

**ROLE OF PARENTAL DIVORCE IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL
FUNCTIONING OF ADOLESCENTS IN NORTH WEST
PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA**

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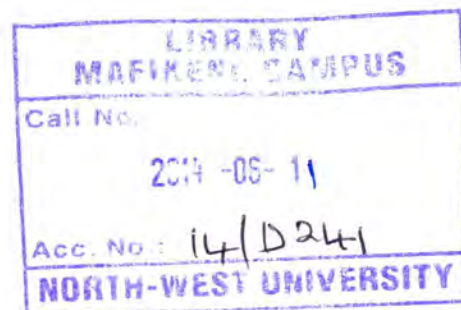
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**MINI DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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SCIENCES IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY AT THE NORTH-
WEST UNIVERSITY, MAHIKENG CAMPUS**

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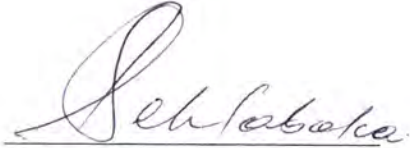
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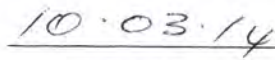
Declaration

I, David Mochaka Sehlabaka, hereby declare that this study, titled; **“Role of parental divorce in the psychological functioning of adolescents in North West Province, South Africa.**

is my own original work and has not, previously in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any university for a degree.

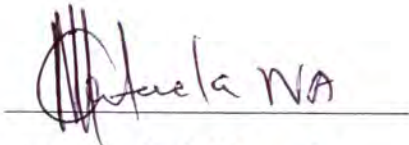


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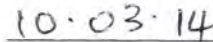


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SUMMARY

Role of parental divorce in the psychological functioning of adolescents in North West Province, South Africa

Key words: parental divorce, psychological functioning, adolescence.

This study focused on adolescents going through parental divorce from the black and the coloured communities of South Africa in Mafikeng, in the North West Province. In this study, the individual adolescent is seen as from ages 13 to 21 years. In exploring the role of parental divorce on the Psychological functioning of the adolescents involved, a qualitative research method was used and a phenomenological design followed. Thirteen adolescents from divorced families, 6 males and 7 females were sampled and participated in this study. The average age at the time of divorce was 9 years old while the average maximum time since divorce took place was 17 years. All the 13 participants were individually interviewed.

Themes and subthemes were derived from the findings. The principal outcome of the study was that the participants had different pre-divorce experiences and therefore unique disturbances on their psychological functioning followed. Although the study disclosed some psychological disturbances, most of the participants have reflected some kind of adjustments through resilience. In this study, resilience was measured as the capacity to deal with change and continue to develop the power or ability to return to the original form or position, after facing some challenges that may have caused some damage in one's life. Some participants decided to focus more on positive circumstances that made them feel better despite the situation. This study will, hopefully, contribute in developing recommendations that will assist counsellors to ensure implementation of the support strategies and support groups to adolescents of divorced parents.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Divorce, which is defined as the legal ending of marriage between two people or the ending of a family unit, has been of a social concern to researchers over the past four decades (Baitar, Buysse, Brondeel, Mol & Rober, 2012). One out of every three marriages world wide ends up in divorce every year (Lotter, 2010). It is therefore asserted that divorce is considered a reality of life that has started growing and seem to becoming common in the lives of many despite personalities, values, community standards, religious teachings or cultural background (Hartman, Magalhães & Mandich, 2011). Studies which have been conducted on this phenomenon regard it as one of the most unavoidable social realities with bad effects; not only on the two individuals but also on the children (Demo & Fine, 2010; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

According to Gumbiner (2011), during the 1970s when psychological literature first discussed the effects of divorce on children, the general view was that divorce did not have any kind of harm on the children involved, but it was later discovered through research studies that it did play a role of harm, extending itself to the children involved in the marriage (Van Jaarsveld, 2007). Further, more recent research has revealed that divorce is not a single event, but a complex process that unfolds over time, requiring extensive reorganisation and a series of psychological adjustments for all individuals involved leading to psychological dysfunctions on the concerned children (Van Niekerk, 2006). Fear of abandonment, loss of one parent and place attachment, anger and remorse, emotional swings, confusion, blame and helplessness may be the experienced psychological dysfunctions on the children involved in

parental divorce. Cameron (2008) states that divorce dramatically changes and shapes the lives and structure of the contemporary family, affecting the children involved and possibly leaving short and long term psychological effects on each member of the family and, mostly, adolescents who happen to be occupied with finding their identity and level of growth in life.

Various scholars (Mogoane, 2010; Zeratsion et al., 2013) have defined adolescence as a stage of transition of human physical and psychological development occurring between puberty and adulthood. The psychological theorist, Erik Erikson, terms the adolescent stage as the fifth and the most critical stage in the sequence of developmental stages, whereby identity consolidation versus identity diffusion (Crawford, Cohen, Johnson, Sneed & Brook, 2004; Macionis, 2010). In this crisis of identity, adolescents start to have a clear understanding of the self, their personal interests, values and beliefs as well as their position in the environment around them.

This study focused on adolescents going through parental divorce and adolescence is regarded as from ages 13 to 21 years. According to Booth and Amato (2001), a high number of adolescents globally are exposed to social traumatic states of affairs in their families which may later end in parental divorce, a factor regarded as the course of common psychological stress among adolescents (Van Jaarsveld, 2007). According to Erikson, if the adolescent in this stage comes across unsuccessful life resolutions as parental divorce, they will be left with a diffuse sense of identity, confusion about their social life roles, and thereafter become uncertain of internal subjective situations and feelings (Crawford et al., 2004; Benokraitis, 2005).

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

According to Emery (2004), one out of every three marriages worldwide end up in divorce and over one million children, mainly adolescents face parental divorce every year. About 73

percent of South African children have been affected by divorce in the past years, two out of five children mainly adolescents, experience the divorce of their parents before they reach the age of 18 and about 25 percent of all children spend their childhood time in a step family (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010; Van Jaarsveld, 2007).

South Africans are also faced with this divorce epidemic which started growing in the past few decades and seems to be common in the lives of many. In support to this notion, Naran (2006) reported that one in three marriages ended in divorce in South Africa leaving some short and long term effects on every member of the family involved. A lot of factors can lead to divorce. As Blanchard (2011) states, a number of situations may be regarded as the top causes of divorce and these are: Communication breakdown between the married couple, an abusive relationship, physical attraction diminishes, finances and infidelity.

Divorced families have been widely portrayed by the media, mental health professionals, and conservative political voices as seriously flawed structures and environments, whereas, historically, married families were meant to be wholesome and nurturing environments for children (Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Dodge & Bates, 2010; Amato & Afifi, 2006). The growing number of divorcing parents has been seen as the cause of destruction to the nurturing environment within the home. According to Kelly and Emery (2003), more than two decades ago, divorce was re-conceptualized as a process extending over time that involved multiple changes and potential challenges for children, rather than as a single event. Compelling stories of negative outcomes for children of divorce were constantly reported by the media in the nineties, stimulated in part by a 10-year longitudinal study of divorced families that emphasized the enduring psychological damage for children of divorce (Yu et al., 2010).

More recently, two longitudinal studies that reported quite different long-term outcomes for children and young adults (Zeratsion et al., 2013) have revealed a negative impact of divorce

on children. Somehow, Zeratsion et al., (2013) have also emphasised, in their study, that divorce could be very traumatic for children. Since the home is regarded as the whole world of the child, when it becomes an unsafe environment due to parental divorce, it is possible for the child to display negative reactions either emotionally, behaviourally and /or psychologically.

Some studies have identified divorce as an event that may affect the psychological functioning of a child's mind (Mauss et al., 2011; Lansford et al., 2006).

Mauss et al., (2011) asset that psychological functioning may be evaluated based on positive emotions which include high levels of well-being and a lower level regarded as mental health problem. Attributes of high level of psychological functioning may include, among others, differentiated self, resilience as well as the emotional and cognitive stability with controlled emotions. On the contrary, the lower levels of psychological functioning include confusion, fear, anger, self-blame, depression, stress, anxiety and adjustment problems (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). Studies have revealed that a child going through parental divorce has possibilities of experiencing low levels of psychological functioning coming from a psychological distress, leading to a depressive state of mind which may move from a short term effect to a long term effect (Lansford, 2009).

The number, severity, and duration of separation and divorce-engendered stressors have been observed as varying from child to child, from family to family, and over time (Hartman, Magalhães, & Mandich, 2011). Cooperation, re-partnering of one or both parents, stability of economic resources, and children's own individual strength and understanding are central to how these stressors affect children's short and long term reactions and outcomes. It is anticipated that constant and multiple stressors burden children's attempts to cope with

divorce and are more likely to result in more and prolonged psychological and psychosocial impact (Yu et al., 2010).

Studies have also shown that divorce makes children unsafe, this may cause their self-esteem to lower down and in most cases take the blame of divorce of their parents. Uncertain of the future may also make them feel that the future is bleak and in that sense feel helpless because they fear that something bad could happen to them anytime following the unexpected pain they experienced (Yu et al., 2010; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). A large body of empirical research confirms that divorce increases the risk for psychological adjustment in children and adolescents (Amato, 2001; Hartman et al., 2011; Kelly, 2000).

Pedro-Carroll (2005) states that divorce dramatically changes and shapes the life and structure of contemporary family relations and affects all the children involved. However, research reports that adolescents' perceptions and understanding of life events determines how much resiliency they will demonstrate before, during, or after the traumatic event. The researcher continues by stating that a lot of approaches can be more effective in providing support to adolescents affected by divorce. Moreover, it has been realised that there are most helpful programmes like those that provide peer groups in a supportive environment, where normalization can occur in terms of the adolescent's feelings and fears (Rushena, Prior, Sanson & Smart, 2005; Quinney & Fouts, 2003; Rodgers & Rose, 2002). Although working with adolescents has been seen as essential and pragmatic; research has revealed that more adolescents have coped well after their parental divorce through the help of their parents or custodial caregiver (Hipke, Wolchik, Sandler & Braver, 2002; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Laursen & Birmingham, 2003; McIntyre, Heron, McIntyre, Burton & Engler, 2003; Quinney & Fouts, 2003; Rushena et al., 2005).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Divorce is one of the biggest problems not only to South Africans but also globally. It affects people from all walks of life and cuts across the racial divide. According to Statistics South Africa (2009), the South African divorce statistics (2005) reveal an increase of divorce among blacks. Statistics South Africa (2010) further indicates that the divorce cases involving couples with children in the year 2010 were 12 486 (54%) out of the 22 936 cases reported from 12 courts out of 62 courts.

About 20 383 children were affected by divorce whereby 7 542 (37%) of the involved children were from black families only (Stats SA, 2011). Most of South Africa's recent research to date on children of divorce parents has focused on white children and less on the black society and other races (Collins, 2003; Lotter, 2010). Considering the recent overwhelming statistics, one would then understand that the most affected children are from black families in South Africa although the effect on children from other races is not overruled.

