastery and competence; they need to create and compete. They are developing their self-esteem and will use their peers to measure their skills and worth. They have better recall memory. Logical thinking is more evident as they are able to look at problems and consider varied solutions and alternatives. Children of this age need to feel a sense of

control over what they will be doing and how they might express their thought and feelings.

According to Everett (1989), the impact of divorce on children of this age is more profound. Those in the six to eight age group seem to have the hardest time, as they are old enough to realize what is happening, but lack adequate skills to deal with the disruption. They frequently feel a sense of responsibility, experience tremendous grief, and have a pervasive sadness and yearning for the departed parent. At the same time, they experience recurring fantasies of reconciliation and often believe that they possess the power to make it happen. The disruption endangers the child's efforts to move forward. School performance can be severely affected by day-dreaming or acting-out behaviors, problems with peer ( a child may become either a victim or a bully) may occur as the child acts out internal conflicts, and somatic illness can develop from the inherent anxiety of home situation.

In spite of the gains in cognitive skills, early elementary-aged children are still prone to egocentric causal relationships, thus they may believe that they caused the divorce-related events. The early elementary school child is still emotionally dependent upon parents for feelings of safety, security, and positive self-esteem but they are able to exhibit more emotional independence as they venture into the school and neighborhood environments. Gender role identity continues to develop through relationships with each parent (Kalter, 1990).

According to Kalter (1990), sadness and increased fear are common stress reactions displayed by early elementary-aged children who are experiencing divorce. For some children, sadness may be expressed overtly through crying, looking sad, talking about feeling sad or through withdrawal from previously pleasurable activities while for other children the sadness is masked through denying that the divorce is occurring or believing that the parents will reunite. Some early elementary children who experience divorce may exhibit depressive reactions as well as anger and general anxiety. Other behavioral reactions include displaying atypical fears and loss of or failure to achieve developmental accomplishments.

In the immediate crisis stage, early elementary children may feel overwhelmed by sadness at losing their family and the conflict which they witness between their parents (Kalter, 1990; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Irrespective of the amount of contact that the child has with the father, the quality of the relationship changes which creates a sense of loss for the child. Some children are overcome by sadness which may be exhibited as excessive crying and preoccupation with grief while others become obstinate, angry or aggressive. In either case, the child's emotions may interfere with his ability to concentrate at school which disrupts the learning process (Kinard & Reinherz, 1984). Children in this stage may worry about having to care for themselves. The inability to manage emotions causes them to withdraw from pleasurable activities with friends and classmates. The combination of worry and lack of pleasure in formerly pleasurable activities may be symptomatic of a depressive reaction which can escalate into full-blown depression (Kalter, 1990).

As the child enters the short-term aftermath stage, he may continue to grieve over the losses in his life including changes in the family constellation, changes in residence, and quite possibly leaving his former school for a new school. If not constantly reminded of their parents' divorce, the child may be able to focus on school and engage in play with friends and family members. If the parent is still exhibiting signs of distress, the early elementary aged child may take on the role of helper and assumes responsibility for making decisions that are more adult-like, thus disrupting the boundaries between the parent- child relationship and creating an enmeshment between the custodial parent and child (Wallerstein, 1991). Girls are more likely at this age to display internalizing behaviors which are sometimes mistaken as shyness or lack of assertiveness but which do not interfere with other aspects of development (Kinard & Reinherz, 1984).

At the long range stage, the length of time that has elapsed since the parental divorce is related to children's adjustment. Those children who were infants or toddlers or even preschool-aged at the time of the parental divorce do not usually become enmeshed with the custodial parent who is usually the mother (Kalter, 1990). In contrast to those children who have more recently experienced parental divorce, those who experienced divorce as young children may not remember family life prior to the divorce nor yearn to regain it. Boys, in particular, are more prone to exhibit angry aggressive behaviors both at school and at home (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985). Some boys may adopt the anti-social behaviors of the non-custodial parent. The angry, aggressive and anti-social behaviors directed at the mother may contribute to difficulties in the mother-child relationship. For girls whose mothers remarry at this time, the remarriage causes a major disruption in their close relationship to their mother (Kraynak, 2006).

### ***2.5.5. Age nine to twelve years***

According to Robinson (2009), the feelings of competence are more evident within this group as they move towards developing a stronger sense of self. Their logical thinking is advanced and they enjoy being challenged. They often see the world from good/ bad dichotomy and fairness becomes an issue of importance. Further children of this age are able to challenge information in a logical manner and perfectly capable of comprehending full concepts in life. Children of this age assume more responsibility for handling the household chores like cleaning the house and taking care of their rooms. Sometimes they become responsible for babysitting of younger children in case where there are difficulties of affording a daycare by a parent. Cognitively in this stage the child improves substantially in the ability to see the world from someone else's point of view. The children of this age can be enormously caring and concerned about the pain that their parents are going through in handling the divorce. This concern leads to parentification of the child (Hodges, 1986).

Children with these burdens do not become identified as problems, but as super-responsible children. Hodges (1986) argues that this group of children becomes pseudo-mature rather than truly grown up. He says because the maturity is not developed in a normal fashion, it is not truly balanced. From the mental health's point of view these people grow up into very responsible, joyless adults.

Although they have matured cognitively and are capable of a fairly realistic understanding of divorce, they may experience intense feelings of divided loyalty as one

or both parents attempt to engage them in an alliance. Because of the social and emotional growth that they have acquired, children in this age group are gaining an increasing sense of independence. Children in later elementary school also engage in more elaborate psychological defenses against emotional distress (Kalter, 1990). Painful feelings of helplessness and sadness are converted into anger which protects them from feeling vulnerable.

In the immediate crisis stage, children may have been aware of discord between the parents but accepted it as part of their daily life. The older elementary school child may appear emotionally detached rather than show signs of depressive reactions or acknowledge the feelings of loss with respect to changes in the father-child relationship. Boys are more likely to display academic and aggressive behavioral problems at school whereas girls may be overly solicitous of one or both parents and be extremely helpful as well as hospitable at home and school (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985). Girls in this age group appear to weather the stresses of divorce by coping in a very different manner than boys (Hetherington et al. 1985; Kalter, 1990). Girls tended to exhibit more internalizing behaviors such as crying, self-criticism, expressing fears or worries and seeking reassurance.

During the short-term aftermath stage, custodial mothers may begin to feel burdened by the social, emotional, and economic consequences of divorce (Emery, 1982; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). As a result the parent may turn to the child, typically a girl, who is able to assume and carry out household tasks such as meal preparation or caring for younger siblings, empathize and understand the parent's feelings, and engage in adult-like

discussions. In providing support to their parent, this child feels burdened and is distracted from the developmental tasks of developing greater independence from their family and developing relationships with friends and adults outside the family. When children are drawn into the conflicts of their parents because they can assume adult-like roles, the short-term aftermath stage may be prolonged for years (Kalter, 1990).

During the long-range period, older elementary children may be exposed to the stress created by dating and remarriage of their parents which creates several conflicts that the child must cope with (Kalter, 1990). These children must cope with a shift in the mother's investment from solely on the child and his/her needs to the mother's need for adult companionship and intimacy. Less time and attention which is bestowed on the child may provoke the belief that the mother loves them less. This belief calls forth attributions that the mother would care about them more deeply if they were prettier, smarter, etc. In turn, they develop angry feelings that are directed at the parent or expressed through being sullen or uncooperative. When the parent begins to date, children at this age are confronted with the need to recognize their parent's sexuality. The third conflict focuses on whether it is acceptable for the child to like and enjoy their mother's new partner or whether by doing so, the child is disloyal to the other parent. Boys are faced with the internal conflict of needing to rely on their mother for parenting support and love but are concerned that acquiescing to the demands of the parent will label them as a "mama's boy" (Kalter, 1990).

Evidence regarding the adjustment of elementary-aged children focused on measures of social competence, interpersonal relationships, and academic achievement to determine

the effects of living in a divorced home for boys and girls. Kurdek (1989) reported that children who lived in intact families had higher levels of adjustment than did children who lived in other family types (Kurdek, Fine & Sinclair, 1994). In contrast, fourth grade children who had experienced a number of parenting transitions which were defined as experiences involving the divorce of a parent and/or the remarriage of the parent were less well adjusted than children with no or relatively few transitions (Capaldi & Patterson, 1991).

Based on information from the Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage, Hetherington and her associates (1985) as cited in Kraynak (2006) gender differences were stable over time with respect to externalizing/internalizing behaviors and early deficits in pro-social behavior. Externalizing behaviors that consisted of aversive opposition, destruction of property, verbal aggression, and physical aggression were greater for boys living in divorced homes while internalizing behaviors, i.e., crying self-criticism, staring into space, wandering, expressing fear or worry, passive watching of others' activities, seeking reassurance, and being alone/inactive, were greater for girls from divorced homes. When young girls engaged in aggressive behavior, these behaviors were predictive of lower social competence while young boys who demonstrated early pro-social behaviors were more likely to be rated as socially competent.

In the study embarked by Wallerstein and Kelly (1976), cited by Hodges (1986) twenty-six children in their sample of this age group were evaluated. Sadness, grief, depression, and fear of the future were reported. Deprivation feelings and intense feelings of loss in relationship to the non-custodial father were common. In school more than half of the

children had behaviour changes sufficient to be reported to the interviewer by the teacher. Out of the twenty-six children of that sample, twenty-three percent were worse one year later and fifty percent were improved. The intense pain had been replaced by sad resignation. One major behavioural problem that was found common at this age is an active wish for reconciliation. One major problem that begins at this age range is the development of conflicts of loyalty. Children often respond to ambivalence by choosing one side or the other, splitting their conflict in order to simplify it. Robinson (2009) also mentioned some symptoms which are often found within this age group when going through divorce and some of them are common to those mentioned above. These symptoms include fear and overdeveloped anxiety, grief and sadness, frustration and anger, tearfulness and crying spells, emotional detachment, lethargy, depression, obsessive denial of real feelings, withdrawal and self isolation, and hurt and rejection.

The study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) cited in Hodges (1986) reports that children of this age in their sample responded to the divorce of their parents with poise and courage. They characterized children as showing soberness, clarity, and empathy of the parent. The single feeling that stood out as different from other younger age groups was conscious, intense anger. The anger was often directed to the parent who was seen (often accurately) as initiated divorce. Fear of abandonment was common in about one-fourth of the children. Shame was often common response to the news of the separation. This sample showed a shaken sense of identity as well as loneliness and loyalty conflicts. Some reported somatic symptoms, such as headaches and stomach aches. One half of the children of this sample declines in school performance. About half had fallen into a depressive behaviour pattern and others were openly distressed. Robinson (2009) concurs

with the results of this study and adds noticeable common symptoms in this age group, which are, frustrations evidenced by fighting and screaming with others, a developed indifference to everything, anger, feeling out of control and insecure, rebellious and show-off behaviour , and feelings of rejection and abandonment.

### ***2.5.6. Adolescence***

Hodges (1986), suggest that with the onset of adolescence, another cognitive change occurs. Based on Piaget's theory of development during an adolescence stage a child moves from concrete operational period to formal operational logic. This means that the child gives up the relatively concrete approach to solving problems and attempts to obtain solutions on a more abstract level. Hodges (1986) postulates that the characteristics of adolescence have several implications for understanding the response to separation and divorce, these characteristics includes:

*High egocentrism*; they assume that everyone is preoccupied with his or her experiences as he or she is. Adolescents tend to see everything revolving around their experience and they cannot easily see the world from someone else's point of view.

*Decreased empathy*; although the child at this stage can no longer use the concrete operational empathy of understanding the parent, but the ability to appreciate the parent's point of view has not yet developed at a more abstract level. This lack of understanding (and sympathy) on the part of the early adolescent is hard for most parents to accept.

*Separation-individuation becomes an issue*; the egocentrism and empathy reduction of early adolescence is functional for the task of separation from parents. It is important for

the adolescence to be oblivious to the pain of the parent. When the pain is about separation from marital partner the adolescent is presented with an even more complex problem.

*They make judgments on an absolute basis;* ambivalent is handled by splitting. A person is judged as either all good or all bad. Judgments are made on absolute basis. Thus, loyalty conflicts are likely to increase as the adolescent makes judgments about who was right and who was wrong. The ability to see both parents as having admirable qualities and sharing responsibilities has not yet developed. The child moves from seeing the parent as near perfect with few flaws to seeing the parent as seriously flawed and unworthy of respect. The overvalued parents now the target of rage and undervaluation. Some adolescents will pick the parent who leaves, but others will blame the remaining parent for not being lovable enough or supportive enough.

*They experience difficulty with their own sexuality and sexuality of parents;* because adolescents have difficulty with their own sexuality, they often blame the parent who had an affair. This concern raises another problem of adolescence sexuality. In the study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1974) cited in Hodges (1989), it was noted that parental dating forces teenagers to be confronted with their parents' sexuality, particularly when the father was dating someone not far from their own age. On the study by Sorosky (1977) cited in Hodges (1989), it was noted that the father leaving the home can be viewed as a sexual rejection by an adolescent daughter. The teenager boy who is made the man of the house may have difficulty dealing with the closeness of the relationship with the mother.

This anxiety about the parents' sexuality is increased when parents enter themselves into pseudo-adolescent behaviors.

Kalter (1990) concluded that parental divorce at the adolescent stage may cause great emotional pain, damage feelings of self-esteem, and evoke fear and anger. Self-esteem decreases; since the early adolescent's self-esteem is particularly vulnerable. Self-esteem in children tends to rise until age twelve and drops until 18 years of age. When teenagers describe themselves, they are more negative than they were when younger. Feelings about how acceptable the self is a major issue. Since the child identifies with both parents, continuing parental conflict that includes character assassinations is likely to substantially reduce self-esteem. In a study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1974) cited in Hodges (1989), another response to divorce during adolescence is delayed entry or accelerated entry into psychological adolescence. Those with delayed entry may refuse to engage in the separation from parents, remain excessively dependant. One example from this study a teenage boy took over control of his mother, checking her social activities, monitoring her telephone calls, and requesting the check at restaurants. Such teenager does not develop the peer relations that are helpful to them in the individual process. On the other hand accelerated entry into adolescence tends to manifest itself in early introduction into adult pleasures, that is, sex, drugs, and alcohol; while the parents undergoing separation and preoccupied with their own pain that they do not provide adequate supervision. They may also be prone to run away. With respect to others, teens may hurt someone else or get into trouble with the law as a result of risk taking behaviors (Kalter, 1990).

Another major concern for teenagers about the future involves the possibility of their own future marriage succeeding. Children who are experiencing their parents' divorce during adolescence are still seeing a marriage of some duration break up. Teenagers worry about the statistic that the children of divorcing parents are more likely to divorce themselves. As Hodges (1986) postulates, the statistic has been interpreted by some mental health professionals as evidence that divorce produces serious harm in the development of the child so that the ability to form long-term, intimate relationships is damaged.

At the immediate crisis stage, adolescents must cope with a number of stressors directly related to the divorce of parents. These stressors include (a) dealing with the loss of stability, support and protection that one derives from living in a cohesive family environment, (b) coping with offensive feelings toward divorcing parents in a stage where there is a normative shift in perceptions of and feelings regarding parents which range from idealizing to denouncing parents, and (c) dealing with repercussions of egocentric thinking where they assume responsibility for the marital discord/separation.

In the short-term aftermath stage, adolescents must move from the initial shock engendered by the parents' separation to some form of acceptance of the divorce (Kalter, 1990). Some adolescents have fantasies about their parents' reuniting which are dashed when one or both parents enter into a meaningful relationship with another adult.

McClanahan and Sandefur (1994), citing evidence from five studies, indicated that children who have lived in single parent families are twice as likely to drop out of high school prior to graduation. In high school, comparisons of test score given in quartiles

suggested that scores of children from divorced families were ranked lower than those from two parent families. The lower test score performance combined with lower grade point averages and poorer attendance suggested a pattern of underachievement was present (McClanahan & Sandefur 1994; Wallerstein 1991). In addition, when questioned about their expectations concerning college, there was a five percentage point difference between those living in divorced families versus those from intact families, 32 percent of the former group had ambitions to attend college while 37 percent of the latter group planned to attend college. Lower academic achievement and fewer years of education are predictive of vulnerability in later years with respect to income potential and its effect on the individual's lifestyle.

Another area of potential vulnerability for adolescents who have lived in divorced homes concerns a greater likelihood that they will become teen parents. Wallerstein (1991) reported that a number of her subjects engaged in a series of short-lived sexual relationships which would suggest they were more prone to the risk of an unplanned or untimely pregnancy. Based on information from five studies, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) reported that 19 to 34 percent of the subjects from one parent families became mothers as compared to 11 to 22 percent for teens from intact families. Although for some males, being raised in a single parent family increased the likelihood that they would become a father in their teens McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), others tended to avoid relationships with the opposite sex (Wallerstein, 1991).

Information about the long-term psychological well-being of adolescents who had experienced the divorce of their parents while they were in preschool or elementary

school (10 years later), suggested that as females moved into late adolescence, they became frightened of failure and expressed concerns about intimate interpersonal relationships (Wallerstein, 1991). These concerns centered on issues of betrayal, abandonment, and not being loved. At the fifteen year follow-up, almost 50 percent of the young women reported that they were worried and angry, engaged in self-deprecating behaviors and continued to demonstrate evidence of underachievement.

In the study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1974) cited in Hodges (1986), they reported that all of the adolescents tried to withdraw from the family to protect themselves from the pain. The withdrawal manifested itself in increased social activities or prolonged periods of staying away from home. In another study by Sorosky (1977) cited in Hodges (1986), it has been suggested that the younger the adolescent when divorce take place, the more likely the teenager will experience the divorce as a personal abandonment and loss of love. Further, he says that through ample research it is evidence to demonstrate that, as with younger children, autonomy in the adolescent is supported by warm, safe environment.

Robinson (2009) postulates that since this is a very difficult time for any child where he or she is confronted with all sort of changes, divorce adds to those changes. Teenagers may also become very rebellious after hearing that their parents are divorcing and may fall into bad or even self destructive behavioral patterns such as; self mutilation and suicidal thoughts, promiscuity, eating disorders, drinking excessively and taking drugs. He further mentioned symptoms that are often found within this age group which

included anger and rage, sadness and depression, helplessness, severe mood changes, indifference and emotional detachment.

### ***2.5.7. Young Adults***

For today's youth the transition to young adulthood, which encompasses the years from high school graduation to approximately 26 years of age, has become more complex (Amato, 2006). In today's society, young adults are more reliant on their parents for economic support, practical assistance and advice. During young adulthood, they are establishing career trajectories as well as intimate relationships. Information about the well-being of young adults who had lived in a single parent home created by divorce focused on measures of educational achievement, employment, and social relationships to provide information about long-term effects of living in a single parent family. With respect to educational attainment, several studies have documented that young adults who lived in divorced families tend to have fewer years of education (Amato, 2006; Hetherington, 2006; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Information summarized by McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) from five longitudinal studies suggested that approximately 48 to 54 percent of young adults who have lived in a one parent family enrolled in college while 15 to 20 percent graduate from college. In contrast, 51 to 61 percent of young adults who have consistently lived in a two parent family enroll in college. Of that group 21 to 37% graduate from college.

Entrance into the workforce and economic independence has also been used to measure the well-being of young adults who are not preparing for careers by attending college. According to McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), young adults from one parent families are

1.5 times more likely to be idle, i.e., they are not consistently employed nor engaged in a job that helps them build vocational skills. Young adults from single parent families are less likely to enroll and complete college or be gainfully employed, so they have fewer financial resources at their disposal (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

A third measure of well-being focused on social relationships. The number of teens who become mothers as adolescents or young adults is higher for those raised in single parent families than those raised in two parent families, suggesting the premature formation of a family and the concomitant stress engendered by this event (Amato, 2006; Hetherington, 2006; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). By the age of 20, 30 percent of the females raised in single parent families had formed their own families whereas only 10 percent of males raised in similar circumstances had formed their own family. These figures do not take into account the number of young adults who co-habit rather than marry.

Wallerstein (1991) reported that as girls entered young adulthood, they were involved in multiple short-lived sexual relationships and impulsive marriages that ended in divorce. Based on self-reported information, Amato (2006) concluded that young adults who had experienced the divorce of their parents were more likely to report more conflicts in their own marriages and a greater likelihood that the marriage would end in divorce. They were also more likely to have weaker ties with their own parents. This has implications for the availability of support systems in times of stress.

Information about the psychological well-being of these young adults suggested that in comparison with young adults raised in an intact family, young adults from divorced families do not fare as well. Data from retrospective self-report studies showed that young adults from single parent families had more symptoms of psychological distress and reported less happiness with life (Amato, 2006). Although conduct disorders declined in adulthood, other problematic behaviors such as substance abuse and difficulty with the law remained higher in youth from conflicted, divorced and remarried families (Hetherington, 2006). When the long-term effects of divorce were the focus of comparison, young adult males, who had initially as well as longitudinally demonstrated more negative effects than girls with respect to school difficulties, peer relationships and control of aggression, no longer exhibited these problems (Wallerstein, 1991).

Bales (1984) cited in Hodges (1986) reported a pilot research of 39 college students who experienced the divorce of their parents while in college. In this study more than half of the students reported a decline in emotional health, depression, stress, and sense of insecurity. Themes common to younger children were also found, including increased vulnerability, stress, anger, and worries about parents and their future. School holidays were described as a nightmare for many students. Hodges (1986) reports that in this study about one-half of the students reported improved relationships with mothers and more than one-third noted improved relations with their father. Most of the college students accepted the divorce and only 15 percent believed that their parents should have stayed together.

In another study reported by Hodges suggested that a long list of problems were seen as statistically more likely for college students facing divorce of parents as compared to students from intact families. This list consisted of difficulty concentrating on studies, drug use, sleep problems, eating problems, withdrawal, dependency on roommates, difficulty with intimate relations, depression, anxiety, sexual identity problems, fears of abandonment, financial difficulties, loyal conflicts and feelings of insecurity.

## **2.6. Gender and Reactions to Divorce**

Mack and Hines (2007) asserted that boys and girls' reactions to divorce are associated with two factors which are the ways of responding to the divorce, and the length of time needed to adjust to the divorce. Based on their meta-analysis of the impact of divorce on child development, Amato and Keith (1991) concluded that divorce has a more negative effect on boys than on girls. They reported that more boys than girls struggle with making mental and verbal sense of divorce. They also found that in comparison to girls, boys from divorced families develop lower self-esteem and are more likely to display aggression at home and in school. More boys than girls from divorced families tend to quit school.

Hetherington and Kelly (2002) noted that more boys than girls become depressed about the divorce of their parents. Boys were more likely than girls to use blaming, withdrawal, and inattentiveness as responses to divorce. Hetherington's findings pointed to research on boys' tendencies to maintain few friendships and form smaller support systems

(Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996). Another coping mechanism used was drug and alcohol experimentation.

After conducting extensive research on divorce, Wallerstein and Kelly (1996) found that girls make a better adjustment to divorce than do boys. They specified that at least three times as many girls as boys were able to minimize this marital disruption's impact on them. Whereas girls needed one year to adjust to divorce, boys usually needed three to five years to accept the marital disruption. Wallerstein and Kelly (1996) also discovered that boys usually began to show signs of adjustment during the third post-divorce year. Additionally, girls displayed a resilient attitude towards divorce, while boys appeared to experience vulnerability.

Hetherington (1993) pointed out that during these difficult periods, boys became symbols of psychological warfare between two discordant parents. Boys also began to feel that they caused their parents' divorce. Moreover, the father's absence not only caused boys to experience feelings of sexual insecurity, but also distorted their understanding about appropriate male behavior.

Hetherington (1993); Hetherington and Kelly (2002) further indicated that boys usually used two mechanisms to cope with divorce. The first mechanism is compensatory masculinity. According to Hetherington, compensatory masculinity is boys' inability to feel comfortable with their masculinity. This behavior is characterized by boys' assumption of masculine roles that contradicts their chronological age. Another symptom is a display of macho and hypersexual behavior at home and in school.

The second mechanism is the coercive cycle, which Hetherington defined as the post-divorce battle for authority between boys and their mothers. This cycle is epitomized by boys' defiant behavior toward their mothers. Boys display this behavior and initiate this struggle because of feeling they should provide the home with authoritative masculine leadership. Another reason is that boys of this family structure feel that mothers do not fit their description of family leadership. Consequently, boys are more prone to disregard bedtimes, mealtimes, and other familial policies and procedures. When mothers are unable to regulate these actions, boys began to initiate this defiant behavior in school.

Although divorce severely affects the development of boys, this marital disruption can also have a long-term effect on girls. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) discussed a major impact in their Sleeper Effect Theory—a delayed reaction to divorce. That is, the child reacts to the divorce a number of years after the marital separation. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) posited that the Sleeper Effect is more prevalent among girls from divorced families. They attributed this difference to boys' immediate and girls' delayed reactions to divorce. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) continued that this effect is dangerous because of affecting girls' understanding of how attachment relates to sex, love, and commitment. Girls experience anxiety over making long-term romantic commitments. They also began to believe that potential mates could never show genuine loyalty, faith, and love to them. Notwithstanding that, girls sometimes become very promiscuous during adolescence and early adulthood. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) explained that these relationships are anchored by girls' need for a father figure. They further concluded that in most instances, these relationships do not erase girls' fears of experiencing loneliness and abandonment.