If divorce poses a problem for South African children across races, how are these children affected as they go through a vulnerable stage of life changes and new discoveries? Most quantitative research studies (Benokraitis, 2005; Rossouw, 2005; Whiteman, 2001) globally, have revealed that children, mostly adolescents, are affected by divorce more than it does to spouses. Although these studies have been conducted, it has been realized that less has been done to investigate the consequences of this phenomenon specifically using the qualitative perspective.

In addition, although studies have been conducted within different Provinces of South Africa on children and adolescents going through parental divorce (Mogoane, 2010; Van Jaarsveld,

2007), they were generally focused on the psychological impact of divorce on adolescents with less attention to how divorce can affect the psychological functioning of the adolescents and the influences thereof. On the one hand, the conducted studies were mostly conducted among the white population than other races in South Africa (Afifi & McManus, 2010).

This study filled in the gap which has been overlooked by other research studies on adolescents going through parental divorce, using a qualitative view point that enabled the researcher to explore deeper into the lives of the participating adolescents and bringing out a very thoughtful view point on the phenomenon. It was therefore considered crucial for the present study to focus on the psychological functioning of the adolescents involved in parental divorce specifically the blacks and coloureds in the North West Province of South Africa.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study focused on the following research questions:

- What experiences do adolescents go through before, during and after parental divorce?
- Does parental divorce play any role in the psychological functioning of adolescents?
- Do gender differences have any influence on the psychological functioning of adolescents going through parental divorce?
- Does age play any role in the psychological functioning of adolescents experiencing parental divorce?
- What are the coping strategies used by adolescents during and after their parental divorce?

The formulation of a research question is an important step in the research process as it is often used to guide the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012).

1.5 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to explore the role played by parental divorce in the psychological functioning of adolescents in Mafikeng. The following objectives were used as the focus:

1.5.1 Objectives of the study

- To explore the experiences that adolescents go through before, during and after parental divorce.
- To investigate the role played by parental divorce in the psychological functioning of the adolescents.
- To determine the influence of gender differences in the psychological functioning of adolescents going through parental divorce.
- To investigate the role played by age in the psychological functioning of adolescents experiencing parental divorce.
- To determine the coping strategies used by adolescents during and after their parental divorce.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- The research findings on the role of parental divorce in the psychological functioning of adolescents in Mafikeng, North West Province, will guide the researcher to develop recommendations that will assist counsellors to ensure implementation of the support strategies and support groups among adolescents of divorced parents.
- Although there seems to be some literature regarding the effects of parental divorce on adolescents, there have been fewer studies (Harvey & Fine, 2010) done on the psychological functioning aspect in South Africa specifically, the North West Province, and the outcome of this study will, hopefully, contribute more credibility

and add value to the existing literature and open up other avenues for further research on this perspective.

- Based on the existing literature, the prevailing South African government policies have shown less focus on adolescents who are experiencing some psychological dysfunction due to their parental divorce. This study may then serve as guiding point for policy implementers in private organizations and institutions such as religious institutions, schools, counselling sectors as well as family units.

CHAPTER 2

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS AND THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide operational definition of terms used in this study, discuss the main concepts of the study including the role of parental divorce in the psychological functioning of adolescents, as well as establish the theoretical framework and theoretical perspectives underlying the study.

2.2 OPERATIONAL DEFINATION OF TERMS

In this study:

Adolescence is defined as a life cycle period between childhood and adulthood, beginning at puberty and ending with young adulthood (Mogoane, 2010). Depending on biological and socio-cultural factors, as well as individual differences, the age at which adolescence as a separate developmental stage begins, varies from 11 to 17 years, while the age at which it ends is between 18 and 21 years (Louw & Louw 2007). In this study, adolescence is referred to as a period of transition when the individual changes physically and psychologically from a child to being an adult. The terms **child**, and **adolescent** are used interchangeably in this study. According to the constitution of South Africa, a child is a person under the age of 18 years.

Parental Divorce refers to legal and formal dissolution of a marriage (Mogoane, 2010). Divorce is also defined as termination of marital relationship between parents (Rushena et al., 2005). In this study, divorce is used as a legal permission to be separated from one's married partner and to marry someone else if so desired, or to officially end a marriage.

Psychological functioning is defined as positive or negative state of mind, including higher levels of well-being and lower levels of mental health problems (Mauss et al., 2011). In this study, psychological functioning refers to any positive or negative emotion experienced that enhances higher levels of well-being and lower levels of the mental state. Psychological functioning in this study is measured based on the following attributes, confusion, loneliness, loss, anger, remorse, sadness, trauma, shame, and blame.

2.3 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

2.3.1 The Ecological Models of Human Development

In order to understand human development, especially the adolescence stage which is a critical stage of development, one must consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs. Urie Bronfenbrenner' theory of ecological systems is therefore used as a model of this study to understand the ecological system of growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory which was first introduced in the 1970s is composed of five socially organized systems that describe child growth. The first one is the *micro-system* which refers to the relationship between a developing child and the immediate environment, including the childs' family and school.

The second is the *meso-system* which refers to the relations between the different microsystems or connections between contexts. This system entails the connection between an adolescent's family and school experiences, moving from school to church experiences, and from family to peer experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to this system, an adolescent whose parents have divorced (which is a negative family experience) may have difficulty in developing positive inter-personal relationships with their friends or peers,

underperform at school and lack social interactions at church (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This suggests that, the adolescent's microsystem or immediate social connections will be negatively impacted by parental divorce of such an adolescent.

The third one is the *exo-system* which is more concerned with the connection between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role with the individual's immediate context. To illustrate more on this system, an adolescent's experience at home may be influenced by the father's experiences at work. The father might receive a promotion that requires more travel, which might increase conflict with the wife and affect patterns of interaction with the child/adolescent.

The *macrosystem* is the fourth and it consists of the overarching pattern of micro-meso, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture. These are with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems. It is within these systems that an adolescent will develop and be guided by the norms and belief systems of his given culture and be influenced in his life course by bodies of knowledge that are embedded in each of these broader systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The *chronosystem*, which is the last system, according to Bronfenbrenner, encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child's environments. Elements within this system can be either external, such as the timing of a parent's divorce, or internal, such as the physiological changes that occur with the aging of a child. As children get older, they may react differently to environmental changes and may be more able to determine more how that change will influence them (Dennison & Koerner, 2008).

It is within this last system (chronosystem) that this study is modelled as it encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to an adolescent's environment. The onset of the parental divorce, the process and its effectiveness, according to this system, will psychologically impact the child experiencing that change overtime. As the adolescent develops with time physiologically, psychologically and even spiritually within the child's environment, the parental divorce which occurs as the child develops, will have an impact on the child's reaction to the environmental changes. For example, the father or the mother leaving home will negatively or positively impact and influence the child's reaction towards interpersonal relationships either presently or in the future.

That change within the environment of an adolescent, with time, will elicit some negative or positive psychological reaction either towards self or towards the parent that has left that environment of the child. Overt psychological reactions such as bullying other children, defiant behaviour, risky behaviours such as promiscuity or substance abuse etc. may emerge. Covert behaviour which may be displayed on adolescents due to this environmental change overtime such as sadness, rage, hatred, resentment, happiness, self-blame and so on, will be the result of parental divorce on these adolescents which later may develop into psychological disorders such mood disorder, anxiety disorder, adjustment disorder and personality disorder.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) believes that, especially in its early phases, and to a great extent throughout life course, human development takes place through the process of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an active, involving bio psychological human organisms and the child's objects and symbols in its immediate environment.

This model stressed the importance of these interactions which must occur on regular basis over an extended period of time for its effectiveness. Therefore, this model serves an

integrated approach to understand human interactions and the role environment plays on an adolescent's emotional growth.

Drawing from the conceptual framework of the study (Ecological model of human development) the following theoretical perspectives were briefly used to explain this study: Bowenian family system theory, Erick Erickson's psychosocial development theory, and Bowlby's attachment theory including the gender aspects.

2.4 THEORITICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.4.1 Bowen Murray Family Systems Theory

The other relevant theory in understanding the psychological functioning of adolescents due to parental divorce is family systems theory. The family systems theory is a theory that was introduced by Dr. Murray Bowen in 1976, that suggests that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as part of their family, as the family is an emotional unit. Families are systems of interconnected and interdependent individuals, none of whom can be understood in isolation from the system (Rabstejnek, 2011).

2.4.1.1 Triangulation and Adolescents' Internalizing Adjustment Problems

According to Bowen (1976), a family is a system in which each member has a role to play and rules/boundaries to respect. Members of this system are expected to respond to each other in a certain way according to their role, which is determined by relationship agreements (Rabstejnek, 2011). According to this theory, each member within this system must resolve all emotional issues with the family of origin, rather than reject reactively or accept passively that family, before one can become a mature and healthy individual in that system (Buehler & Welsh, 2009). Bowen further asserted that unresolved conflicts with the family of origin

would catch up with the individual in this system and affect his or her present relationships (Nielson, 2013).

Bowen's theory consists of eight main concepts which are, differentiation of self, triangulation, emotional cut off, sibling position, multigenerational transmission process, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, and societal emotional process (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). In this study, one concept, Triangulation is used.

According to Buehler and Welsh (2010), hostile marital conflict is a risk factor for adolescents' development in two-parent families. Triangulation of the child or adolescent into parental disputes is one of the mechanisms by which marital conflict becomes a risk factor for adolescents and the child is "caught in the middle" and torn between divided loyalties (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Grych, Raynor, & Fosco, 2005). Triangulation is a system process in which a child becomes involved in parents' conflictual interactions by taking sides, distracting parents, and carrying messages to avoid or minimize conflict between parents (Cui, Conger, Donnellan & Lorenz, 2007).

Charles (2001) states that triangulation occurs when two people in a family bring in a third party to dissolve stress, anxiety or tension that exists between them which in parental divorce. The third party is the child or adolescent involved. In this study, adolescents' triangulation into parents' marital conflict includes parents' attempts to form an alliance with the child against the other parent and the child becoming the focus of parents' attention to avoid addressing their own problems (Bell, Bell & Nakata, 2001; Grych et al., 2005).

The Bowenian family systems theory hypothesises that triangulation is associated positively with adolescents' internalizing adjustment problems (Bowen, 1978; Buehler, & Welsh, 2009). In this study Bowen implies that parents' anxiety and difficulties with balancing

intimacy and autonomy needs, such as poor self-differentiation, create marital tension and conflict. Bowen further suggests that a primary mechanism for addressing this marital tension is to include a child in the strife so as to reduce or displace personal anxiety and relational tension. This triangulation process, as a result, represents a boundary violation because it places adolescents in confusing and distress-provoking situations as they negotiate between parents and manage conflicting loyalties (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Jacobvitz, Hazen, Curran, & Hitchens, 2004). Adolescents' involvement in their parents' relational difficulties places them at risk for psychological distress, particularly problems such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, and withdrawal tendencies (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Miller, Anderson & Keala, 2004).

2.4.2 Erickson's Psychosocial Theory of Development

A personality theorist, Erikson (1968), states that human beings face a specific psychosocial dilemma, or crisis, at every stage of life they come across (Mitter & Coon, 2007). A psychosocial dilemma is a conflict between personal needs and the social world and resolving each dilemma creates new balance between a person and society. Erik Erikson states eight stages through which a healthily developing human should pass through within time and space of development whereby environment plays a major role in the entire life of a person and gives clarity to the physiological dilemma experienced during development.

In each stage, the person confronts; and hopefully masters new challenges. Each stage builds on the successful completion of the earlier stages. The challenges of stages not successfully completed may be expected to reappear as psychological problems in the future. Each stage is characterized by a psycho-social crisis of these two conflicting forces.

The first stage of Erik Erikson is trust versus mistrust. This stage focuses on the infant's basic needs being met by the parents and this interaction leading to trust or mistrust. According to

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory, this first stage is the child's immediate environment encompassing the child's parents. The child's relative understanding of the world and society comes from the parents and their interaction with the child (Bee & Boyd, 2009). Parental divorce at this stage is interpreted as abandonment by the child, leading to the child learning not to trust any important object within its immediate environment. The second stage of Erikson's developmental theory is autonomy versus shame and doubt. As the child gains control over eliminative functions and motor abilities, the child begins to explore his/her surroundings. The parents provide a strong base of security from which the child can venture out to assert his/her will (Allen & Marotz, 2003). The environmental connections ranging from the child's family experiences to school experiences, church and peer experiences (mesosystem) enhance the self-esteem of the child and promote higher levels of the child's psychological well-being. Parental divorce at this stage leads to shame and doubt on the child.

Initiative versus Guilt is the third stage, according to Erikson. At this stage, the child wants to begin and complete their own actions for a purpose. Parental divorce at this stage elicits guilt on the child that is still developing and trying new innovations/initiatives. Later on as adolescents, children may feel guilty over things that logically should not cause guilt. They may later feel guilty that they are the cause of their parental divorce (Bee & Boyd, 2009) as adolescents and lack eagerness to take initiative in life.

The fourth stage of Erick Erickson's psychosocial development is labelled as industry versus inferiority. This stage can be understood within the context of Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem theory. The child at this stage is synthesizing its own experiences learned from the micro-meso, and exosystems. Children at this age are becoming more aware of themselves as individuals. They work hard at "being responsible, being good and doing it right" (Allen &

Marotz, 2003). It is within these systems that an adolescent develops and is guided by the norms and belief systems of his/her given culture and be influenced in his life course by bodies of knowledge that are embedded in each of these broader systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Parental divorce at this stage of development enhances inferiority complex among children experiencing it. As children start to recognise their special talents, discovering their cultural belief system at this stage, parental divorce may affect their zeal to connect with their environment and disturb productivity to take its course among children. Parental divorce also elicits a sense of lack of motivation, low self-esteem, and lethargy on these children developing into psychological disorder such as depression, anxiety or even adjustment disorders. They may become couch potatoes if they are not allowed to develop interests (Bee & Boyd, 2009).

The chrono-system by Bronfenbrenner is apt in explaining Erick Erickson's fifth stage which deals with Identity versus Role Confusion. An adolescent according to Erickson's psychosocial theory of development, is conceptualized as a stage of development ranging between 13-19 years of age (Louw & Louw, 2007). As the child/adolescent matures within time and space in the environment he/she exists, experiencing changes physiologically, psychologically, cognitively and spiritually, parental divorce may negatively impact the adolescent's psychological functioning hence role confusion. As the adolescents get older, they may react differently to environmental changes and may be more able to determine more how that change will influence them in future (Dennison & Koerner, 2008).

The adolescent are newly concerned with how they appear to others. Superego identity is the accrued confidence that the outer sameness and continuity prepares in the future are matched

with the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for oneself, as evidenced in the promise of a career. The ability to settle on a school or occupational identity is pleasant. In later stages of adolescence, the child develops a sense of sexual identity. As they make the transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents ponder the roles they will play in the adult world whereby parental divorce at this stage of development will elicit mixed ideas and feelings about the specific ways in which they will fit into the society (Louw & Louw, 2007).

The most unique aspect about the stage of Identity is that it is a special sort of synthesis of earlier stages and a special sort of anticipation of later ones whereby adolescents have certain unique qualities in their personal lives which is a bridge between childhood and adulthood.

Adolescent stage is a time of radical change, that is, the great body changes accompanying puberty, the ability of the mind to search one's own intentions and the intentions of others, the suddenly sharpened awareness of the roles society has offered for later life (Louw & Louw, 2007). In this case, parental divorce disturbs and negatively affects the developmental changes in the adolescent's life experiences resulting in role confusion. This stage elicits the confusion that may occur within adolescents experiencing parental divorce. The ego identity can also be fragmented due to the same constraints because this is the stage whereby an adolescent is moving from "self to other" relationships and parents at this stage are seen as important "objects" to mirror (Louw & Louw, 2007).

Intimacy versus Isolation, once adolescents have established their identities, they are ready to make long-term commitments to others. Environmental factors such as parental divorce affects the life time decisions that the adolescents make in future. They become capable of forming intimate, reciprocal relationships (through close friendships or marriage) and willingly make the sacrifices and compromises that such relationships require and if

adolescents later, due to the impact of parental divorce, cannot form these intimate relationships, a sense of isolation may result (Allen & Marotz, 2003).

Generativity versus Stagnation follows the previous stage ranging between 25-64 years of age. Generativity is the concern of guiding the next generation. Socially-valued work and disciplines are expressions of generativity. Parental divorce experienced during the adolescence stage may impact negatively on a person at this stage resulting into stagnation and lack of generativity (Allen & Marotz, 2003).

The final stage of the psychosocial development, according to Erikson, is Ego Integrity versus Despair which occurs during late adulthood to death. It is during this time that people contemplate their accomplishments and are able to develop integrity if they see themselves as leading a successful life. If they see their life as unproductive, due to negative experiences experienced during adolescence stage such as parental divorce, they may end up being failures in relationships, leading to feelings of despair that they did not accomplish their life goals, often leading to depression and hopelessness (Slater & Charles, 2003).

2.4.3 Bowlby's theory of attachment on divorce

Childhood attachment styles are clearly based on the emotional bond between the parent and child, opposed to a biological push to become attached. In a study on adopted children, it was realized that positively formed attachments heighten the chance for a well-adjusted life, regardless of the biological relation of the attachment figure (Juffer, Stams & van IJzendoorn, 2002). "Even in a biologically unrelated group of parents and their adopted children from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds, early child-parent relationship characteristics played a significant role in shaping children's adjustment in middle childhood" (Juffer et al., 2002).

Bowlby's attachment theory covers different aspects of attachment. This theory ratifies some of the objectives of this study since it elicits children's reaction to broken attachment due to parental divorce. It is often reported that children of divorced parents have trouble adapting to different stages of their lives because of their experience with broken or detached attachment bonds. Attachment can be defined as the strong bond or emotional connection between people, in most cases parent and child, and can be identified through the child's keenness to be closer to the parent and later in peer and romantic relationships (Stroebe & Archer, 2013). According to this theory, children from divorced families are said to have no accurate template for successful relationships to replicate in their lives.

2.4.3.1 Separation from an Attachment Figure

According to this theory, marriage is a highly significant form of attachment bond with negative consequences when broken, especially on adolescents of the same ecological system/structure. Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem agrees with Bowlby 1969' theory of attachment that, as we grow older, we form new attachments with multiple important figures throughout our lives (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). For infants, it is only natural to form attachments with the people who care for them most (their parents), with regard to their physiological and emotional needs and these are the parents.

As people mature, the old attachments are only detached after great strain, and new attachments are made along the way. New attachments can be friends, co-workers or romantic interests. These new attachments refer to the relations between the different microsystems or connections between contexts. Some common examples are the connection between family experiences and school experiences, school experiences to church experiences, and family experiences to peer experiences. Indeed it seems reasonable to surmise that the bond we observe to persist in unhappy marriages is an adult development of

childhood attachment" (Stroebe & Archer, 2013). Although the distress caused by divorce is great for both partners, it is easier to see how adults cope with the broken attachment because of their life experiences, maturity, and alternate sources of support. In contrast, children rely mainly on few attachment figures and often lack the coping skills that adults have refined since they get detached to the other parent who is not in custody.

2.4.3.2 Children

Children usually lose a degree of contact with one of their very few attachment figures when a divorce occurs, especially the parent that leaves the home. It is a confusing and stressful time for children, regardless of whether the divorce was amicable or not. McCartney, Owen, Booth, Clarke-Stewart, and Vandell (2004) refer to various national studies when stating that poor school performance, low self-esteem, behavioural problems, distress and adjustment difficulties are associated with parental divorce. In adolescents from divorced families, they noted more instances of delinquent behavior, early sex activity and continued academic issues. Age and gender are also factors that may come to play into how children's attachments are altered after their parental divorce.

2.4.3.3 Children's Adjustment and Age factor

The behavioural reaction of a child to divorce has been shown to correlate with the age group when the divorce or separation occurs. In a controversial study of divorced families, Stambaugh, Hector and Carr (2011), state that most children have the same initial feelings. When their family breaks up, children feel vulnerable, for they fear that their lifeline is in danger of being cut. They change roles and birth line in case of after divorce remarriages in future. Adolescents often act out and get into trouble, become depressed or frenetic. Some throw themselves into deviant behaviour (Hartman et al., 2011), or engross themselves in work while still very young to help their custodian parents and their siblings to survive

(Stambaugh, Hector & Carr, 2011). Future studies require to investigate if this is a phenomenon within the African context.

2.4.3. 4 Children's Adjustment and gender factor

One of the objectives of this study is to discuss the gender difference amongst adolescents from divorced parents. Gender difference between children in a divorce plays a very important role in how they adjust. Multiple studies have agreed that boys and girls react differently to the reduced contact with a major attachment figure. Boys seem to have an especially difficult time with divorce, causing them to have trouble at school, withdraw from social interactions, or start fights with peers (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). However, Amato and Afifi (2006) indicate that behaviour traits can be ranked based on gender in children with divorced parents and observed negative behaviours and those boys are affected differently from girls during attachment disturbances like change of the family structure caused by divorce.

Although in the 1990s, divorce was associated with greater conduct problems among boys than girls, the more general conclusion in the earlier meta-analysis (Matsafu, 2005), as well as in the present one is that, most of the disadvantages associated with divorce are similar for both boys and girls. These findings imply that the stress on the children is equal, although they may show it in differing ways. Amato's (2001) follow up study also goes to great lengths to show that the current trends in gender differences are not as severe as they were once thought to be.

2.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the operational definition of terms was given and the main concepts of the study were discussed which included the emotional impact of parental divorce on late adolescents, as well as the theoretical framework and theoretical perspectives guiding the study namely, Bronfenbranner's ecological system which was used as a model of this study, Bowenian family system theory, Erick Erickson's psychosocial developmental theory and Bowlby's attachment theory were also discussed and explained in this chapter. The next chapter focuses on the literature review of the study.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviewed and discussed recent literature regarding the role parental divorce plays in the psychological functioning of adolescents. The first part of the chapter discussed the international and South African viewpoint of divorce and its effects on adolescents. The last part explored what other researchers found out about the psychological impact of divorce. A concluding summary of the discussed points is made at the end of the chapter.