## **2.7. Long term adjustment to divorce**

Hodges (1986) also reported on long term adjustment on the studies. Approximately two thirds of children two and half to three and one quarter years old showed substantial improvement one year later. Gone were the regressions, aggression, fearfulness, possessive behaviour, and heightened questioning. Still present was an apparent neediness in relationships, manifested by a readiness to accept and reach out for strangers and waiting to sit in a stranger's lap and hold hands.

For preschool children, three to four years in a sample of eleven children, seven were worse off one year later, suggesting that this age is particularly vulnerable to parental separation. The difficulties one year later were in the direction of increased inhibition and constriction in play, fantasy and behaviour, lowered self-esteem, sadness, and neediness. Again the need for physical contact, individual attention, and approval was evident. These children were unable to handle their anxiety and depression through play, and this was characterized by seriousness, sadness and sense of helplessness. For the oldest preschool group age five to six years of age Wallerstein and Kelly (1975) reported that five of fourteen children in the study looked significantly worse one year later and four of the five were girls.

For early latency age children Kelly and Wallerstein cited in Hodges (1986), reported the course of adjustment for 26 children who were seven and eight years of age. One year later, the pain experienced initially had largely disappeared and was replaced by sad resignation. About one year later 50 percent had improved in adjustment, 15 percent had consolidated the difficulties initially seen, and 23 percent were worse in adjustment. For

later latency in a study by the same authors of 31 children aged nine and ten years it was reported that 21 percent were still adversely affected one year later.

For adolescence a study on 21 teenagers was done. The results reported that within a year following parental separation, most of the adolescents were proceeding toward the task of that stage of development at an appropriate pace. Those teenagers who experienced entry into adolescence with a history of long standing difficulties had more trouble. The precise percentage of adolescence doing well at one year was not reported.

Wallerstein (1991) based her research on the lives of 130 children of 60 middle-class families, argues that divorce throws long shadows into the lives of adolescents and young adults "the ghosts that rise to haunt them as they enter adulthood. Men and women from divorced families live in fear that they will repeat their parents' history, hardly daring to hope that they can do better. These fears, which were present but less commanding during adolescence, become overpowering in young adulthood, more so if one or both of the parents failed to achieve a lasting relationship after a first or second divorce. Dating and courtship raise their hopes of being loved sky-high, but also their fears of being hurt and rejected. Being alone raises memories of lonely years in the post-divorce family and feels like the abandonment they dread. They're trapped between the wish for love and fear of loss."

Possible adult sequel has been examined in a range of domains. Difficulties in young people's own family formation, and in intimate relationships, are recurrent themes. A meta-analysis of over 30 studies identified significant effects on risks of separation or

divorce; educational and occupational achievements; material circumstances in adult life; physical health; and psychological well-being. Effect sizes were generally weak, but were largest in relation to psychological adjustment (Maughan & McCarthy, 1997).

The long term implications of divorce have been examined prospectively in two of the British birth cohort studies. In their early twenties, members of the 1958 cohort whose parents had divorced were almost 40% more likely than others to score in the clinically significant range on a measure of depressive symptoms. Despite this major relative increase in risk, however, only a minority of adults from divorcing families around 11 % was affected. In addition, the main impact of divorce seemed indirect, mediated via negative trajectories through the educational and social changes of adolescence (Maughan & McCarthy, 1997).

Members of the 1946 birth cohort have been tracked further in adulthood. In that sample, psychiatric symptoms scores were elevated for women (but not men) at ages 36 and 43 years, and both men and women from families of divorce were more likely to have faced breakdowns in their own marital relationships. Symptom scores for women from divorced families of origin were only elevated for those whose own adult relationships had broken down, or who had themselves never married. As these findings suggest, the long-term effects of family breakdown may be detected in many different areas of adult functioning, and pathways to psychiatric morbidity may be dependent on complex interactions between developmental domains (Maughan & McCarthy, 1997).

In a study by Wallerstein (1984) cited in Hodges (1986), a 10-year follow-up study of the 30 children who were between the ages of two and half and six was done. It has been reported that most of the children in that study claimed no memories of the pre-divorce family. Almost none of the children remembered their emotional reactions to the divorce. No child remembered being frightened even though this feeling was the most common response at the time. These children who were preschool at the time of divorce did not carry painful memories of the divorce. The lack of memories was in sharp contrast to the reaction of older children who reported vivid memories of the separation and their pain.

In another sample of girls who were between ages 10 and 18 at the time of divorce were evaluated between ages 20 and 28 after the divorce of their parents. It was reported that there were subgroup that were cohabiting with men who were often significantly older. It was obtained that girls who had lost their fathers by divorce dated more often and were more sexually active. It was as if these girls were using sexuality to regain a relationship with a man. Boys from divorced homes had better self-concepts and better perceptions of family environment compared to boys from intact families. They seemed to have a relatively positive view of the divorced home and girls a relatively negative view.

## **2.8. Resumé**

Humanø's maturity level could not be separated from understanding the meaning attributed to oneø's parental divorce. In trying to understand more about that in this chapter several previous studies on divorce were discussed. This included studies on ages and developmental stages of children and the way each age group perceive the concept and the process of parental divorce. The experiences according to each age group and

gender, the meaning attributed to divorce of their parents, and their reactions to divorces as per age group were discussed. Short term effects and long term effects were discussed. In chapter four the findings of this study will be discussed compared with these contained in this chapter. Common themes in both chapters will be discussed. The next chapter outlines the research design used by the researcher to collect data, how data were collected, procedures and instruments used in the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter was a review of a relevant literature to understand the concept under investigation. This chapter outlines the research design used by the researcher to collect and analyze data. It indicates how data were collected and considers methods, procedures and instruments used in the study.

#### **3.2. Research design**

The study is a phenomenological study, which is qualitative in nature (Struwig and Stead, 2001). According to Morris (1981) cited in Barker, Pistrang & Elliot (1995) phenomenology is the study of phenomena, which can be defined as "that which appear real to the senses, regardless of whether their underlying existence is proved real or their nature understood". In summary, phenomenology is the study of the possible appearances, forms, and structures of human experience.

Giorgi (1983) emphasizes that, the phenomenologist normally seeks to understand the behavior within the context of experience. On the other hand, phenomenology may be essentially described as an approach or method in which the researcher attempts to suspend (brackets out) all preconceptions (biases) in order to allow original lived world reality to reveal itself (Edwards, 2001). In addition to what Edwards says Barker et al (1995) say phenomenological research is the practice of phenomenological method which consists of two steps or rules called bracketing and describing. They defined bracketing

as an attempt to set aside one's biases, assumptions and expectations as far as possible. Since the underlying assumptions are hidden, bracketing requires a special act of reflection to be able to identify them. One and the most common description of this reflection is "bracketing the natural attitude" based on the metaphor of separating something from the main meaning of the sentence by putting parentheses or brackets around it.

Barker et al (1995) defined describing in this sense as involving several principles including focusing on immediate, concrete or specific impressions; avoiding evaluative terms such as "good/bad" except where these are part of the experience itself; and to avoid explaining, particularly early in the research. The researcher should bear in mind that the task is to discover the meaning not to invent it, so questions or anything which encourages the informant to speculate on causes or reasons may hinder the focus on concrete experience.

Further, Barker, Pistang and Elliot (1995) distinguished four central assumptions of phenomenology.

- Firstly, perception is regarded as the primary psychological activity, since our perceptions give rise to what we do, think and feel. Based on this, perceived meaning is more important than objects, facts or physical events so called "objective reality".
- Secondly, understanding is regarded as being the true end of science. The aim is to produce explanations of the person's experiences and actions in terms of

intentions/ purposes and meanings, usually in the form of descriptive narrative or lists of themes or defining features.

- Thirdly, a key assumption is that of multiple perspectives (epistemological pluralism). Each person's perspective has its own validity; therefore multiple, differing perspectives are equally valid and of interest for study. These multiple perspectives constitute different self-worlds which are the object of the study for the phenomenologist.
- Fourthly, individuals' perceptions of their self-worlds are based on their own hidden assumptions, and the phenomenologist tries to understand those hidden assumptions of the perceptions. This simply means that what we perceive is built on multiple assumptions about ourselves, others and the world. These assumptions are taken for granted, unquestioned context for our actions and perceptions.

Qualitative methods describe and analyze their subject matter using ordinary language as opposed to numbers. Qualitative data are collected by open-ended questions or by observations that yield verbal descriptions (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 1995), which is the method that was used to collect data of this study.

The main advantages of qualitative methods that Barker et al. (1995) postulated are that:

- they enable the individual to be studied in depth and detail. They allow the researcher to address the questions that are not amenable to quantification.
- they avoid simplifications imposed by quantification, since some things cannot easily be expressed numerically. They enable more complex aspects of experience

to be studied and impose fewer restrictions on the data or the underlying theoretical models than quantitative approaches.

- the data are usually vivid and easy to grasp. The reports of qualitative studies are usually more readable than those of quantitative studies.
- they are good for hypothesis generation, and for exploratory, discovery-oriented research. They permit a more flexible approach, allowing the researcher to modify his or her protocol in mid-stream. The data collection is not constrained by pre-existing hypothesis.
- they usually give more freedom to the participant than structured quantitative methods. The participant's expression is less constrained by the data collection procedures.

Based on these advantages of qualitative methods and all the descriptions of phenomenology, the researcher realized that, through using this method, participants will be comfortable, be free to express themselves openly, and without being restricted. Therefore, to achieve this aim the methodology chosen was the empirical phenomenology method as described by Giorgi (1985). This method was considered suitable because it seeks the true nature of reality by setting aside all theory and preconception and going back to life as it is actually perceived and experienced.

This was advantageous to the participants because as they were expressing their feelings and experiences, the healing process was also taking place and unhealed wounds were discovered. After that discovery, it was easy to help each participant through his/her healing process by providing psychotherapy. The research objective of the study was to

investigate the experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents, thereby requiring a form of methodology and design. As Fow (1996) argues that experimental methods which depend upon operational definitions, quantification and measurement may not be suited to the study of certain phenomena, experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of parents is such phenomenon. Therefore, phenomenological investigation was employed to extract the experiences and meaning attributed to parental divorce and to enhance the understanding of this concept from the South African context by individuals who experienced it.

### **3.3. Sampling**

Convenience sampling method was used, where an investigator selected cases that were easily obtained and where time constraints prevented much consideration of sampling processes (Struwig & Stead, 2001). A sample consisted of 10 participants (5 males and 5 females), between the ages of 19 and 30 from divorced family backgrounds. The sample was chosen among the University of Zululand students as it was a convenient place for the researcher.

### **3.4. Data collection**

Predetermined questions (in line with the objectives of the study), were posed to each participant in a systematic and consistent manner. The questions were written so as to allow the participant to reread it, if needed, for proper understanding. The participants were also given the opportunity to discuss issues beyond the questions' confines as suggested by Struwig & Stead (2001). The questions that were directed to participants were as follows:

**1. What does it mean to you to be from a divorced family?**

The main focus of this question was to extract the meaning conceived by the participants as being from a divorced family. This question was asked considering the ideology that changes in a family structure might have different conceptions and meaning with each and every individual.

**2. What were your experiences in this regard?**

This question allowed each participant to express their unique experiences of being from a divorced family. This referred to the experiences that the participants believe it is/was a consequence or a result of the divorce of their parents.

**3. What has been the impact of such experiences to your psychological wellbeing?**

This question was meant to allow the participant to extract all or any noticed impact specifically in their psychological wellbeing. It was expected that such experiences have an impact to one's psychological wellbeing some may be negative and some may be positive. So this question was aimed at assessing the common psychological impacts of divorce on children of divorced families.

#### **4. What would you suggest as an intervention strategy that could empower individuals from divorced families and their wellbeing?**

The main focus of this question was on finding some ideas of what the participant need or needed at the time of the experience. Noting that there were from different families and had the experience at different ages, it was expected that their suggestions would vary according to the nature of their experiences. Through the responses of this question it would be easy to draw an intervention plan to those who are recently or currently experiencing divorce of their parents.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

According to Mouton (2001), analysis involves breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships. The raw data was read in depth so as to form a good conception of what was said by the participants. The data was then broken down into Natural Meaning Units (N.M.Us) based on their meaning discriminations. This was then grouped into themes and qualitative analysis was carried out.

### **3.6. Ethical considerations**

Struwig and Stead (2001) argue that conducting research is an ethical enterprise, and that ethics provide a researcher with a code of moral guidelines on how to conduct research in a morally acceptable way. In this research project integrity was maintained, the researcher was honest, fair, and respectful toward participants and not attempted to mislead or deceive participants. The researcher upheld and accepted the responsibility for her actions. Confidentiality, dignity, and rights as well as individual differences, were respected. The researcher avoided or minimized any harm befalling the participants by

providing counselling and/or therapy to them. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant. The results will be disseminated through the publication of a scientific article in a SAPSE accredited journal and the dissertation will be submitted to the library to be available for interested readers.

### **3.7. Resumé**

This chapter has shown the research process that this research study used. It has included the research design, sampling, data collection methods used, data analysis, and ethical consideration of this study. The next chapter is discussing the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data obtained from respondents of this study and this will help the researcher to assess and evaluate findings to arrive at conclusions. This will be archived through thematic findings of this study as mentioned in chapter three. These findings are interpreted, discussed and contextualized in relation to the research questions.

#### 4.2. Characteristics of the sample

In the table below are the characteristics of the respondents of this study.

**Table 1: Biographical information of participants**

<b>Respondent no.</b>	<b>Current age</b>	<b>Approximate age at which divorce took place</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Custody awarded to:</b>
1	25 years	14 years	Male	Mother
2	23 years	10years	Male	Mother
3	21 years	12 years	Male	Mother
4	26 years	16 years	Male	Mother
5	23 years	11 years	Male	Mother
6	21 years	05 years	Female	Father
7	22 years	10 years	Female	Mother
8	24 years	04 years	Female	Mother
9	20 years	11 years	Female	Mother
10	23 years	10 years	Female	Mother

### 4.3. Key Themes

As the researcher mentioned in chapter three, key themes were identified upon close examination of the qualitative data gathered from the respondents. There were abundant themes filtered from the responses of the participants. The themes that were mentioned many times by different participants were regarded as main or key themes of the study. These main themes are then stated under each and every open ended question posed to the participants.

#### **Main themes identified from responses to open ended questions 1.**

##### **What does it mean to you to be from a divorced family?**

Responses to this question led to an identification of multiple themes. These themes included pain, independency, inconsistency, despair, incongruity, responsibility, development, resilient, reconciliation, empowered, deprivation, obstruction, loss, inferiority, guilty. Although these themes all appeared from the responses, only those appeared more common within the responses were considered as main themes and illustrated in table two.

**Table 2: Main themes from the question, what does it mean to you to be from a divorced family?**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Illustrations</b>
1.	Learning	One of the aspects mentioned by most respondents was of learning. Learning is known as knowledge empowering. The following excerpts evidenced the meaning of learning

		<p>as expressed by participants</p> <p>“It means learning to be a good parent, so that you won’t repeat the same mistake.”</p> <p>“To be from a divorced family to me it means that in life as a whole you learn many things.”</p> <p>“It means a lot, my parents divorced taught me a lot of things and to be responsible as a young person.”</p> <p>“Comparing myself with my age group, it feels that I am different, but it pushed me to do things on my own.”</p>
2.	Deprivation	<p>Many participants felt that being deprived from love of both parents cannot be excluded from the meaning of divorce of one’s parents. These excerpts evidenced the meaning of deprivation by participants</p> <p>“On the other hand since parents divorced I seem to have a favourite parent and I did not get enough love from both parents.”</p> <p>“If you are from a divorced family you are sometimes</p>

		<p>forced to stay with a single parent like what happened to meí .. I was not allowed to see my dadí It was difficult because my father could not allow us to visit my older brothers and sistersö.</p> <p>öIt means that I can depend more on one parent who is always available or present rather than on the both of themö.</p> <p>öIt means not having enough love that should be produced by mother and father all togetherö.</p>
3	Pain	<p>Pain is one of the common themes that many participants of this study mentioned as the meaning of being from a divorced family. Below are some of the excerpts asserted by the participants:</p> <p>öBeing unfortunate of having both parents together, especially as a male not having a father on a permanent basis is very painful.ö</p> <p>öIt was painful each time there are conversations about parents it used to hit back.ö</p>

		<p>“It was painful in such a way that I even committed myself in wrong things which were drinking and stealing to ease the pain I was feeling.”</p>
4	Independency	<p>Some responses suggested that being from a divorced family means independency. This evidenced by the following responses:</p> <p>“It means that I should be able to stand and do things on my own, be independent, and knowing that my parents are not there to depend on.”</p> <p>“Comparing myself with my age group, it feels that I am different, but it pushed me to do things on my own.”</p>
5	Loss	<p>Loss is one of the meanings that were mentioned by several participants. this is implied in the following responses:</p> <p>“There is a gap that life is not normal to me.”</p> <p>“I don’t have all the things that I need from parents, for example, financial support, love, and modelling etc.”</p>

		<p>“It means that I don’t have a present parent.”</p>
6	Responsibility	<p>The meaning of the divorce of one’s parents was also associated to self responsibility by other participants. This is evidenced in the following responses:</p> <p>“It actually made me responsible; widen the horizons and enlarged my thinking capacity.”</p> <p>“It means a lot, my parents divorced taught me a lot of things and to be responsible as a young person.”</p> <p>“Comparing myself with my age group, it feels that I am different, but it pushed me to do things on my own.”</p>
7	Despair	<p>Other participants asserted that to them the divorce of their parents means being from a dysfunctional family. The fact that they perceive their families as broken it means they have feelings of despair. Following responses supports this:</p> <p>“My family from my view can never be a fully functional and full family.”</p>

		<p>“It means to be from a broken family like you are not being loved, like you were the one who made your family break up.”</p> <p>“If something is not happening the way you wish, I always thought that it is because the father is not there. There is a gap that life is not normal to me.”</p> <p>“Its like you are different from other children, you are cursed. It’s like you live in a different world.”</p>
8.	Development	<p>Other participants asserted that their parents’ divorce meant positive and/ negative impact to their development. This is evidenced in the following statements:</p> <p>“It actually made me responsible; widen the horizons and enlarged my thinking capacity.” This statement illustrates positive impact.</p> <p>“Being unfortunate of having both parents together, especially as a male not having a father on a permanent basis is very painful.” This statement illustrates negative impact, it is communicated here that self-identification had</p>

		some complications.
--	--	---------------------

**Main themes identified from responses to open ended questions 2.**

**What were your experiences in this regard?**

From the responses of this question, themes in table three emerged. Emerged themes included pain, abuse, transformation, anger, obstruction, hardship, empowerment, inconsistency, development, loss, withdrawal, trauma, confusion and despair. In the table bellow are main themes and their illustrations.

**Table 3: Main themes from the question, what were your experiences in this regard?**

No.	Themes	Illustration
1	Pain	<p>In answering the question on the experiences that one had during the divorce of their parents, pain is the one of the experiences that more participants experienced. Following assertions from participants suggested this:</p> <p>öIt was painful in such a way that I even committed myself in wrong things which were drinking and stealing to ease the pain I was feeling.ö</p> <p>öIt was painful that my parents are divorcing and there life</p>

		<p>has to change.ö</p> <p>öI experienced pain; although it made me strong it helped me to face other difficult situations well.ö</p> <p>öI experienced a lot of pain, but then again a relief.ö</p>
2	Abuse	<p>Another common experience that the participants have is of abuse. There are different kinds of abuse they experienced. This is evidenced by the following examples quoted from participantø responses:</p> <p>öIt did not feel like I was a normal child because I was coming from a divorced family and my father made the situation worse with empty promises which were emotionally abusive.ö</p> <p>öWhat I experienced to be from a divorced family is that you get a lot of abuse; you become abused emotionally and physically.ö</p> <p>öI was emotionally and physically abused by the stepmother, while staying under fatherø custody.ö</p>

		<p>“On the mother’s side also been abused by the stepfather, and emotionally by the things he used to do to my mother, and my mother has been not working so she had to stay for the sake of our financial support.”</p> <p>“What I experienced to be from a divorced family is that you get a lot of abuse; you become abused emotionally and physically.”</p>
3	Hardship	<p>Hardship of emotions and financial issues were other common experiences within the participants. Following statements asserts this:</p> <p>“I almost dropped out school, because after that at home there were financial instabilities and I felt I was responsible to make things better.”</p> <p>“I experienced difficulties financially and the father never supported me.”</p> <p>“Hardship, more especially at the early stage of the divorce. I even changed into a secretive person; I could</p>

		<p>hardly talk or open up to people.ö</p> <p>öI experienced that once your parents are separated it is hard to receive love that you felt before the divorce occurred.ö</p>
4	Despair	<p>A feeling of despair is one of the experiences experienced by children of divorce. Illustrations bellow suggested this.</p> <p>öIt did not feel like I was a normal child because I was coming from a divorced family.ö</p> <p>öI become sad when I hear my friends talking about their relationships with their parents.ö</p> <p>öI felt that I encountered/faced some problems in my development that I thought, had my father being present maybe I wouldn't had had the experiences I had.ö</p>
5	Empowerment	<p>Feeling of empowerment was also associated with the experiences of children of divorced parent. This is evident on the following statements obtained from the participants</p>

		<p>“I also learned that polygamy is not a good thing.”</p> <p>“I experienced pain; although it made me strong it helped me to face other difficult situations well.”</p>
6	Transformation	<p>Transformation in different areas of life was experienced by most participants during the time their parents were divorcing. Following statements asserted that.</p> <p>“It was painful that my parents are divorcing and there life has to change.”</p> <p>“I even changed into a secretive person; I could hardly talk or open up to people.”</p> <p>“It was painful in such a way that I even committed myself in wrong things which were drinking and stealing to ease the pain I was feeling.”</p>

### **Main themes identified from responses to open ended questions 3.**

#### **What has been the impact of such experiences to your psychological wellbeing?**

Responses to this question led to an identification of several themes. These themes included development, empowerment, depression, rationality, rejection, biased perception, personality framing, trauma, ego-strength, independency, introverted, low self-esteem, optimism, guilty, and despair. Within these themes there those that are regarded as main themes because of their frequencies on participantø responses. In table four bellow, only the themes that are regarded as main themes will be illustrated.

**Table 4: Main themes from the question, what has been the impact of such experiences to your psychological wellbeing?**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Illustration</b>
1	Empowerment	Among the impacts that children of divorce experienced empowerment was the one of them. The psychological well-being of children of divorce was empowered in different ways. Few illustrations illustrated that from their responses.  øIt helped me to learn to be independent and be strong.ø  øIt has made me a better person and gave me a larger scope on life and how it is like.ø

		<p>õ . But it helped me a lot because it keeps me focused and serious about all I do.ö</p> <p>õIt just made me to love children and to organize activities to develop them and stop crime in the community.ö</p> <p>õIt opened my mind and lightened me up. It helped me to learn to be independent and be strong. It thought me the way of behaving in my relationships (especially love relationships).ö</p>
2	Development	<p>Development in different areas was one of the themes that appeared frequently from the responses of the participants. This is evidenced in the following illustrations.</p> <p>õI got matured earlier compared to my age group, my level of thought became fast, and everything that I do has got the reason.ö</p> <p>õPsychologically I have matured a lot and it has helped me understand and know more about myself.ö</p> <p>õThe experience assisted me/ yielded me to grow and be emotionally mature and psychologically minded.ö</p>

3	Depression	<p>Most children of divorced families experienced depression as an impact to their life. Illustrations from the participants below asserted that.</p> <p>“It added stress to my life in such a way that I had a headache for seven months after the divorce, which was caused by too much thinking and stress. I used to think a lot and I didn’t even have time to relax and socialize with friends.”</p> <p>“Almost dropped out school. Drinking and stealing.”</p> <p>“They really brought bad impact, because my performance at school changed due to the trauma. I went through and I could hardly share the things that hurt me with people who could help me.”</p> <p>“The only thing that was making me sad was that when we have to talk about our parents, I didn’t know what to say because every child would say my mom and dad. And when I only say mom I was embarrassed that they might laugh at me and all the asking about “where is your father”</p>

		confused me.ö
4	Rejection	<p>Feelings of rejection were also associated with the impact of divorce to the psychological wellbeing of children of divorce. From the responses bellow this was illustrated.</p> <p>öI never got many things that need to be natured by parents, for example fatherø love, I donø know my father in general.ö</p> <p>öMy performance at school changed/ dropped because this was the last thing I expected from my parents.ö</p>
5	Trauma	<p>Trauma is one of the impacts of divorce that impacted the psychological well-being of children of divorce. The response from the participants suggested that.</p> <p>öThey really brought bad impact, because my performance at school changed due to the trauma.ö</p> <p>öThe experience I got has an impact psychological to me because I always think about the day my father decided that he wanted to kill my mother in front of us and we were crying.ö</p>

6	Self-actualization	<p>Through divorce of parents some of the children felt that it helped them to actualize themselves better. This is evidenced from some of the responses of the participants bellow.</p> <p>“It helped me to learn to look for people who can give advices, and on the way one should take decisions.”</p> <p>“Psychologically I have matured a lot and it has helped me understand and know more about myself.”</p>
---	--------------------	--

**Main themes identified from responses to open ended questions 4.**

**What would you suggest as an intervention strategy that could empower individuals from divorced families and improve their wellbeing?**