3.2 UNDERSTANDING PARENTAL DIVORCE AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON ADOLESCENTS

3.2.1 International studies on divorce

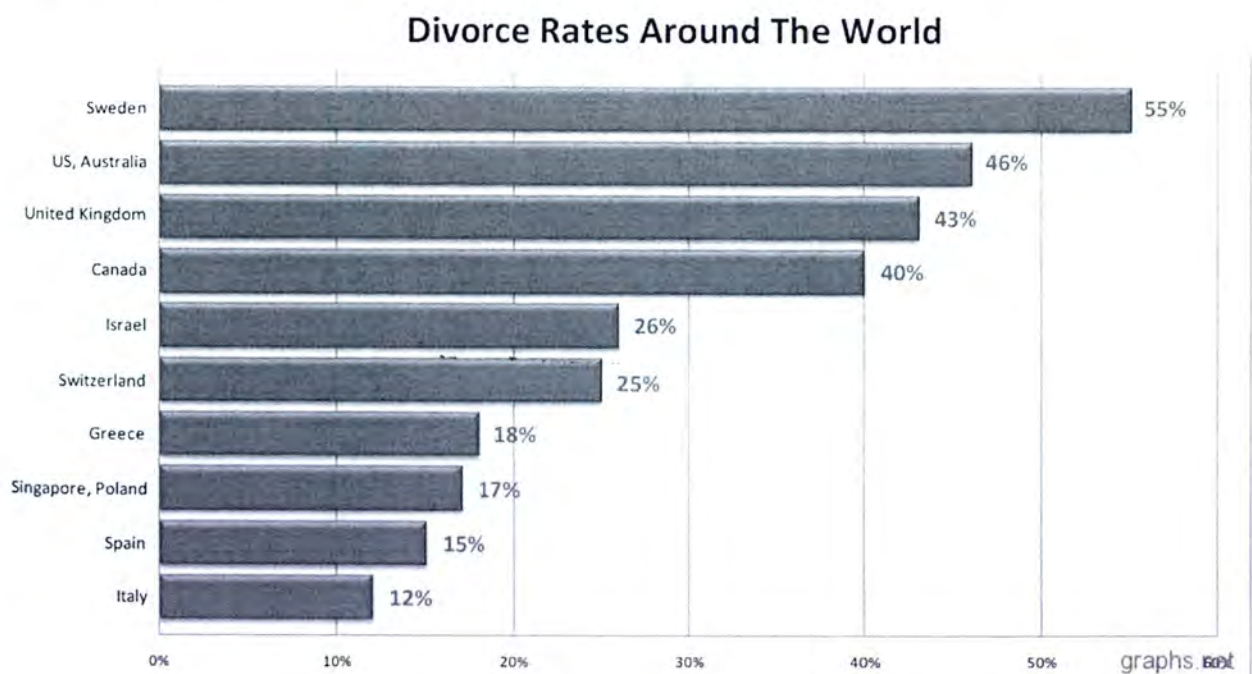
The global increase of divorce has raised an alarm in western societies (Lotter, 2010) and is regarded as a major concern in society. According to Ottaway (2010), United States families have been experiencing rapid increase in broken marriages that end up in divorce over the past three decades. On the other hand, Carroll (2005) stated that in the United States, the most dramatic change that is shaping the contemporary family life is divorce while Chen and George (2005) see divorce as an inescapable fact of life in the United States. More to this fact, a lot of Americans are marrying to divorce within a few years of their marriage and one out of two marriages in the United states ends in divorce, leading to almost half of the children worldwide spending their adolescent life without both parents present (Denton, 2012). The rise of marriage dissolution has resulted in the ostensibly traumatic post-divorce lifestyle for the parents and their children.

Although Stambaugh, Hector and Carr (2011), stated that the United States divorce rate has declined modestly and that 41% of marriages still end up in divorce, the National centre for health statistics, 1997, in America indicated about 1,150,000 divorces and annulments in the United States, involving over 1,000,000 children. According to the Forest Institute of Professional Psychology, 50% of first marriages, 67% of second marriages and 74% of third marriages in the United States ended in divorce in 2010 (Emery, Beam, & Rowen, 2011). While the situation continues to grow in the United States, there is a question about what the experiences of the phenomena are in other places globally and what the affected children go through since it has been discovered that over 50% of marriages end in divorce globally (Cameron, 2008).

The graph below compiled by graphs.net/zo201206/divorce-rates.html, September 2012, shows the divorce rates around the world, basically in the western countries.

Graph 1

The divorce rates around the world



Adopted from Divorce Fact Sheet 2012

According to the Divorce Fact Sheet (2012), the first five continents with the highest divorce cases are Sweden, with the highest percentage of 55% compared to all other countries. United States and Australia come next with 46%, United Kingdom 43% and Canada 40%. In addition, United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, New Zealand and the United Kingdom are regarded as the common places of divorce. The annual number of divorces in Canada is 71,000 and about 43% of marriages do not reach their 50th anniversary. Although not in the list, India which once had the lowest divorce rate of 1.1% in 2006 has shown a rise in divorce rates recently (Divorce Fact Sheet, 2012).

Divorce increases the psychological and behavioural problems in children and the parents and leads to pressure on society at large (Kelly & Emery 2003). It is clear that the pressure of divorce does not only affect the concerned people around it, that is the couple and the children, if it is a global situation like it shows on the graph above, then the whole world is challenged.

Some studies have also revealed that children from divorced families have more difficulty with a number of psychosocial dimensions than children who have not experienced parental divorce (Knab, Brokaw, Reimer, & Welsh, 2009; Chen & George, 2005) facing all the post-divorce effects. Many current studies have realised that divorce is just one step in a series of family changes, and life in a single-parent family and possible further marital transitions following divorce, impacts on children's adjustment. As families negotiate this transition, risks and protective factors rise and children's families and life situations change during and following the divorce (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

If both parents neglect the responsibility of handling their divorce with sensitivity, awareness and cooperation, the consequences of their neglectful or reckless actions at the end of their divorce may have a severe negative impact on their children (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

However, it has been noted that the implications varied with individuals, family, and extra familial risk. Protective factors that undermine or promote the well-being of children are associated with diverse developmental course of children's vulnerability or resilience in coping with divorce (Knab et al., 2009). While some families are stressed, some research have identified that in some cases, the divorce is for the best, families still exist thereafter and children leave harmoniously with the separated parents. Unfortunately those cases are often in the minority (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

3.2.2 Divorce studies in South Africa

While divorce takes its worst route in the world, South Africa is not an exception as contemporary research revealed that parental divorce has been a reality for every one of six children in South Africa in the recent years (Lotter, 2010). South Africans are experiencing an exceptionally high divorce rate; the stressful nature of this parental separation and divorce results in a higher susceptibility of children experiencing psychological, social, academic, and health problems. Until recently, little consideration has been given to how divorce affects black South African families. It has been considered mainly a middle-class and white families problem until 2008 when the black population started to reveal some rising rates of 35% of all the divorce cases in South Africa (Lotter, 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2009).

In the interim, Lotter (2010) suggests that while much has changed in terms of what constitutes marriage in many black South African communities, a major difference that still exists is that western marriage is based on individualism and independence while marriage in most black cultures is still based on the principle of collectivism and interdependence. Yet, in spite of these fundamental differences, black South African families continue to be uncritically compared to the western nuclear family whereby divorce is the choice of the couple and the extended family is not considered significant within any decision taken.

Further indication of the high rate of divorce in South Africa has also been reported by Prince (2009) asserting that seven million children are growing up with single mothers outnumbering the 6.2 million- about 34% of the country's children – who live with both parents.

Whatever the cause, divorce has remained part of the South African society and all that is to be done is to learn to cope with its effects. In South Africa, people tend to move like a pendulum from one extreme to the other (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). When divorce laws were first liberalized, it was thought that children would be upset for a short while and then resume life as usual but the pendulum has swung over to the other side and parents are told that all children from divorced families will be profoundly damaged (Collins, 2003; Mogoane, 2010).

According to South African Law Commission (2002), divorce is invariably traumatic for all concerned, but has been a major effect for the children of such a marriage. The high divorce rate and the breaking up of other relationships of the family members mean that more children are experiencing rearrangements in their households. Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) indicate that divorce is a deeply painful experience for children. They endure depression, greater learning difficulties, aggression towards parents and teachers and are two to three times more likely to be referred for psychological help at school than their peers from intact families.

Lotter (2010) emphasizes that while divorce impacts all members of the family in some way, children are often the least responsible for the parting of their parents, but are influenced by it the most. Research has shown that painful psychological experiences are revealed in the accounts of young children who have lived through the divorce of their parents. The South African culture is generalized under a collectivist kind of culture and therefore divorce

concerns the role of the extended family. As suggested by Takyi (2003), according to the South African black culture, marriage includes both parents and marriages are considered a cultural practice of kinship by which two families of blood lines are united. Most notably, the “in-laws” are formally or informally implicated in the decision to get divorced and it is not supposed to be a matter to be decided by the two individuals constituting the married couple (Russells, 2003).

3.3 PARENTAL DIVORCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING OF ADOLESCENTS

3.3.1 Before parental divorce

3.3.1.1 Conflicts between parents

Some literature have shown that before divorce of two people in marriage there are certain behaviours that may be displayed that may psychologically affect the children involved. Among others, conflicts between parents have been regarded the most leading stressful and depressing experiences to adolescents (Collins, 2003).

Social science literature has come to a consensus that inter-parental conflict is a major stressor and a prominent risk factor for children experiencing familial transition and divorce (Taylor, Purswell, Lindo, Jayne & Fernando, 2011; McIntyre et al., 2003; O’Connor, Plomin, Caspi & DeFries, 2000; Chen & George, 2005; Rushena et al., 2005). Some couples terminate their marital relationships as a result of persistent conflict but fail to terminate their conflicting pattern after their divorce and expose it to their affected children. Some children who happen to have been exposed to the tension and anger of parental conflict and even verbal or physical violence before divorce are likely to demonstrate adjustment problems later in life. Although conflicts are diminished on account of the divorce itself, some families

continue the conflicting interaction in financial negotiation, co-parenting responsibility, and visitations which prolong the pains, anger and trauma caused by the divorce on the children.

More research has emphasized parental conflict as the major reason of emotional impact of the after effects of divorce on children. Kelly and Emery (2003) further assert that, Children from divorced families have widely varying histories of exposure to marital conflict and violence. Although it is often assumed that parents in high-conflict marriages continue their conflict after separation and divorce, pre-divorce conflict is a predictor of the amount of post-divorce conflict. Although the association between intense marital conflict and children's poor adjustment has been repeatedly demonstrated, findings from studies of the impact of post-divorce conflict and children's adjustment have been mixed, Booth and Amato (2001), reported no association between post-divorce conflict and later adjustment in young adults after divorce life.

Secondly, Stambaugh, Hector and Carr (2011) have found out that post-divorce conflict has more adverse effects did conflict in the married families. On the other hand, some early researchers (Cartwright, 2006; Stambaugh, Hector & Carr, 2011) have seen it with a third point of view that, marital conflict is rather a more effective predictor of post-divorce adjustment than a post-divorce conflict. The varied findings may reflect the use of different measures of conflict and adjustment, a failure to differentiate between types of conflict after divorce, parental styles of conflict resolution, and the extent of direct exposure of the child to anger and conflict.

One may look at how high marital and post conflicts may destruct the child' life after divorce and some research have answered the question. High conflict is more likely to be a destructive post-divorce aspect when parents use their children to express their anger and are verbally and physically aggressive on the phone or in person (Booth & Amato, 2001; Yu et

al., 2010). That is, some parents may involve the children by sending or telling them how bad the other spouse is. Expressing their rage toward their former spouse by asking children to carry hostile messages, denigrating the other parent in front of the child, or prohibiting mention of the other parent in their presence create intolerable stress and loyalty conflicts in their children. Not surprisingly, such youngsters become more depressed and anxious when compared with high-conflict parents who left their children out of their angry exchanges (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Some studies reflected that, when parents continued to have conflict but encapsulated their conflict and did not put their children in the middle, their children did not differ from children whose parents had low or no conflict (Yu et al., 2010).

Conflict may be considered a more stressful situation in the children's lives as research indicates that mothers in high-conflict marriages are reported to be less warm, more rejecting, and are fond of using harsher discipline, and thereafter, fathers withdraw more from and engage in more intrusive interactions with their children compared with parents in low-conflict marriages (McCartney, Owen, Booth, Clarke-Stewart, & Vandell, 2004). Further, living with a depressed, disturbed, or character-disordered parent after divorce clearly places the children at risk. The children end up showing impaired emotional, social, and academic adjustment (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

3.3.2 During the process

Lack of communication by the parents during the divorce process has been shown to be the leading factor that stresses, confuses and depresses the children involved and identified as a precipitating factor. Communication is the major key to make the child understand what is going on and the intentions to be taken by the parents yet it is the most aspect that parents fail to do in the mist of the divorce (Taylor et al., 2011). Kelly and Emery (2003) assert that, the complicating children's attempt to coping with the major changes of separation is an

inadequate information by their parents about the separation and divorce. Most children are left to struggle alone with the meaning of the arguments, fights and the whole event, which may end up leading to a sense of isolation and cognitive and emotional confusion (Dunn, Davies, O'Connor, & Sturgess, 2001; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Smart & Neale, 2000).

The majority of parents fail to communicate their thoughts with each other regarding the effective custody and access arrangements for their children (Taylor et al., 2011), hence, less able or less willing to communicate with their children since they have unclear resolutions about the changes in the family structure. According to Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) in their study of parent-child communications about divorce, 23% of children said none of their parents communicated with them about what was happening and what they should expect, and 45% said they had been given an abrupt one or two line explanations like, "Your dad is leaving". Only 5% said that they had been fully informed and encouraged to ask questions (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Lack of parental communication about the divorce may leave the child empty, full of fear, anger and uncertain of what to do and how to behave, hence the accumulation of stress.

3.3.3 After the divorce

Divorce is ranked second after death, in regard to the level of stress it generates in people's rounded wellbeing. As life changes for the couple and their children during and after divorce, it is normal for them to experience a significant sense of grief (McCartney et al., 2004). On the one hand, some studies have found out that while the whole family goes through a transition of one kind at the same time, many changes are encountered by the child and hence likely that the children's feelings about the divorce may differ from those of the parents (Bojuwoye & Akpan 2009; McLanahan, 2008). Divorce has been seen to be interrupting the psychological functioning of the adolescents and reflecting the following: emotional

disturbances, stress experiences, loss of one parent and change of places, financial status, confusion and anger as well as physical problems (McLanahan, 2008).

3.3.3.1 The emotional disturbances

Since divorce rates are higher on remarriages than on first marriages, many children involved are exposed to a series of changes in their family's relationships and roles. Children who are exposed to multiple marital transitions experience the most adverse consequences in adjustment (Denton, 2012). Most are featured as externalizing symptoms, including conduct disorders, antisocial behaviours, and problems with authority figures and parents. Less vigorous differences are found with respect to depression, anxiety, and self-esteem (McLanahan, 2008).

Denton (2012) goes on to emphasize that, in spite of situation, most of the children experience problems in the months immediately following parental divorce, as family roles, relationships, and circumstances change, children are often depressed, anxious, angry, demanding, noncompliant, displaying an anti-social behaviour and experiencing a drop in their school performance. These concerns of the effects of divorce on children have been mostly acknowledged by educators, mental health workers, and family theorists who believe that these experiences have strong and enduring detrimental effects on the development of children and on the society at large (Bojuwoye & Akpan 2009), leading to stress experiences among the affected children and adolescents.

3.3.3.2 Stress experiences

According to Amato and Cheadle (2005), children with divorced parents tend to have modestly lower levels of cognitive, social and emotional well-being than those whose parents who stay together. Children who experience parental divorce before the age of sixteen tend to

have emotional and educational problems, to initiate sexual activity early, and to be at risk of stress and depression and suicidal thoughts (D'Onofrio et al., 2006). The fundamental aspects that may be associated with children's reactions to parental divorce may include, relationship with parents before and after divorce, continual open conflict between spouses and the degree to which the child was drawn into the conflicts, the parents' inability or ability to separate their roles as parent, relocations and the perceived loss of the then non-custodial parent, age, gender and socio-economic status, leading to some stressful situation on the adolescent life (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Ottaway, 2010).

3.3.3.3 Loss of one parent and change of places

Moving after divorce is a common and obligatory action that may interfere substantially with the contacts and relationships between children and their non-moving parents (Braver, Ellman; & Fabricius, 2003; Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Kelly & Emery, 2003) leading to a stressful and confused life on the children. According to Cameron (2008), in the aftermath of a divorce, one of the more unfortunate outcomes is that one of the parents may become absent from the child's life. A child who suddenly goes from having two parents to one parent will almost certainly feel the missing parent's absence intensely, not because single parenting is a problem, but especially because the transition may have been abrupt or lacking an explanation from one or both parents (McLanahan, 2008).

In some instances, the child may feel discarded, disowned, unloved, or come to believe that they have done something wrong to cause the other parent to go away. One parent's absence in the life of a child may affect the child not only through the direct factor of their absence, but also through a lack of fiscal support (Mogoane, 2010). One of the biggest fears for children is change and with divorce, changes occur in many household responsibilities and fear of abandonment that if they have lost one parent, they may lose the other as well (Grube

& Golabella, 2008). They may blame themselves, feel unlovable, or not feel safe. The children in most cases worry about who will take care of them and pick them up from schooling in case they happen to lose both parents (Denton, 2012).

A prominent instance of missing the other parent in their lives and wishing the parents could be there is when the children continue to consider both of their parents as part of their family, even following the parents' separation or divorce. This happens when the children are asked to draw a picture of their family; they include both of their parents even if their parents have long been divorced (Chen & George, 2005).

If the interests of the entire family, which includes the parents, other children, extended family members, and, sometimes, other parties who may have significant relationships with the children are ignored or attachment lost, there may be negative consequences for all members of the family system (Lamb, Sternberg, & Thompson, 1997; McLanahan, 2008). In addition, there is a significant reduction in the time children spend with their non-resident parents due to a number of psychological, inter-parental, and institutional barriers. Many fathers reduce their involvement or cease contact with their children following divorce because of their own personality limitations and conflicts (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Relocation is also a stressful change on its own, that is, moving to stay in a new location, a new environment, new neighbourhood, new friends, new school, and all these new and permanent changes in a short time may lead to stress and an emotional impact (Lansford, 2009). According to Denton (2012), the first thing that the child experiences due to the relocation, is the family they have always known is now different, short of one or more people. Children may have to adjust to new schedules, new homework, mealtime, and bedtime routines. They may no longer have contact with some friends and extended family members such as grandparents or cousins and mostly one of the parents.

Changes in how much contact occurs with any of these can cause some distress. Having a different bedroom and being away from familiar possessions also may create stress on the children. Secondly, the two people upon whom the child is dependent are no longer equally accessible to the child and the foundation of the child's world is splintered (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

These conditions maximize the potential for the child strong development due to loosing positive relationships with both parents as well as their involvement in the child's school activities and for frequent and regular contact with the non-residential parent (Yu et al., 2010). The loss of these important relationships may also lead to the children facing the risk of long term or permanent erosion or loss of the discussed important relationships. the loss of one parent may lead to a diminished view of the non-custodial parent's importance in their lives of many children going through divorce, and an erosion on closeness leading to meaningless parent-child relationships (Riggio, 2004; Yu et al., 2010; Kelly & Lamb, 2000).

3.3.3.4 Financial status

In one study, Cartwright (2006) stated that, it was realized that the poor financial status of the custodial parent did not only affect the children, it led to effects of other family dynamics on post-divorce adjustment of the children. Poor financial status of custodial parents was found to have greatly influenced how children experience the sad feelings of parental divorce and how they perceived the role of their absent parent (in most cases the father). Poor financial status greatly affects the normality of the children's daily routine and life stability, their social relationship with their peers and efforts to plan as well as building towards the future (Chen, 2008).

3.3.3.5 Confusion, Anger

After all the experiences and changes of the after effects of divorce, adolescents may feel alienated from their peers or stigmatized by the loss of a two-parent household leading to feelings of confusion and anger (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Those that are especially from a contentious divorce may later become disobedient, violent, or arrogant at home or in school, they may show a marked or sudden decline in academic performance, become immoral, or choose to abuse illegal substances (Cameron, 2008).

According to Hartman et al., (2011), these children going through anger may behave badly, test limits or intentionally break rules. Hartman et al., (2011) continue to state that the drastic change of life in the children following their parents' divorce may end up overwhelming for children. Due to the situation, they may be reluctant to acknowledge the divorce or separation as real and their refusal to acceptance to the reality may later manifest itself as shock or disbelief.

3.4 FACTORS THAT PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING

3.4.1 Age

Age is another important factor found to influence how children perceive and react to parental divorce. Zeratsion et al., (2013) stated that young adolescents of divorced parents have revealed higher mental distress with internalized symptoms like depression and anxiety beyond that observed in with the elder ones. In agreement with the above authors, Regional Psychosocial Support Initiatives, REPSSI (2007) reports that some cultures may not recognize or expect young children to grieve the loss (through divorce or death) of loved

ones. However, Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) agreed that divorce is painful both to parents and children irrespective of the latter's ages. Lotter (2010) further emphasizes that age and developmental stage may lead to adjustment or non-adjustment to children's parental divorce and separation.

The age of an individual in time of their parental divorce contributes more to their emotional affection in their later life (Gruber & Colabella, 2008; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004). In one study, it was found that the younger the individual is at the time of the divorce, the more problems that person will have with future intimate relationships and behaviour (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). This problematic behaviour may be attributed to by the child's inability to understand and deal with the divorce of his or her parents at a young age (Ottaway, 2010).