This question was asked with an aim of getting different suggestions from the respondents. It was considered that the participant has experienced the parental divorce and that there was a specific feeling that he or she wished it could be attended in certain manner. So this question was seeking to find out that during that moment, what could have been the best thing for her or him in dealing with the pain or adjustment to new changes. It was just to find that feeling of “if this could have happened it could have been better”. On the other hand so these feelings would help the multi disciplinary team involved in helping children of divorce to what exactly children of divorce need except

for deciding for them. Of course the common suggestions, which were regarded as main themes were considered, however they are all important to consider for intervention. Emerged themes are listed in point form below and those emerged as common will be illustrated in the table below. Emerged themes on suggestions included:

- Objectivity
- Early intervention
- Communication with parents
- Expression of feelings
- Pre- marital counselling
- Child Psychotherapy
- Psychotherapeutic projects
- Outreaching children anonymously
- Provision of coping strategies
- Self introspection by children
- Accurate examination before awarding custody
- Avoidance of involvement of children in parent's conflict
- Continuous support from parents
- Avoidance of bad influencing children about the other parent.
- Psycho-educational outreach to children
- Psycho-education to parents
- Psychotherapy to parents
- Personal empowerment
- Dealing with guilty

- Acceptance
- Optimism

**Table 5: Main themes from the question, what would you suggest as an intervention strategy that could empower individuals from divorced families and improve their wellbeing?**

No	Themes	Illustration
1.	Objectivity	<p>Objectivity about the situation of parental divorce is one of the most suggestions that appeared most as an intervention to children of divorced families. This is asserted in the following participant's responses.</p> <p>“To be very objective about the situation”</p> <p>“They should take things as they are and do not spot the different because divorcing at parents does not mean death of each of them it's just a separation that does not take away the love they both have for you as their child.”</p> <p>“Tell them especially children that it is never their fault and there is nothing they can do about it.”</p>
2.	Expression of feelings	<p>One of the frequent appeared themes was that of expression of feeling by the children of divorce. This</p>

		<p>theme appeared in the next participant's responses.</p> <p>“Speak out, talk to the person whom you think can help you because the more content you are, the bigger the emotional wound grows.”</p> <p>“Talk to somebody you trust the most so that you will be free.”</p> <p>“ to open communication lines with both parents and let them know how you feel.”</p> <p>“ talking with a trustworthy person and self introspection can structure oneself.”</p>
3.	Psychotherapy to children	<p>Psychotherapy to children of divorce was suggested by most of the participants in their responses. This is illustrated in the following responses.</p> <p>“Children of divorced parents should go for psychotherapy.”</p> <p>“One on one talking should be made free and sometimes</p>

		<p>be out of the offices rather in more relaxed environments.ö</p> <p>öGet therapy focused on emotional well-being. Get enough support.ö</p>
4.	Optimism	<p>Being optimism was implied in most responses responded by participant. The following statements suggested that.</p> <p>öí .and do not spot the different because divorcing of parents does not mean death of each of them itø just a separation that does not take away the love they both have for you as their child.ö</p> <p>öI would also empower that person by letting him/her know that one can survive and become somebody in life even if he/ she is from a divorced family and raised by a single parent and that one needs to know exactly what she/he wants to achieve.ö</p> <p>öí .and move on with the hope that what has happened has a reason to be happening.ö</p>

5.	Early intervention	<p>Some of the responses suggested that one from a divorced family should seek for intervention as possible. These statements from the participants stated exactly that.</p> <p>“I deal with it at an early stage”</p> <p>“Get enough support.”</p>
6.	Pre-marital counselling	<p>Some of the children of divorce suggested that pre-marital counselling can be one of the interventions to be considered to avoid parental divorce. This is asserted by the following responses.</p> <p>“Parents must ensure that they won’t divorce before attempting to have children.”</p> <p>“I would suggest that people before taking a decision to get married, they should see trained professionals such as Psychologists.”</p>
7.	Outreaching children anonymously	<p>Outreach programmes were suggested by some of the participants who experienced parental divorce. This was implied in responses below.</p>

		<p>“This should be advertised and there should be helpline and outreach them without identification.”</p> <p>“Outreach those affected and don’t have informationí . Community outreaching in letting people be aware of psychological services that are available, especially in rural areas.”</p>
8.	Coping strategies	<p>Children of divorce suggested that during this moment coping strategies is more helpful to them in helping them to cope better with the situation. This is suggested from the responses of participants below.</p> <p>“I think coping strategies, talking with a trustworthy person and self introspection can structure oneself.”</p> <p>“To support the children on what to do and the way of adjusting and accepting the situation.”</p>
9.	Psycho-education to children	<p>It was clear that some parents and children did not know about psychological implications of the situation and ways of finding help. This is implied in the responses below.</p> <p>“It could be giving psychotherapy and psycho-education</p>

		<p>to parents, so that problems might be resolved and be prevented.ö</p> <p>öBe educated and given knowledge about the new conditions.ö</p>
10.	Dealing with guilty	<p>Some children experienced guilt about the divorce of their parents, so from their responses they suggested that helping them dealing with guilt would of much benefit to them.</p> <p>öTell them especially children that it is never their fault and there is nothing they can do about it.ö</p> <p>öGet rid of self blame in some children.ö</p>
11.	Acceptance	<p>Children of divorce suggested that helping them to accept the situation of their parent's divorce will be of great benefit to them. That was implied in the following reposes.</p> <p>öThey just have to accept their parent's decision and move on with the hope that what has happened has a reason to be happening.ö</p>

		<p>“They should take things as they are and do not spot the different because divorcing of parents does not mean death of each of them it’s just a separation that does not take away the love they both have for you as their child.”</p>
--	--	--

#### **4.4. Discussion of qualitative results**

Divorce is a broad and comprehensive concept that can be explored and discussed in different perspectives. For the purpose of this study, the discussion of findings will examine the key themes that were identified. The meaning attributed, experiences, psychological impact, and suggestions of intervention strategies of children from divorced families will be sifted from the thematic findings that emerged throughout the study.

##### **4.4.1. Emerging key themes**

The themes, as tabulated above will be discussed further with reference to examples and links to them.

###### **4.4.1.1. What does it mean to you to be from a divorced family?**

###### **Learning**

Many participants felt that the divorce of their parents has contributed in their learning process of life. Learning has proved to be the most important element in the meaning of

divorce of one's parents. This is evident in the statement stated in Hodges (1986) that, "children of this age assume more responsibility for handling the household chores like cleaning the house and taking care of their rooms. Sometimes they become responsible for babysitting of younger children in case where there are difficulties of affording a day-care by a parent. The children of this age can be enormously caring and concerned about the pain that their parents are going through in handling the divorce. This concern leads to parentification of the child. The parent who is lonely and demoralized by the divorce finds a sympathetic ear in the child."

This is the experience of children between the ages nine to twelve years as Hodges (1986) asserts. From this assertion it is implied that to some children divorce of their parent means learning to do things that at times, children at their age group cannot do.

Examples of some statements as responses from children from divorced families as they were trying to articulate on learning are as follows:

"It means learning to be a good parent, so that you won't repeat the same mistake."

"To be from a divorced family to me it means that in life as a whole you learn many things."

"It means a lot, my parents' divorce taught me a lot of things and to be responsible as a young person."

“Comparing myself with my age group, it feels that I am different, but it pushed me to do things on my own.”

### **Deprivation**

Many participants felt that they were deprived in receiving all the needs as all other children from intact families. This included different things like love from both parents, to stay or spend time with both parents and others they were even deprived from spending time or growing up together with their siblings.

This concurs with the statement from Divorce Source (2010) stating that, a child's world is a small one where his or her father and mother are pillars. When one disappears, a child loses his or her bearings and sense of normality. Further, some divorce situations may make the child feel lonely. This may be due to a long absence of one of the parents. Divorce deranges the idea of order for a child.

Deprivation was expressed in the following responses by the participants:

“On the other hand since parents divorced I seem to have a favourite parent and I did not get enough love from both parents.”

“If you are from a divorced family you are sometimes forced to stay with a single parent like what happened to me! .. I was not allowed to see my dad! It was difficult because my father could not allow us to visit my older brothers and sisters.”

“It means that I can depend more on one parent who is always available or present rather than on the both of them.”

“It means not having enough love that should be produced by mother and father all together.”

### **Pain**

One of the main themes mentioned by the participants is pain. This means that many participants attributed pain to the meaning of divorce of their parents. This concurs with the report from the study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1974) cited in Hodges (1989). From the result of this study it is implied that pain is attached to the meaning of parental divorce. This was reported from the study of adolescent’s experience and reaction to divorce and it was reported that all of the adolescents tried to withdraw from the family to protect themselves from the pain. The withdrawal manifested itself in increased social activities or prolonged periods of staying away from home.

In the following examples mentioned by participants the meaning of pain was attached:

“Being unfortunate of having both parents together, especially as a male not having a father on a permanent basis is very painful.”

“It was painful each time there are conversations about parents it used to hit back.”

“It was painful in such a way that I even committed myself in wrong things which were drinking and stealing to ease the pain I was feeling.”

## **Independency**

Other participants perceived divorce of their parents as a call to independency. So the divorce of their parents meant independency to them. This theme concurs with the results reported by Kalter (1990), stating that, because of the social and emotional growth that they have acquired, children in the age group between 9 and 12 years are gaining an increasing sense of independence.

This is evident from the following responses from the participants:

“It means that I should be able to stand and do things on my own, be independent, and knowing that my parents are not there to depend on.”

“Comparing myself with my age group, it feels that I am different, but it pushed me to do things on my own.”

## **Loss**

The meaning of one's parental divorce was not separated from loss. Some participants felt that the divorce of their parents means loss to them. This is evidenced in the results of the study by Sorosky (1977) cited in Hodges (1989), in which its results suggested that the younger the adolescent when divorce take place, the more likely the teenager will experience the divorce as a personal abandonment and loss of love.

Divorce Source (2010) also adds on this by stating that, a child whose parents are divorcing may feel sucked into a vortex of loneliness, guilt and fear. When one parent leaves, he or she may fear the other one will follow.

This was implied by in the following examples below:

“There is a gap that life is not normal to me.”

“I don’t have all the things that I need from parents, for example, financial support, love, and modeling etc.”

“It means that I don’t have a present parent.”

### **Responsibility**

To some participants the meaning attributed to the divorce of their parents was being responsible. This concurs with findings from the study reported by Wallerstein (1991). Wallerstein (1991) asserted that from his study he discovered that if the parent is still exhibiting signs of distress, the early elementary aged child may take on the role of helper and assumes responsibility for making decisions that are more adult-like.

Another study that concurs with this theme is one reported by Hodges (1986), reporting that children of this age assume more responsibility for handling the household chores like cleaning the house and taking care of their rooms. Sometimes they become responsible for babysitting of younger children in case where there are difficulties of affording a daycare by a parent. In addition to that Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1985) postulate that girls may be overly solicitous of one or both parents and be extremely helpful as well as hospitable at home and school.

So as they say in the following examples:

“It actually made me responsible; widen the horizons and enlarged my thinking capacity.”

“It means a lot, my parents divorced taught me a lot of things and to be responsible as a young person.”

“Comparing myself with my age group, it feels that I am different, but it pushed me to do things on my own.”

### **Despair**

Other participants asserted that to them the divorce of their parents means being from a dysfunctional family. The fact that they perceive their families as broken it means they have feelings of despair. In the study by Bales (1984) cited in Hodges (1986) similar themes emerged. This is evident on the report that more than half of the participants on his study reported a decline in emotional health, depression, stress, and sense of insecurity, increased vulnerability, stress, anger, and worries about parents and their future. These children were unable to handle their anxiety and depression through play, and this was characterized by seriousness, sadness and sense of helplessness (Wallerstein and Kelly,1975).

Following responses supports this:

“My family from my view can never be a fully functional and full family.”

“It means to be from a broken family like you are not being loved, like you were the one who made your family break up.”

“If something is not happening the way you wish, I always thought that it is because the father is not there. There is a gap that life is not normal to me.”

“Its like you are different from other children, you are cursed. Its like you live in a different world.”

### **Development**

Other participants asserted that their parents' divorce meant positive and/ negative impact to their development. Hodges (1986) argues that this group of children becomes pseudo-mature rather than truly grown up. He says because the maturity is not developed in a normal fashion, it is not truly balanced. From the mental health's point of view these people grow up into very responsible, joyless adults.

This is evidenced in the following statements:

“It actually made me responsible; widen the horizons and enlarged my thinking capacity.” This statement illustrates positive impact.

“Being unfortunate of having both parents together, especially as a male not having a father on a permanent basis is very painful.” This statement illustrates negative impact, it is communicated here that self-identification had some complications.