Younger children are more likely to experience a lack of social support outside of the family that may help them through the difficult process of divorce; thus, they will have more difficulty dealing with it and carry the pain along with them into their adolescent stage (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). In support of this finding, Hetherington and Kelly (2002) also indicate that, younger children suffer more severe long-term effects of divorce due to the ignorance of their parents and to the fact that they are still young and cannot understand anything.

In contrast, based on a ten year follow-up study investigating children from divorced families, Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009), found that younger children suffer less long-term trauma associated with divorce because they remember less of the divorce. However, some additional research points out to individuals' developmental stage at the time of divorce and how that relates to the way they react towards the experience.

Besides, it has been realized in some studies that the adolescent stage may trigger the problems that the children had or trigger the memories in the life of children who have been

previously functioning very well. Even for those children who experience limited problems initially or who appear to have coped earlier with their parents' marital dissolution, problems can emerge later in life as they confront new challenges and development tasks. Some of these childhood problems are sustained into adolescence (Christensen & Brooks, 2001).

If children experience their parental divorce during their preadolescent and adolescent stages, they may not exhibit more problems or be much affected as they will be in close alignment with their peers who will indirectly help them repress feelings associated with parents' divorce (Amato, 2001). Afifi, Afifi and Coho (2009) on the other hand note that because of their cognitive maturity, adolescents perceive divorce as parents' own problems more than younger children. The usual general reaction of adolescents to parental divorce is to consider institution of marriage as distrustful and unreliable.

On the contrary, Ottaway (2010) argues that developmentally, adolescents have a tendency of somewhat being sceptical about the world, and when their parents divorce during that age, the sad feelings may intensify which may often make them rush into intimate relationships. Adolescents are exposed to more adult information than younger children and should not be used as confidants or overburdened with intimate details of the divorce in case they are caught in the middle between their parents' arguments.

In a study by Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009), adolescents whose parents divorced about a year or two prior to the time of the study's interview, gave graphic details of their experiences including sobbing bitterly and feeling very sad as they watched their parents fighting one another and as one of them (in most cases fathers) later left in anger and did not return thereafter.

3.4.2 Gender Difference

Studies have shown that young adolescents of divorced parents had higher mental distress the same way in both males and females. They went on to state that in one study, Dutch girls reported more mental distress symptoms after parental divorce than boys while one American study found the opposite result and other studies have found a similar association among boys and girls (Zeratsion et al., 2013).

Størksen, Røysamb, Holmen and Tambs (2006) found that girls, to a larger extent, reported enduring symptoms of anxiety and depression in association with parental divorce than do boys. Størksen, Røysamb, Holmen and Tambs continue by stating that, despite the fact that there would be some gender differences with the effects, some studies demonstrated that by two years after divorce there were no differences as both boys and girls from divorced families exhibited psychological problems in the same way.

Some studies have also revealed that problems often found immediately after or during marital conflicts and subsequent divorce tend to be more pronounced in boys than girls. Girls tend to internalize problems emanating from divorce while boys tend to externalize them. Boys tend to exhibit more problems later in life than girls. Boys from divorced parents have higher dropout rate from school than girls in the same situation (Brown & Wright, 2003; Gruber & Colabella, 2008).

One reason given for social adjustment differences between boys and girls is that girls are probably more socially skilled than boys, which makes girls to be less susceptible to any disruptive effects of parental divorce (Adolescent Psychiatry, 2007). Even though there may be some increased aggressiveness of boys from divorce families that makes their social relationships problematic, it cannot be ruled out that all boys suffer more damaging consequences of divorce than girls (Gruber & Colabella, 2008).

Chen (2008) emphasizes that fathers are perceived differently by both boys and girls in terms of attitudes they depict. In this case, this may lead to the gender differences in the perceptions of fathers in the family. Fathers are known to build and influence boys' gender role behaviour and development. That is, boys learn from their fathers about male interests, activities, social behaviour and their growth. Furthermore, Kalmijn (2007) conveys the fact that boys are affected the most if the custodian parent is of the opposite sex. It has been clear from the literature that gender may play a very slight role in the stress caused by divorce on children since some studies reflect girls being more affected than boys while some have shown boys being the most affected.

3.4.3 Coping strategies

Although divorce can be seen as a stressful phenomenon for most children, the harmful effects often decrease within two to six years if children have "protective factors" that assist their adjustment but prolonged in the absence of such factors. The Literature (Majzub & Mansor, 2012) has shown that some children may be able to adjust and adapt very well after their parental divorce as a result of the factors and circumstances around them; these factors may be gender, age, socialisation and good relationships with peers and parents; the adolescent's parent's disclosure of the issue of divorce in a positive way makes the adolescence understand (Afifi & McManus, 2010). Other factors are spiritual relationships and support (Regnerus, 2003), psychological support (Riggio, 2004), while some will heal up with time (Chen & George, 2005). Additionally, Majzub and Mansor (2012) emphasize that, according to the Gestalt Homeostasis theory by Woldt (1984), the adolescents either interact positively during and after parental divorce and build relationships following the divorce and achieve homeostasis or, the adolescents may react negatively in a resistance cycle due to the circumstances surrounding them. Majzub and Mansor (2012) also state that their study reveal

that a good attitude after parental divorce reveals encouraging results in terms of maturity, confidence as well as positivity in life.

3.5 SUMMARY

In conclusion, , although some researchers may see divorce as a traumatic experience to children, some, on the contrary, state that not all children react the same way to their parents' divorce, that each child' reaction depends on what goes on around them and/or the different personal or familial circumstances before or after the divorce (Amato, 2003; Chen, 2008). They further state that while some children react with anger, fear or tremendous grief, others are happy that finally, the conflicts will be over. Some children experience shame and hide the news of their parents' divorce from their friends or pretend it's not happening while some may react by feeling relieved especially if there has been intense fighting in their homes.

Children's reactions to divorce may vary, depending on the following situations: the situation and communication before the divorce or separation; the amount of involvement with the non-residential parent; the residential parent's ease in adjusting to the divorce; parenting skills of both parents; agreement on child rearing and discipline; approval and love from both parents; openness to discussing the divorce with parents; degree of conflict between parents; economic status the child care as well as other added stressors including relocating, changing school and parental remarriage (Lachs, 2002). According to research (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Clandos & Kemp, 2007; Zieman & Baker-Randall, 2000), the overall perception is, children's reactions to parental divorce depend on each child' personal factors and that even children of the same family going through the same situation may react differently to their parental divorce.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the research methodology section is to provide the reader with information on how the study was conducted. This chapter includes the following: the research method, study design, sampling, research context and participants, procedure and data gathering, data Collection, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations undertaken.

4.2 RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher used the qualitative method to explore and describe the role of parental divorce in the psychological functioning of adolescents in Mafikeng (Mmabatho) area in the North West Province of South Africa. The aim for choosing the qualitative research approach was to capture the emotional life experienced by the participants through its ability to draw out the participants' meaning, experience, or perceptions. It involves identifying the participants' beliefs and values that underlie the subject being studied (Fouche & Delpont, 2011; Nestor & Schutt, 2012).

4.2.1 Design

The researcher made use of the phenomenological design in this study. According to Larkin and Thompson (2012), meaning should be conceptualized "at the level of the person in context" as the experience holds significance for that participant. This study therefore involved exploring and describing the participants' emotional experiences of parental divorce from their unique perception. The phenomenological design is used by qualitative researchers as they are interested in the descriptive meaning participants give to their experiences and

therefore, need to obtain a familiarity with this small number of people to identify patterns in the participants' lives, words and actions in the context of the case as a whole (Fouché & Delport, 2002).

4.2.2 Sampling

For the purpose of this study, the researcher made use of purposive sampling. Babbie (2010) states that purposive sampling allows the researcher to select units that form part of the sample based on the researcher's judgement of which units will be most useful or representative. In this study, the sample consisted of adolescents who experienced the parental divorce. Kelly (2006) asserts that the selection of participants is based on the discretion of the researcher as to which subjects best fit the research questions.

The researcher followed these criteria for the inclusion of participants in this study:

- Adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18 years, who are currently living with one parent who is the custodian.
- The parental divorce must have occurred between 5 to 10 years ago.
- Participants had to be speaking Sotho-Tswana, Zulu- Xhosa, or English.
- Voluntary participation was encouraged as a prerequisite.

4.2.3 Research Context and Participants

In phenomenological research, the number of participants can range between five and twenty five (Creswell, 2008). This research study was conducted in Mafikeng (Mmabatho) suburban of North West Province in South Africa. Mmabatho is a suburban area and the families that reside in this area tend to be of the middle class consisting of Sotho-Tswana, Xhosa-Zulu, Afrikaans and English speaking population. The number of participants was 14 adolescents, however, only 13 participants from divorced families, 6 males and 7 females were used in

this study. The researcher disregarded one of the participants' interviews as the participant indicated that the divorce of the parents took place the previous year therefore did not meet the criteria of the study. The average age at the time of divorce was 9 years old while the average maximum time since divorce was 10 years. All participants were eloquent in English language; therefore, there was no need of an interpreter.

4.2.4 Procedure and Data Gathering

Ethical letter for permission to conduct the research was obtained from the university. The researcher selected one church per unit in Mmabatho and presented the purpose and objectives of the research to each church leader. Based on the problem statement in chapter 1, the researcher deemed it appropriate to gather data from the religious population as it is indicated to have high rate of divorce (Statistics South Africa, 2010). Parents were provided with the letter of consent for their children to take part in the interviews (See Appendix C). The Criterion for the selection of participants was their age ranging between 15 and 18 years and that a period of at least 5-10 years should have lapsed after the divorce of their parents. Each participant was interviewed individually to ensure confidentiality.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION

4.3.1 In-depth interviews

An in-depth interview on lived experiences of parental divorce by adolescents that took 45-60 minutes to complete was conducted in this study. This phenomenological in-depth interview was used to gain insight through exploring the depth, richness of experiences such as of adolescents from the divorced families (Fouché & Delport, 2002). This approach was appropriate for exploring and describing the role of parental divorce in the psychological

functioning of adolescents so that the findings could be used effectively to develop support guidelines.

The interviews were audio recorded with each participant's consent as well as parent's consent as recommended by researchers (Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2012; Greeff, 2011; Kelly, 2006). The tape recorder allows a fuller record than notes taken during the interview (De Vos, Strydom, H., Fouche & Delport, 2006). However, some participants were not comfortable to be audio recorded and, therefore, asked to participate by responding through written expression. The central question was: *What did you experience before, during and after your parents' divorce?* The following were the follow up and guiding questions that helped the researcher focus on the data needed: a) *What does it mean for you to lose a parent through divorce?* b) *What are the feelings that you were experiencing before, during and after the process of their divorce?* c) *How has their divorce impacted on your day to day functioning?* d) *What coping strategies have you adopted to deal with the divorce of your parents?* All the interview questions are presented in the Appendix 107. The participants were interviewed individually, face to face, at the researcher's office as suggested by Cozby (2007). Evans and Rooney (2011) assert that the advantage of a face-to-face interview is that the researcher can gather information directly from the people in which the researcher is interested and that complex issues can be explored.