#### **4.4.1.2. What were your experiences in this regard?**

##### **Pain**

In answering the question on the experiences that one had during the divorce of their parents, pain is the one of the experiences that more participants experienced. In relation to this a study by Kalter (1990) concluded that parental divorce at the adolescent stage may cause great emotional pain, damage feelings of self-esteem, and evoke fear and anger. In addition to that in the study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1974) cited in Hodges (1989), it is reported that all of the adolescents tried to withdraw from the family to protect themselves from the pain.

Following assertions from participants suggested this:

“It was painful in such a way that I even committed myself in wrong things which were drinking and stealing to ease the pain I was feeling.”

“It was painful that my parents are divorcing and there life has to change.”

“I experienced pain; although it made me strong it helped me to face other difficult situations well.”

“I experienced a lot of pain, but then again a relief.”

### **Abuse**

Another common experience that the participants have is of abuse. There are different kinds of abuse they experienced. This theme was not literally presented from the studies consulted, however the researcher perceived this theme as one of the basic themes that should not be left behind. Simply because all the changes those children go through, might be abusive to the majority of them. For example, the change of character, change of family setting, or probably by depressed parents who might transfer their feelings to them in different ways either by neglecting them, being more irritable in a sense that a child fears them, making empty promises, excessive use of corporal punishment at home, or even by being over protective to them and lots more. These all could be abusive to children.

For example or evidence to this, a study by Maughan and McCarthy (1997) asserted that children in divorcing families are likely to face an accumulation of difficulties. This is because distressed parents, whose capacity to respond to their children's needs may be reduced; economic difficulties and loss of social status; ongoing conflict between parents; moving house and changing schools; and, in many instances, subsequent remarriage of one or both parents, requiring new relationships with these new partners, and possibly with step siblings.

This is evidenced by the following examples quoted from participant's responses:

“It did not feel like I was a normal child because I was coming from a divorced family and my father made the situation worse with empty promises which were emotionally abusive.”

“What I experienced to be from a divorced family is that you get a lot of abuse; you become abused emotionally and physically.”

“I was emotionally and physically abused by the stepmother, while staying under father's custody. On the mother's side also been abused by the stepfather, and emotionally by the things he used to do to my mother, and my mother has been not working so she had to stay for the sake of our financial support.”

“What I experienced to be from a divorced family is that you get a lot of abuse; you become abused emotionally and physically.”

### **Hardship**

Hardship of emotions and financial issues were other common experiences within the participants. A study reported by Hodges (1989) suggested that a long list of problems were seen as statistically more likely for college students facing divorce of parents as compared to students from intact families. This list consisted of difficulty concentrating on studies, drug use, sleep problems, eating problems, withdrawal, dependency on

roommates, difficulty with intimate relations, depression, anxiety, and sexual identity problems. From Divorce Source (2010) it is asserted that anger, sadness, depression, opposition, aggression, non-compliance, perceived parental loss, interpersonal conflict, economic hardship, life stress, less parental supervision, inconsistent discipline, more negative sanctions, lower school achievement, acting out, lower self esteem, social adjustment problems, and increased dependency all may result during the days between separation and divorce.

Following statements asserts this:

“I almost dropped out school, because after that at home there were financial instabilities and I felt I was responsible to make things better.”

“I experienced difficulties financially and the father never supported me.”

“Hardship, more especially at the early stage of the divorce. I even changed into a secretive person; I could hardly talk or open up to people.”

“I experienced that once your parents are separated it is hard to receive love that you felt before the divorce occurred.”

### **Despair**

A feeling of despair is one of the experiences experienced by children of divorce. Kalter (1990) asserts that some will be extremely sad and show signs of depression and

sleeplessness. The inability to manage emotions causes them to withdraw from pleasurable activities with friends and classmates. The combination of worry and lack of pleasure in formerly pleasurable activities may be symptomatic of a depressive reaction which can escalate into full-blown depression.

In addition and common to that, Robinson (2009) also mentioned some symptoms of despair that included fear and overdeveloped anxiety, grief and sadness, frustration and anger, tearfulness and crying spells, emotional detachment, lethargy, depression, obsessive denial of real feelings, withdrawal and self isolation, and hurt and rejection.

Illustrations below suggested this:

“It did not feel like I was a normal child because I was coming from a divorced family.”

“I become sad when I hear my friends talking about their relationships with their parents.”

“I felt that I encountered/faced some problems in my development that I thought, had my father being present maybe I wouldn’t had had the experiences I had.”

### **Empowerment**

Feeling of empowerment was also associated with the experiences of children of divorced parent. Studies consulted reported contrary results to this theme. As reported from Divorce Source (2010) anger, sadness, depression, opposition, aggression, non-

compliance, perceived parental loss, interpersonal conflict, economic hardship, life stress, less parental supervision, inconsistent discipline, more negative sanctions, lower school achievement, acting out, lower self esteem, social adjustment problems, and increased dependency.

The is evidence on the following statements obtained from the participant confirms that, despite of the difficulties and pain experiences, there was a lesson and it was taken positively.

“I also learned that polygamy is not a good thing.”

“I experienced pain; although it made me strong it helped me to face other difficult situations well.”

### **Transformation**

Transformation in different areas of life was experienced by most participants during the time their parents were divorcing. In agreement to this King and Goldman (1988) reported an example that, some infants/toddlers withdraw from active engagement with caregivers or from activities that they formerly enjoyed, they manifest changes in eating/sleeping behaviours or regression of developmental milestones might occur over a prolonged period of time.

Regardless of the age of the child, the immediate crisis period initiates major changes in the life of the family as well as the structure of the family that begins when the parents

separate and one parent, usually the father, leaves the residence (King and Goldman 1988).

On the other angle Kalter (1990), Kinard & Reinherz (1984), Robinson (2009) postulated an idea that there are social and economical changes involved when parents divorce. He reported that the reasons provided by the child's understanding of the social and economic changes in the family following separation/divorce may contribute to the development of diverse emotions including anger, feelings of loss (grief), loneliness, rejection, damaged self-esteem, guilt, and anxiety. The quality of the relationship changes, family constellation, changes in residence, and quite possibly leaving his former school for a new school creates more changes in most areas in child's life behaviorally, emotionally, mentally etc. (Wallerstein, 1991).

Following statements asserted that:

“It was painful that my parents are divorcing and there life has to change.”

“I even changed into a secretive person; I could hardly talk or open up to people.”

“It was painful in such a way that I even committed myself in wrong things which were drinking and stealing to ease the pain I was feeling.”

#### **4.4.1.3. What has been the impact of such experiences to your psychological wellbeing?**

##### **Empowerment**

Among the impacts that children of divorce experienced empowerment was the one of them. Although there were no studies that supported this theme, the researcher felt that it is one of the themes that should be taken in consideration. This is because it just points on a different angle, which is seen as a positive impact of the divorce to children. This illustrates that not all people learn bad from bad, but some learn a positive thing from a painful situation. These are people who have strong ego strength or we may say they are optimistic. The psychological well-being of these children of divorce was empowered in different ways. Few illustrations illustrated that from their responses bellow:

“It helped me to learn to be independent and be strong.”

“It has made me a better person and gave me a larger scope on life and how it is like.”

“ . But it helped me a lot because it keeps me focused and serious about all I do.”

“It just made me to love children and to organize activities to develop them and stop crime in the community.”

“It opened my mind and lightened me up. It helped me to learn to be independent and be strong. It thought me the way of behaving in my relationships (especially love relationships).”

## **Development**

Development in different areas was one of the themes that appeared frequently from the responses of the participants. In contrast to this Hodges (1976) postulates that the statistic has been interpreted by some mental health professionals as evidence that divorce produces serious harm in the development of the child so that the ability to form long-term, intimate relationships is damaged.

As evidence from Hodges’s statement, Amato and Keith’s (1991) meta-analysis of the impact of divorce on child development concluded that divorce has a more negative effect on boys than on girls. They reported that more boys than girls struggle with making mental and verbal sense of divorce.

The theme of development is evidenced in the following statements stated by the participants from this study:

“I got matured earlier compared to my age group, my level of thought became fast, and everything that I do has got the reason.”

“Psychologically I have matured a lot and it has helped me understand and know more about myself.”

“The experience assisted me/ yielded me to grow and be emotionally mature and psychologically minded.”

### **Depression**

Most children of divorced families experienced depression as an impact to their life. This concurs with the results reported in Kalter (1990) stating that children of divorce’s inability to manage emotions cause them to withdraw from pleasurable activities with friends and classmates. Further, the combination of worry and lack of pleasure in formerly pleasurable activities may be symptomatic of a depressive reaction which can escalate into full-blown depression.

In the study embarked by Wallerstein and Kelly (1976), cited by Hodges (1986) sadness, grief, depression, and fear of the future were reported. Bales (1984) cited in Hodges (1986) reported that from his study more than half of the students reported a decline in emotional health, depression, stress, and sense of insecurity.

Responses from the participants below assert that divorce of their parents psychologically impacted through depression.

“It added stress to my life in such a way that I had a headache for seven months after the divorce, which was caused by too much thinking and stress. I used to think a lot and I didn’t even have time to relax and socialize with friends.”

“Almost dropped out school. Drinking and stealing.”

“They really brought bad impact, because my performance at school changed due to the trauma. I went through and I could hardly share the things that hurt me with people who could help me.”

“The only thing that was making me sad was that when we have to talk about our parents, I didn’t know what to say because every child would say my mom and dad. And when I only say mom I was embarrassed that they might laugh at me and all the asking about “where is your father” confused me.”

## **Rejection**

Feelings of rejection were also associated with the impact of divorce to the psychological wellbeing of children of divorce. In the study by Robinson (2009) and Kalter (1990) it was mentioned that among symptoms which are often found feelings of rejection and abandonment were part of them. Another study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) cited in Hodges (1989) concurs with this theme as it reports that the fear of abandonment was common in about one-fourth of the children within their study. This sample showed a shaken sense of identity as well as loneliness and loyalty conflicts.

As an evident example to this on the study by Sorosky (1977) cited in Hodges (1989), it was noted that the father leaving the home can be viewed as a sexual rejection by an adolescent daughter. The teenager boy who is made the man of the house may have difficulty dealing with the closeness of the relationship with the mother. This anxiety

about the parents' sexuality is increased when parents enter themselves into pseudo-adolescent behaviours.

From the responses of the participants of this study the following statements emerged.

“I never got many things that need to be natured by parents, for example father's love, I don't know my father in general.”

“My performance at school changed/ dropped because this was the last thing I expected from my parents.”

### **Trauma**

Trauma is one of the impacts of divorce that impacted the psychological well-being of children of divorce. Amato (2000) and Wallerstein and Blakeslee (2003) concurs with this in from their report that divorce is one of the most traumatic and life changing events for children. For example, adolescents must move from the initial shock engendered by the parents' separation to some form of acceptance of the divorce (Kalter, 1990). Data from retrospective self-report studies showed that young adults from single parent families had more symptoms of psychological distress and reported less happiness with life (Amato, 2006).

The following responses from the participants suggested that trauma is one of the psychological impacts experienced by children from divorced families:

“They really brought bad impact, because my performance at school changed due to the trauma.”

“The experience I got has an impact psychological to me because I always think about the day my father decided that he wanted to kill my mother in front of us and we were crying.”

### **Self-actualization**

Through divorce of parents some of the children felt that it helped them to actualize themselves better. In a study by Wallerstein (1984) cited in Hodges (1986) the findings suggested that boys from divorced homes had better self-concepts and better perceptions of family environment compared to boys from intact families. They seemed to have a relatively positive view of the divorced home. These results concur with the theme suggested in this study, the responses cited below suggests.

“It helped me to learn to look for people who can give advices, and on the way one should take decisions.”

“Psychologically I have matured a lot and it has helped me understand and know more about myself.”

#### **4.4.1.4. What would you suggest as an intervention strategy that could empower individuals from divorced families and improve their wellbeing?**

##### **Objectivity**

Objectivity about the situation of parental divorce is one of the most suggestions that appeared most as an intervention to children of divorced families. This is asserted in the following participant's responses.

“To be very objective about the situation”

“They should take things as they are and do not spot the different because divorcing at parents does not mean death of each of them it's just a separation that does not take away the love they both have for you as their child.”

“Tell them especially children that it is never their fault and there is nothing they can do about it.”

##### **Expression of feelings**

One of the frequent appeared themes was that of expression of feeling by the children of divorce. This theme appeared in the next participant's responses.

“Speak out, talk to the person whom you think can help you because there more content you are is the bigger the emotional wound grows.”

“Talk to somebody you trust the most so that you will be free.”

“ to open communication lines with both parents and let them know how you feel.”

“ talking with a trustworthy person and self introspection can structure oneself.”

### **Psychotherapy to children**

Psychotherapy to children of divorce was suggested by most of the participant in their responses. This is illustrated in the following responses.

“Children of divorced parents should go for psychotherapy.”

“One on one talking should be made free and sometimes be out of the offices rather in more relaxed environments.”