4.3.2 Field notes

Polit and Beck (2010) state that field notes are taken by the researcher to document the unstructured observations made in the field, and interpretation of those observations. As suggested by De Vos et al.. (2006), the field notes were immediately jotted down after each interview and they were descriptive accounts which the researcher objectively recorded about

all the proceedings of the interview. The field notes were taken to help the researcher to remember and explore the process of the interviews. These were the critical points were followed; they include empirical (observation) and the researcher's interpretation, emotions, perceptions and prejudices. They assisted the researcher to turn them into the final product. The data was stored securely in a lockable cabinet in the researcher's office as well as on the researcher's personal computer protected by password, only known to the researcher, as suggested by Greeff (2011).

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was used as it was vital to the researcher to capture the participants' accounts of how parental divorce emotionally impacted on them during and after their divorce. A number of software programmes are available to automate the labelling and grouping of texts and are especially useful in the analysis of numerous transcripts (Anderson, 2004). The interviews recorded on audio-tapes were transcribed verbatim. In this study, data was analysed manually.

The researcher also followed the recommendation of Burns and Grove (2005) who state that the researcher has to engage with the text in a process of interpretation to capture meanings related to the participants' world. In order for the researcher to get a 'feel' of the interview, the researcher must begin by reading and re-reading an individual transcript (Storey, 2007). The researcher read and re-read each transcript and made notes of information considered important for the purpose of this study.

The researcher furthermore made comments about similarities, differences, amplifications and contradictions about what a specific participant was saying. The transformation of initial notes into themes was continued throughout the whole transcript, and a theme title was indicated when repletion of themes occurred, as suggested by Smith (2008). This process is

known as 'coding' and it means that the data is divided into labelled, meaningful pieces, with a view to later cluster the relevant coded material under coded headings. The researcher also attempted to look for divergence and convergence as was recommended by Smith and Osborn (2008) when analysing the transcripts. The aim of the coding was to identify what was thought to be the most important themes in the transcripts.

The researcher must list themes on sheets of paper and look for connections between them. During this phase of listing of themes some of the themes were clustered together and some emerged as subthemes. Some of themes were discarded if they did not have a strong evidence base. In this regard, the researcher continuously ensured that the relevant themes corresponded with the actual words that were used by participants.

Tables were produced from the analysis of the individual transcripts in the study. The tables elicited each theme with its subordinated subthemes which carried the conceptual meaning within, as suggested by Smith and Eatough (2007). The researcher attempted to expand the analysis by explaining, illustrating and enhancing the relevant themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). The researcher therefore, discussed each theme and sub theme using illustrations from participants' accounts, and linking these to the relevant literature.

In agreement with this viewpoint, Cresswell (2009) states that themes represent the major findings of a study and, accordingly, themes and subthemes were used by the researcher to create headings in the findings section.

4.5 TRUSWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Crystallization reflects reality from different angles (Ellingson, 2008). Crystallization also provides researchers with a deeper understanding of studied phenomena. The in-depth interviews as well as field notes in a single study demonstrated crystallization and added

vigour, breadth and depth to the study (Maree, 2010). The findings were constructed as themes and patterns to enable the researcher to interpret the participants' accounts on multiple levels and thus reveal multiple ways of understanding the research topic, making crystallization an appropriate strategy to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings (Ellingson, 2008).

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE STUDY

According to Cresswell (2009), the researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants. The participants' rights to privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, fair treatment, as well as protection from discomfort and harm were observed through the study. The researcher ensured that the participants understood the aim of the study, what would happen in the research process and that participation was voluntary. Therefore, the researcher developed a consent form (refer to Appendix B), based on the suggestions of guidelines for informed consent (Strydom, 2011)

A letter of permission to do interviews from the university as well as a consent letter was discussed with the parents prior to the interview (refer to Appendix C). The consent document was signed by the parents in agreement of the ethical code of the study and as consent for their children to take part in the study. The research was conducted with children and therefore the researcher attempted to ensure their safety and well-being as suggested by Evans and Rooney (2011). The researcher further explained that participation in this study was voluntary; the research questions were posed in a manner that honoured the participants' well-being.

According to Thompson and Chambers (2012), participation may be discontinued at any time without the provision of a reason. Therefore, the researcher explained that participants could choose to withdraw at any time of the interview should they feel discomfort. Intervention for

participants who may experience emotional problems during the interviews was made available. The researcher also verified that no payment would take place in exchange for participation in the study.

Privacy was insured by interviewing participants in the researcher's office, and audio tapes were kept safe and locked in the researcher's filing cabinet in the office. Anonymity and confidentiality as indicated in Strydom (2011), implying that all information is handled in confidential manner was ensured by the researcher in keeping the participants' names anonymous and confidential that is, not divulging them to anybody. The principles of human dignity (Ubuntu), were observed in order to obtain co-operation from the participants and all other parties who are involved in this study.

Nestor and Schutt (2012) suggested that debriefing at the end of research interviews is essential. The researcher evaluated participants' personal reactions regarding their interview to check the possibility of re-traumatisation and the need for psychological intervention. The researcher allowed participants some time to reflect on the interview and discussed their experiences of taking part in the study, this was done at the end of each interview.

4. 7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher attempted to expand on the research procedures followed in this qualitative study. The main focus was based on data collection, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness of the study as well as on the ethical consideration of the study.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter starts with a brief overview containing the sample, location, gender, racial grouping and the average range of age during the time of parental divorce experienced by adolescents. Background information of each participant is provided as well. The three themes and their sub-themes are tabulated separately.

5.2 BACKGROUND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Individual interviews were conducted with 13 adolescents from divorced families around Mahikeng, 6 males and 7 females. The adolescents were from two race groups which are 6 coloureds and 7 blacks; 2 Zulu speaking and 5 Tswana speaking. The adolescents' age ranged from 15 to 19, categorizing them under late adolescent stage. The average age at the time of divorce was 9 years old while the average maximum time since divorce was 10 years. Seven participants were still attending school and 6 participants were not in school; 2 participants from the 6 were not in school, 2 dropped out due to their parental divorce; 5 participants from those who were in school had repeated grades at least twice due to the divorce during the time of interview.

5.3 BACKGROUND ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS

Brief background information of participant 1

Participant 1 is a coloured male aged 17 years and does not have any siblings. He was not schooling since he dropped out at grade 12. His parents divorced when he was 7 years old, 10

years back. None of his parents told him about the divorce, he found out by himself through a mail that was posted to his mother which he opened out of curiosity.

Brief background information of participant 2

Participant 2 is an 18 years old coloured female currently in grade 12. She has 14 half brothers and sisters from different mothers but has no sibling from her biological mother. The participant found out about her parents' divorce 7 years later in 2010 at the age of 14 while the divorce had taken place in 2003 when he was 7 years old. According to her; "L... [Little pause] *I didn't find out from them, I was looking for my school papers in... in... in... [difficulty in speaking] in a cupboard and I was struck by some papers when I went through them I found out that it was the divorce papers of my mom and dad.*"

Brief background information of participant 3

Participant 3 is a 17 years old male and he is from the black race. His parents divorced 6 years back when he was 11 years old. "*I was still young at the time and had no clue to what was happening during the divorce but after the divorce for two years I kept on asking myself why we had moved out at my father's house and moved where my uncle used to live before he died, that's when I was to know to that my parents had divorced I was 9 years old by that time.*"

Brief background information of participant 4

Participant 4 is a 17 year old coloured female with half-brothers and half-sisters. She was not told about the divorce, "*I found it by accident when I was looking for my school papers, I saw papers that took all my attention and when I went through them I found out the truth.*"

Brief background information of participant 5

Participant 5 is an 18 year old black female with 3 siblings. Her parents divorced when she was 9 years of age, 10 years back "*One Saturday I was bored at home, I love reading so I had read all the books in our house, I started reading random papers in our book shelve and I came across my parent's decree of divorce. I was in shock; I locked myself in my room that day and cried all a night. I hated my mother for not telling me.*"

Brief background information of participant 6

An 18 year old male, black. Parents have been divorced for 10 years. The divorce took place when he was only 8 years of age. Does not state how he came to know about the divorce.

Brief background information of participant 7

Participant 7 is a female of 15 years of age and is black. Her parents divorced 6 years back when she was 9 years old. She was told by her mother, "*My mother told me and it was just fine because by then I was very young and did not understand.*"

Brief background information of participant 8

Participant 8 is a female, black and 18 years of age. She has completed grade 12 and has a brother. Her parents divorced when she was 12 years old, the same year of the divorce. She was never told about the divorce, "*only found out when my father moved out of the house...* That was when I realise that there is something wrong.

Brief background information of participant 9

Participant 9 is an 18 year old female and black with 3 siblings, she was not told as well about the divorce. She does not accurately remember her age at which her parents divorced, she believes she was between 9-10 years old.

Brief background information of participant 10

Participant 10 is 17 years old, female and black, has 2 siblings. Her parents divorced when she was at the age of 11 which is 6 years back. She was told about the divorce by her mother after asking.

Brief background information of participant 11

The participant is an 18 year old coloured male with 3 siblings and doing grade 11. His parents divorced in 2009 when he was 13 years of age. It was evident to her based on the perpetual fights between them so she concluded by herself.

Brief background information of participant 12

A 17 years old male and is black with one sister. His parents divorced 6 years back and he was not informed about the divorce, he just heard about it.

Brief background information of participant 13

Participant 13 is a 16 years old female and black in grade 11 and has one sibling. Parents divorced in 2008 when she was 11 years of age. Parents communicated with her about the divorce.

5.4 THREE THEMES WITH SUB-THEMES

The effects of parental divorce on the psychological functioning of the adolescents, factors influencing the psychological effects and resilience were extracted from the interview discussions. The data revealed that the experiences and the effect on the psychological functioning laid out by the adolescents differed according to the individual' experiences in both pre and after divorce life independently, as well as according to the level of support given to the individual after the divorce. The three themes and their sub-themes are tabulated separately below.

5.4.1 Theme one: The effects of parental divorce on the psychological functioning of the adolescents

Table 1

The effects of divorce on the psychological functioning of the adolescents

THEME	SUB-THEME
The effects of parental divorce on the psychological functioning of the adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed feelings • Feeling of abandonment • Confusion and blame • Self-mutilation • Depression



The effects of the psychological functioning of the adolescents were revealed in different ways depending on the individuals. These effects were identified as feelings of anger; feelings of abandonment; helplessness and self-blame; self-mutilation; and depression; define what mixed feelings are.

5.4.1.1 Mixed feelings

The participants expressed mixed feelings of anger, loss, trauma and loneliness.