“Get therapy focused on emotional well-being. Get enough support.”

### **Optimism**

Being optimism was implied in most responses responded by participant. The following statements suggested that.

“ .and do not spot the different because divorcing at parents does not mean death of each of them it’s just a separation that does not take away the love they both have for you as their child.”

“I would also empower that person by letting him/her know that one can survive and become somebody in life even if he/ she is from a divorced family and raised by a single parent and that one needs to know exactly what she/he wants to achieve.”

“...and move on with the hope that what has happened has a reason to be happening.”

### **Early intervention**

Some of the responses suggested that one from a divorced family should seek for intervention as possible. These statements from the participants stated exactly that.

“I deal with it at an early stage”

“Get enough support.”

### **Pre-marital counselling**

Some of the children of divorce suggested that pre- marital counselling can be one of the interventions to be considered to avoid parental divorce. This is asserted by the following responses.

“Parents must ensure that they won’t divorce before attempting to have children.”

“I would suggest that people before taking a decision to get married, they should see trained professionals such as Psychologists.”

### **Outreaching children anonymously**

Outreach programmes were suggested by some of the participants who experienced parental divorce. This was implied in responses below.

“This should be advertised and there should be helpline and outreach them without identification.”

“Outreach those affected and don’t have information. Community outreaching in letting people be aware of psychological services that are available, especially in rural areas.”

### **Coping strategies**

Children of divorce suggested that during this moment coping strategies is more helpful to them in helping them to cope better with the situation. This is suggested from the responses of participants below.

“I think coping strategies, talking with a trustworthy person and self introspection can structure oneself.”

“To support the children on what to do and the way of adjusting and accepting the situation.”

### **Psycho-education to children**

It was clear that some parents and children did not know about psychological implications of the situation and ways of finding help. This is implied in the responses below.

“It could be giving psychotherapy and psycho-education to parents, so that problems might be resolved and be prevented.”

“Be educated and given knowledge about the new conditions.”

### **Dealing with guilty**

Some children experienced guilt about the divorce of their parents, so from their responses they suggested that helping them dealing with guilt would of much benefit to them.

“Tell them especially children that it is never their fault and there is nothing they can do about it.”

“Get rid of self blame in some children.”

### **Acceptance**

Children of divorce suggested that helping them to accept the situation of their parents’ divorce will be of great benefit to them. That was implied in the following responses.

“They just have to accept their parent’s decision and move on with the hope that what has happened has a reason to be happening.”

“They should take things as they are and do not spot the different because divorcing at parents does not mean death of each of them it’s just a separation that does not take away the love they both have for you as their child.”

#### **4.5 Resumé**

Chapter four explored the results obtained from the data that was collected through the instrument used. The instrument gathered qualitative data, which was closely examined through the steps mentioned in chapter three. Key themes have been identified and then these findings were discussed. The next and final chapter which is chapter 5 presents the recommendations and possible areas for future research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter (Chapter 4) presented a detailed discussion of the results of this research study. Attention was given to qualitative findings through the themes that emerged from the data collected. Key themes were identified and discussed. This chapter will focus on issues around divorce of one's parents that have yet to be addressed. This will include recommendations and suggestions for future research. It also mentions the shortcomings of this study, so that they may be avoided in future.

#### 5.2. Conclusions about analyzed results

This study divided into four sections, which is chapter one, two, three and chapter four. Chapter One introduced the study and showed what motivated the researcher to embark on phenomenological investigation of experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents. The researcher noted the objectives of this study, which served as a guideline throughout the investigation. The researcher also noted the significance of the study to the South African community. Chapter Two reviewed previous literature on the subject of the experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents. Discussions on relevant information of previous studies on, experiences and the meaning attributed to those experiences or challenges that are faced by children from divorced families were discussed.

In Chapter Three the researcher outlined the research design used to collect data. It indicated how data were collected and considered methods, procedures and instruments used in the study. Chapter Four presented the analysis of data obtained from respondents of this study. Several key themes were identified as per question and then these findings were discussed. There were several experiences and meanings that children of divorce attributed to the divorce of their parents. Different psychological impacts were also explored, both positive and negative. What was more significant about these results is the fact that more experiences were not good, meanings attributed were more negative, as well as psychological impacts in their lives were more negative. This brings to a conclusion that experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents are negative.

### **5.3. Conclusion about overall objectives/aims.**

The objectives of the study were extracted from the main research question; a phenomenological investigation to the experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents. In addition to that was to hear from the participants of what could be an effective intervention they could suggest. This was asked in consideration that during the time of the experience there was something they felt that if it could be done they can cope better with the situation. The first objective was to find out the experiences of individuals from divorced families. Several themes emerged here including learning, deprivation, pain, independency, loss, responsibility, despair, and development. The second objective was to find out what meaning they attribute to their experiences. Themes that emerged

based on this objective included pain, abuse, hardship, despair, empowerment, and transformation

The third objective was to find the impact of such experiences to their psychological wellbeing. In which empowerment, development, depression, rejection, trauma, and self-actualization emerged as main themes from the question in line with this objective. The last objective was to find out what the effective intervention strategies that could empower them and improve their wellbeing. It was mentioned earlier that this objective was aimed at finding an intervention to children of divorced parents. From the question in line with this objective, main themes emerged included helping them to be objective about the situation, encourage expression of feelings, providing psychotherapy to children, helping children to be optimistic about the situation, encouraging early intervention, compulsory pre-marital counseling, outreaching children anonymously, providing coping strategies, providing psycho-education to children, helping them in dealing with guilty, helping them through the process of acceptance.

#### **5.4. Limitations of the Study**

Although this research study managed to achieve many of its objectives the researcher believes that there were some limitations of this study that need to be mentioned:

- The sample chosen was not diverse enough, for instance, it would have been more interesting to obtain the experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of parents from different racial groups.

- The sample of the study was only extracted from the University of Zululand students, which makes it difficult to generalize to the whole town, province or country. The researcher feels that a rich data would have been collected from different surroundings and geographical areas.
- It was very difficult for the research to get professional work done on divorce in the surrounding areas, hence it was noted that this is the concept that has been receiving less attention in the Zululand region. However, the researcher is hopeful that this research study would pave a way for future research on the concept of effects of divorce on children.
- Theory and research in psychology is largely based on American cultures than on South African cultures.
- Another aspect that needs consideration is the possibility of gathering participants at group psychotherapy so they would discuss their feelings and identify with each other and even receive consolidated intervention from the group members. On the other hand the researcher was satisfied about the method of data collection that was utilized, because it allowed the participants to verbalize their feelings which assisted the researcher to see the problem and took them through psychotherapy individually. That was psychotherapeutic to the participants, especially because most of them had never had a chance to express their feelings about the divorce of their parents. Some were still stuck, and couldn't let it go, but through their participation they were able to deal with those denied feelings of the past and even understood themselves and moved on. However, having had group interacting might have also brought about more intervention for participants and those that would read the study.

## **5.5. Recommendations for future research**

The following recommendations for future research have surfaced:

- More research in this area is necessary. While this study has created a platform for a dialogue and an interest in improving and empowering the lives of children of divorce, a larger scale research study would have a much greater impact. This would require funding, time and other resources.
- A national or provincial study should be undertaken to determine the impacts of parental divorce in our country.
- A future study would focus on the intervention or maybe ways of preventing turmoil to the kids of divorce.

## **5.5. Resumé**

The final chapter (chapter 5) handled the recommendations and possible avenues for future research studies. This chapter presented conclusions of the study, its limitations and other research possibilities for understanding the experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parent in South African. This is vital for both children and parents, because this situation is the one of those that mostly leads to a development or drastic increase to pathological behaviour in our country, more sadly to the young people who are the future of the country. It is the fact that the rate of divorce has drastically increased in South Africa, and denying its negative impacts will destroy the future of our country. These results should act as the guidance to the intervention or prevention of such situations.

## REFERENCES

- Amato, P. R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1269-1287.
- Amato, P.R., & Keith, B. (1991). Parental divorce and adult well-being of children: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110, 26-46.
- Amos, J. (1997). *Separations: Divorce*. London: Cherrytree Press Ltd.
- Bandura, A., & Richard H. W. (1963). *Social Learning and Personality Development*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Barker, C., Pistrang, N., & Elliot, R. (1995). *Research Methods in Clinical and Counselling Psychology*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bowlby, J. (1969), *Attachment and loss, Vol. 1: Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Capaldi, D. M., & Patterson, G. R. (1991). Relations of parental transitions to boys' adjustment problems: I. A linear hypothesis; II. Mothers at risk for transitions and unskilled parenting. *Developmental Psychology* 27, 489-504.
- Corak, M. (2001) "Death and Divorce: The Long-Term Consequences of Parental Loss on Adolescents", *Journal of Labor Economics*, 19(3), 682-715.

Cronje, D.S.P., & Heaton, J. (1999). *South African family Law*. Durban: Butterworths.

Demo, D. G., & Acock, A. C. (1988). The impact of divorce on children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50, 619-648.

Divorce Source (2010). Children & Divorce. Divorce Source, Inc. Accessed, 12/07/2010 from, [www.divorcesource.com](http://www.divorcesource.com).

Edwards, S.D. (2001). The Phenomenology of Intervention. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 1, 1-8.

Edwards, J. N. (1987). "Changing family structure and youthful well-being: Assessing the future." *Journal of Family Issues* 8, 355-372,

Emery, R. (1982). Interparental conflict and the children of discord and divorce. *Psychological Bulletin* 92, 310-330. Emery 1982

Emery R.E., Waldron M.C., Kitzmann K.M., & Aaron J. (1999). Delinquent behavior, future divorce, or nonmarital childbearing, and externalizing behavior among offspring: A 14-year prospective study. *Journal of Family Psychology*. 1999;13, 1612.

Everett, C.A. (1989). *Children of Divorce: Developmental and Clinical issues*. London: The Haworth Press.

Freeman, L., Temples, D., & Hill, C. (1999). The relationship between adult happiness and self-appraised childhood happiness and events. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 160(1), 466-55.

Frude, N. (1990). *Understanding family problems: A psychological Approach*. New York : John Wiley & Sons.

Ginsburg, H., & Opper, S. (1969). *Piaget's theory of intellectual development*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Giorgi, A. (1983). Concerning the possibility of phenomenological psychological research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 14(2), 136-138.

Hetherington, E. M., Cox, M., & Cox, R. (1985). Long-term effects of divorce and remarriage on the adjustment of children. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 24(5), 518-530.

Hetherington, E. (1993). An overview of the Virginia longitudinal study of divorce and remarriage with a focus on the early adolescent. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7(1), 396-56.

Hetherington, E. M., & Stanley-Hagen, M. (1999). The adjustment of children with divorced parents: A risk and resilience approach. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 40(1), 1129-140.

Hetherington, E., & Kelly, J. (2002). *For better or worse: Divorce reconsidered*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Hetherington, E. M. (2006). The influence of conflict, marital problem-solving and parenting on children's adjustment in non-divorced, divorced, and remarried families. In A. Clarke-Stewart, and J. Dunn. eds. *Families count: Effects on child and adolescent development*. pp. 203-237. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hines, M. (2007). Adolescent adjustment to the middle school transition: The intersection of gender and divorce in review. *Research in Middle Level Education Online*, 31(2), 10-17.

Hodges, W. F. (1986). *Interventions for Children of Divorce: custody, access, and psychotherapy*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Kalter, N. (1990). *Growing up with divorce: Helping your child avoid immediate and later emotional problems*. New York: The Free Press.

- Kinard, E. M., & Reinherz, H. (1984). Marital disruption: Effects of behavioral and emotional functioning in children. *Journal of Family Issues*. 5, 90-115.
- King, M. J., & Goldman, R. K. (1988). Crisis intervention and prevention with children of divorce and remarriage. In J. Sandoval. ed. *Crisis counseling, intervention, and prevention in the schools*. pp. 4-71. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kraynak, A. R. (2006). A Historical Review of Research findings regarding the adjustment of U.S. Children of Divorce. *Forum on Public Policy*: 1-24 Accessed 10/04/2011 from [www.forumonpublicpolicy.com](http://www.forumonpublicpolicy.com).
- Kurdek, L. A. (1989). Children's adjustment. *The divorce and divorce therapy handbook*. pp. 77-95. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc.
- Kurdek, L. A., Fine, M. A., & Sinclair, R. J. (1994). The relation between parenting transitions and adjustment in young adolescents: A multi-sample investigation. *Journal of Early Adolescence*. 14, 412-432.
- Lang, K., & Zagorsky, J.L. (2001) "Does Growing Up with a Parent Absent Really Hurt?", *Journal of Human Resources*, 36(2), 253-273.
- Marta, S.Y. (2003). *Healing the pain restoring the hope*. London: Rainbows Inc.
- Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative researching*. London: SAGE Publications.

Maughan B., & McCarthy G. (1997). Childhood adversities and psychosocial disorders.

*Br Med Bulletin* 1997, 53, 156-169

McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. (1994). *Growing up with a single parent*. Cambridge:

Harvard Univ. Press.

Meyer, C. (2008). *Divorce support*. New York: New York Times Company.

Mouton, J. (2001). *How to succeed in your Master's and Doctoral Studies: a South*

*African guide and resource book*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Marriages and divorces, 2002 / Statistics South Africa. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa,

2005xxvi, [Report No. 03-07-01(2002)] Accessed, 30/04/2008 from

[www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za).

Papalia, D.E., Olds, S.W., & Feldman, R.D. (2004). *Human Development (9<sup>th</sup> ed)*. New

York: McGraw-Hill.

Buckingham, R. W., & Huggard, S.K. (1991). *Coping with grief*. New York: The Rosen

Publishing Group, Inc.

Robinson, T. (2009). *Divorce: What About The Children?*. Cape Town: Struik Lifestyle.

- Sadock, B.J., & Sadock, V.A. (2003). *Kaplan & Sadock's Synopsis of Psychiatry: Behavioural Sciences/Clinical Psychiatry*. 9<sup>th</sup> Ed. New York: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Scanlon, E., & Devine, K. (2001). Residential mobility and youth well-being: Research, policy, and practical issues. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 28(1), 119-138.
- Secombe, K., & Warner, R. (2003). *Marriage and families: Relationships in social context*. Canada: Wadsworth.
- Struwig, F.W., & Stead, G.B. (2001). *Planning, Designing and Reporting Research*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman (Pty) Ltd.
- Teachman, J. (2002). "Childhood Living Arrangements and the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64, 717-729.
- Wallerstein, J. S., & Kelly J. B. (1975). "The effects of parental divorce. The experiences of the preschool child." *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry* 14, 600-616.
- Wallerstein, J. S. & Kelly, J. B. (1980). *Surviving the breakup: How children and parents cope with divorce*. New York: Basic Books.

Wallerstein, J. S., & Blakeslee, S. (1989). *Second chances*. New York: Ticknow and Fields.

Wallerstein, J. S. (1991). The long-term effects of divorce on children: A review. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 30(3), 349-360.

Wallerstein, J., & Kelly, S. (1996). *Surviving the breakup: How children and parents cope with divorce*. New York: Basic Books.

Wallerstein, J., & Blakeslee, S. (2003). *What about the kids? Raising your children before, during, and after divorce*. New York: Hyperion Press.

## APENDIX A

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY IS CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN A RESEARCH PROJECT ENTITLED "A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF EXPERIENCES AND MEANING ATTRIBUTED TO THE DIVORCE OF ONE'S PARENTS."

Your participation in this project is of great importance, since the information that will be obtained from it will contribute on helping our society. Therefore your willingness to be interviewed for this research project is highly appreciated.

Your involvement in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The project leader will treat the information you provide as confidential. You will not be identifying in any document, including the interview transcripts and the research report, by your surname, first name, or by any other information.

### CONSENT FORM

---

I understand the contents of this document and agree to participate in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

SECTION A

INSTRUCTIONS: PLEASE ANSWER EACH QUESTION BY PUTTING A TICK UNDER THE COLUMN THAT MOST SUITES YOUR ANSWER. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS AND NO TRICKY QUESTION.

**Please remember to answer each question.**

Biographical information

Age \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender**

Female

Male

**Home Language**

**Approximate age at which divorce took place**

**Custody was awarded to:**

**Mother**

**Father**







## APPENDIX B

P.O. BOX 185  
GAMALAKHE  
4249  
31 March 2008

The Research Committee  
University of Zululand  
Private Bag X 1001  
Kwa-Dlangezwa  
3886

Dear Sir or Madam

### **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

I am writing to request permission to conduct research within the University of Zululand campus. My research study is entitled: *A phenomenological investigation of experiences and meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents.*

I am currently enrolled with the University of Zululand studying for a Masters Degree in Counselling Psychology, in the Department of Psychology. This study will benefit most of the University community by improving wellbeing of children affected or might be affected by the divorce of their parents. It will also give a perspective of problem children face during parental divorce, so that parents and prospective parents and concerned professionals could avoid or intervene.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Yours faithfully

Ntombintombi C. Nhlangulela

## APPENDIX C

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE FROM A DIVORCED FAMILY?

- Being unfortunate of having both parents together, especially as a male not having a father on a permanent basis is very painful.
- It was painful but as time went on, I became okay because I got someone to support me. It means that I should be able to stand and do things on my own, be independent, and knowing that my parents are not there to depend on.
- It was painful each time there are conversations about parents it used to hit back. If something is not happening the way you wish, I always thought that it is because the father is not there. There is a gap that life is not normal to me. Comparing myself with my age group, it feels that I am different, but it pushed me to do things on my own. It actually made me responsible; widen the horizons and enlarged my thinking capacity.
- To me it means that even if the parents are not staying together life goes on. It means that one should not face the problems and stack on them. It also means that it doesn't mean that parents should stop supporting their children regardless of staying with them
- It means learning to be a good parent, so that you won't repeat the same mistake.

On the other hand since parents divorced I seem to have a favourite parent and I did not get enough love from both parents. I don't have all the things that I need from parents, for example, financial support, love, and modeling etc.

- To be from a divorced family to me it means that in life as a whole you learn many things. If you are from a divorced family you are sometimes forced to stay with a single parent like what happened to me. I am staying with my mother some years I was not allowed to see my dad. I was five years when divorce took place my mother took me with her because of my two brothers and two sisters. I was staying with her at Ladysmith and they were staying at Bergville. It was difficult because my father could not allow us to visit my older brothers and sisters. If my mother bought clothes for them they were not allowed to take them.
- It means a lot, my parents divorced taught me a lot of things and to be responsible as a young person. Sometimes it makes me feel inferior when with people who stay with both parents. However; at first I hated my dad for what he did but I learned to let it go.
- It means that I don't have a present parent. My family from my view can never be a fully functional and full family. It means that I can depend more on one parent who is always available or present rather than on the both of them.
- It means not having enough love that should be produced by mother and father all together. But from the experience that I have it means nothing because ever since

I was born it was always my mother who always took care of us. So nothing has changed when our father lived with us and now.

- It means to be from a broken family like you are not being loved, like you were the one who made your family break up. You somehow feel responsible, like if you are a child like you were not a good reason for your parents to stay together. Its like you are different from other children, you are cursed. It's like you live in a different world.

#### **WHAT WERE YOUR EXPERIENCES IN THIS REGARD?**

- It did not feel like I was a normal child because I was coming from a divorced family and my father made the situation worse with empty promises which were emotionally abusive.
- I saw my mother almost killed herself. She disappeared and was found in the forest. It was painful in such a way that I even committed myself in wrong things which were drinking and stealing to ease the pain I was feeling. I almost dropped out school, because after that at home there were financial instabilities and I felt I was responsible to make things better. I also learned that polygamy is not a good thing.
- I experienced difficulties financially and the father never supported me. It was painful that my parents are divorcing and there life has to change. I got matured

early. The environment and the way people treated me was different and felt shame for me. This was a bit annoying to me.

- I was emotionally and physically abused by the stepmother, while staying under father's custody. On the mother's side also been abused by the stepfather, and emotionally by the things he used to do to my mother, and my mother has been not working so she had to stay for the sake of our financial support.
- It limited my progress in life for example like education, since they don't help each other. I experienced pain; although it made me strong it helped me to face other difficult situations well. We are a big family, so our parents had to divide us into two and my father took half of us as well as my mother. That impacted our relationship as their children; we even treat each other like strangers.
- What I experienced to be from a divorced family is that you get a lot of abuse; you become abused emotionally and physically. I become sad when I hear my friends talking about their relationships with their parents
- Hardship, more especially at the early stage of the divorce. I even changed into a secretive person; I could hardly talk or open up to people.
- I experienced loneliness and loss since I never experienced a father-daughter relationship. I felt that I encountered/faced some problems in my development that I thought, had my father being present maybe I wouldn't had had the

experiences I had. Divorce is bad to any child because sometimes a child may not understand the reasons for the separation.

- I experienced a lot of pain, but then again a relief. When mom and dad divorced we were shocked but as time went we realized it was about time it takes place. Mom really needed freedom because at times he was abusive to her and to us.
- I experienced that once your parents are separated it is hard to receive love that you felt before the divorce occurred.

**WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF SUCH EXPERIENCES TO YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING?**

- It has made me a better person and gave me a larger scope on life and how it is like. Psychologically I have matured a lot and it has helped me understand and know more about myself.
- Almost dropped out school. Drinking and stealing.
- I got matured earlier compared to my age group, my level of thought became fast, and everything that I do has got the reason. When my father was not supporting me financially, I would feel he doesn't love me. It added stress to my life in such a way that I had a headache for seven months after the divorce, which was caused by too much thinking and stress. I used to think a lot and I didn't even have time

to relax and socialize with friends. Even my friends ended up not understanding me because I lived like I have to prove something all the time. But it helped me a lot because it keeps me focused and serious about all I do.

- Negatively it made me to hate a drunken person and anything that has to do with alcohol. I never got many things that need to be nurtured by parents, for example father's love, I don't know my father in general. It just made me to love children and to organize activities to develop them and stop crime in the community. I don't want another person to go through what I went through, so as result I advice the person not to do that. I try by all means to help a person who has been abused. It helped me to stop judging person who has a child rather I support and appreciate her/his child.
- It opened my mind and lightened me up. It helped me to learn to be independent and be strong. It thought me the way of behaving in my relationships (especially love relationships). I learned to love my siblings equally although; we stay separately with each parent. It helped me to learn to look for people who can give advices, and on the way one should take decisions.
- The experience I got has an impact psychological to me because I always think about the day my father decided that he wanted to kill my mother in front of us and we were crying. At that night and nobody wanted to help us in the community because they were afraid of my dad. This affected me emotionally because even now I am studying and its my mother who is working as a domestic worker and

supporting me at school.

- They really brought bad impact, because my performance at school changed due to the trauma. I went through and I could hardly share the things that hurt me with people who could help me.
- This experience impacted both positively and also a bit negatively. The experience assisted me/ yielded me to grow and be emotionally mature and psychologically minded. Through this experience I learned to be independent and strive for the best.
- At that time, I thought he was still going to come back. All those thought affected me at school but not in a bad way. The only thing that was making me sad was that when we have to talk about our parents, I didn't know what to say because every child would say my mom and dad. And when I only say mom I was embarrassed that they might laugh at me and all the asking about "where is your father" confused me.
- My performance at school changed/ dropped because this was the last thing I expected from my parents. And I was trying to figure out some means to bring them back together again. I started blaming myself thinking that maybe I was the main cause of their separation.

**WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST AS AN INTERVENTION STRATEGY THAT COULD EMPOWER INDIVIDUALS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES AND IMPROVE THEIR WELLBEING?**

- To be very objective about the situation, deal with it at an early stage and to open communication lines with both parents and let them know how you feel.
- I would suggest that people before taking a decision to get married, they should see trained professionals such as Psychologists. Children of divorced parents should go for psychotherapy.
- Improving wellbeing by establishing projects that encourages talking, because I believe talking is a cure on its own. This should be advertised and there should be helpline and outreach them without identification. One on one talking should be made free and sometimes be out of the offices rather in more relaxed environments. I think coping strategies, talking with a trustworthy person and self introspection can structure oneself.
- Firstly it is important to first identify the person who relates well to the child as an award of custody. It should be avoided that a child be involved in conflictual situations. Parents should continue supporting the children, and not talk negative things about the other parent on to the child in relation to divorce
- To support the children on what to do and the way of adjusting and accepting the situation. Outreach those affected and don't have information. It could be giving psychotherapy and psycho-education to parents, so that problems might be

resolved and be prevented. Community outreach in letting people be aware of psychological services that are available, especially in rural areas

- I would empower the other person from divorced a family by telling her/him that she /he must be wise and never keep something stressing inside him or her. Talk to somebody you trust the most so that you will be free. I would also empower that person by letting him/her know that one can survive and become somebody in life even if he/ she is from a divorced family and raised by a single parent and that one needs to know exactly what she/he wants to achieve
- Speak out, talk to the person whom you think can help you because there more content you are is the bigger the emotional wound grows.
- Get therapy focused on emotional well-being. Get enough support. Be educated and given knowledge about the new conditions. Get rid of self blame in some children. Parents must ensure that they won't divorce before attempting to have children.
- They should not take their parent's problems and make them theirs. They should take things as they are and do not spot the different because divorcing at parents does not mean death of each of them it's just a separation that does not take away the love they both have for you as their child.
- Tell them especially children that it is never their fault and there is nothing they

can do about it. They just have to accept their parent's decision and move on with the hope that what has happened has a reason to be happening.