Anger: Anger was stated as the major feeling, *"I still feel very angry... every day I am feeling more and more pain and am getting more and angrier, even towards myself, but especially when people come to me and say things I feel angry."*

One participant stated three feelings at the same time whereby confusion was reflected, *"I have feelings of Anger, remorse, sadness, fear... Anger: "towards my dad for having tormented my mom like that and treating her as though she doesn't have anyone but him... she held on tight because of us... and maybe for the love she had for him... I would have long divorced a husband that treated me like that... Remorse: "I feel sorry for my dad, Satan' chews people and spits them out... because he has blinded him into seeing the important things in life... Sadness and Fear: "My dad just breaks my heart. Please whoever is reading this, please include him in your prayers, for God to help him and save him from this illness."*

Loss. Loss was experienced by most of the participants differently. To one participant, *"Divorce is still the same way as death, as if one of your parents passing on..."* to the other, *"Indeed it is not easy losing a parent, something I don't wish for anyone to go through because it is hard."* One of the participants stated, he would spend *"Most of the days, alone in my room I would cry my heart out while holding their photo in my hand, welling up in more tears, I have lost him [the father]."* To some participants it is *"Indeed not easy, losing a parent is something I don't wish for anyone to go through because it is hard."*

Pain. One of the participants had pain caused by the loss of a complete family, *"...and so I grow up with pain inside me for once my parents were an item and I watched that fall apart and me being used as a weapon to either one of them was not good at all... calling my mother and not calling the name dad killed me quietly."*

Trauma. The word “trauma” is used to describe experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm people's ability to cope and function well psychologically, leaving an unstable mind and uncontrollable behaviour. It can also be described as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience following a stressful event. One participant felt “*lonely, I felt depressed and I felt stressed and after the...the...the...the... [Difficulty in talking] divorce that just went from bad to worse, I felt very lonely, I felt sad and I felt aggressive...*” a least of feelings that end up with aggression accompanied the participant’s life after the divorce.

Loneliness. The fights, “*During the process of the divorce I felt lonely due to the fact that my parents were so focused on their fighting and divorce, they lost interest and attention to me...*”

5.4.1.2 Feeling of abandonment

Abandonment means the feeling of neglect, rejection and desertion from both parents. In this study, some of the participants felt they were abandoned by their parents. Life prior to the parents’ divorce changed, “*... a place I called home turned into a war house, a battle field itself. My parents were so busy showing, and hating each other they forgot about me. I would stand in front of their bedroom door and fall asleep but wake up they were still shouting at each other... Morning, day and night they would fight, I would run away to the river and they never even noticed I was not there. I tried killing myself and they still didn’t realize it. I was left alone in my own world as young as I was by myself.*”

5.4.1.3 Confusion and blame

Parental divorce has led to blame in some participants’ lives whereby some felt ashamed, helpless, confused and thereafter shifted the blame from one person to the other while in most cases they end up taking the blame upon themselves.

Shame, helplessness and blame. The participants mentioned feelings of shame after the divorce *“From being a tranquil and jubilant, energetic teenage boy, my head bent in dejection, shame and worry at the news of the divorce, I feel helpless... I kept on hoping this, though quite vainly because that never happened.”*

To one participant, the divorce brought disappointment, shame and blame, *“When I found out about my dad’s contribution to the divorce I was disappointed and even at some point ashamed of having him as my dad because I used to have this perception that he was the best dad any young girl would want... he was my hero, before... I would have told you how much I looked up to him but now I will tell you how much I look down on him... I don’t have a dad... I am all alone because of him.”*

Shifting blame from one person to the other. *“I think I am the cause of this...”* The shifting of the blame and confusion led to some participants placing the blame from one person to the other until they blamed people who are not part of their immediate family; *“I added two and two together and to come to think of it he must have stressed my mom out early in the morning which made my mom shout at me... But at the same time when I think of the time when my mom told me that I am a nuisance and went to tell my daddy”* The same participant later stated, *“The way my dad is, I blame it on his parents who let him fend for himself...”* As she went on she stated, *“I blame materialistic things due to the separation of my parents.”* This participant drops the blame from one person to the other in order to try and find out the reason for the divorce and its reality.

Self-blame. The most commonly reflected feeling from the participants was self-blame; *“I felt as if I am responsible for their divorce, even now I still blame myself for not stopping them from getting divorced.”* The fact that the parents used to fight about her, made the participant be certain of *“I am so blaming myself for their divorce... my father used to*

shout at my mother saying that my mother didn't want us to be beaten even if we did wrong things... am blaming myself... one day I heard my mother saying that she'll divorce my father because he likes abusing us, of which he wasn't..." One participant thinks that his existence caused the divorce and *"if I wasn't alive maybe they would get back together."* Some believed they could have controlled the situation, *"I decided not to say anything because I'm still young and cannot tell them what to and what not to do with their lives... after the process, I started blaming myself about every single thing I should have done..."*

5.4.1.4 Self-mutilation and negative replacement

The pain that the participants were experiencing made two of them to self-mutilate in order to cause more pain on their physical body reflecting a sign of poor psychological functioning, *"I cut myself just to get the anger out, just to feel happy..."* One participant stated, *"I was abusing myself physically, because I was in pain, so I was cutting myself so I can feel more pain, so that the emotional pain may go away."*

On the other hand, some participants replaced their pains with other things that they also realized were causing their behaviour to change, *"I felt pain in my heart... I couldn't cope so I started smoking, fighting and drinking I do bad things" ...* Another participant added, *"So like I decided to drink so that I can keep my mind away from these stress I was having... my behaviour changed towards my mother... I am being rude to her I don't respect her when she s shouts at me shout back her."*

5.4.1.5 Depression

The following were different kinds of statements showing stipulated pain by different participants; a total breakdown due to pain, *"When I heard about the divorce, it was like huge portion of me broke down, seemingly never to be repaired again."* [P 1]

Theories of emotions state that if adolescents go through experiences of emotional feelings due to painful situations, they produce bodily arousal reactions which later lead emotions such as sadness, fear, anger and frustrations (Mitterer & Coon, 2007). These reactions, according to this study, give a reaction of the negative psychological functioning which may later lead to withdrawal of some kind from normal life activities, *"I couldn't sleep well or eat well; I was down most of the times"* [P 6] *"When I had gone sober every painful feeling came back stronger and very much alive, rooming my mind, heart and soul Happiness seemed like it was a ferry tail I had even forgotten how it felt like to smile and laugh for my pain always reflected pain and suffering."* [P12]

"It affected me a lot I used to play with other kids, but after the divorce I couldn't any more I didn't even want to do my day to day functioning things I had to do, like cleaning in the house. It was like I can just stay in the house not seeing anyone and not doing anything." [P 6]

"I took my parent's divorce very hard more than I could handle, I felt so lost, lonely and different I felt like my whole world had gone dark... I lost touch with life everything seemed unreal" ... "I feel like I can just sit alone..." [P 7]

"I can't express myself so that's why I bottle everything inside. I just feel like the whole world is against me. I don't even know where my father is; he never calls or sends me money." [P 10]

“...it has affected me psychologically because I... I... I... I... I [Difficulty in talking] Mmm ... I begun I begun have feeling very depressed very lonely. I started experiencing stress.” [P 11]

“Calling my mother and not calling the name dad killed me quietly.” [P12]

“I don’t have friends (interviewer: mm) so I don’t really talk to anyone, I don’t smile, I don’t laugh, I... I don’t know I just feel like the whole world is against me.” [P13]

“When I heard about the divorce, it was like huge portion of me broke down, seemingly never to be repaired again.” [P 8]

5.4.2 Theme two: Factors influencing the effect of parental divorce on the psychological functioning of the adolescents

Table 2

Factors influencing the effect on the psychological functioning of the adolescents

THEME	SUB-THEME
Factors influencing the effect of parental divorce on the psychological functioning of the adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre divorce, during and post-divorce Experiences • Parental disclosure to their children • Gender • Age • The custodian parent • Time as related to events

5.4.2. 1 Pre divorce, during and post-divorce Experiences

This subtheme reveals the experience the adolescents went through before, during and after the divorce of the parents, and the outcome emotion attached to the effect. The participants had different pre-divorce experiences which led to unique disturbances in their psychological functioning.

Table 3 below reveals that where there was abuse of some kind that the child witnessed before the divorce like for participant 2, and 10, the after divorce emotional outcome was positive, instead of being hurt, the adolescent felt a kind of a relief after the divorce.

Table 3

The Pre-divorce, during divorce and after divorce experiences

Pre-divorce experiences	Experiences during the divorce	Feelings after divorce	Analysis attached
<p>P 2 "my dad abused my mom... he would call her names in front of me, he would beat her up and kick her and... and do scary stuff to her ... and he would chase her out of the house when it was cold and then yes ... she (mother) had turned out to being a 'punching-bag... every morning mommy woke up with bruises all over her beautiful fine face... I usually over-heard them talking, all my dad had to always was [I'm so sorry my love, I didn't mean to hurt or treat you bad, it's just that I was too angry and could not even be able to realise that I'm being so overreacting]... my mom would just forgive him like that..."</p>	<p>"I was kind of relieved that they were divorcing..."</p>	<p>P 2 "I just don't blame my mother for taking the huge decision she last decided to take because... their divorce is a relief from fights and abuse, now I can't see any of these anymore, my mother is free... I keep myself away from these unhealthy thoughts ... I just can't sacrifice to lose something by nothing; my future is bright and successful."</p>	<p>The parents' divorce is a relief to her and it is nothing according to her</p>
<p>P 5 "Before the divorce-I like to believe that I was a happy toddler; I have memories of us living together; going shopping with both my parents, going to church with them, visiting relatives together and I remember sharing a bed with my mom and dad. I remember our daily routine; my dad would pick me up from crèche and my sister from school and</p>	<p>"When my parents started fighting they would make me sleep with my sister but it didn't mean anything to me because I was very young then and happy"</p>	<p>"... towards my metric my mom told me that my dad was marrying again. That broke my heart; my hopes of my parents ever being together were shattered. I cry all the time I think about it"</p>	<p>She is still hurt and cries a lot about the divorce</p>

go home then later go pick my mother up from work..."

P 7 "I have anger towards my dad for having tormented my mom like that and treating her as though she doesn't have anyone but him... she held on tight because of us... and maybe for the love she had for him... I would have long divorced a husband who treated me like that..."

"Anger, remorse, sadness, fear"

"I used to wish that things would go back to normal because in a way I was quite close with my dad... I found out many painful things that strains the body that made my mom to leave my dad... those made my mom to leave my dad... but at the same time, it is not fair and it is unpleasant..."

As the youngest participant in the study, at the age of 15 she is still having some mixed feelings about the divorce although it happened

P 10 "My dad abused my mom physically and emotionally. He used to call her names in front of me, beat her up, punch her as if she was his punching bag and then kick both me and my mother out of the house... He sometimes would not come home; when he eventually comes he would be angry and beat my mom up."

"During the process of the divorce I was still a child and confused about what was happening around me..."

"When I found out about the divorce I was shocked at first but later realized that maybe it was for the best because my mom and dad were never happy in their marriage... I am fine about it... it has not impacted my day to day functioning... I dealt with it and accepted it a long time ago"

Accepts the divorce as the best thing to the parents

P 11 "when we were staying together... they were both caring, loving parents... yuh, they used to help me with homework... we used to have fun, I just miss my daddy cause he was... he was... (difficulty in speaking) the first one to remind me of my homework even if I had forgotten it, he helped me he didn't let me do my homework alone..."

"I couldn't concentrate, kept on hearing my mother and father shouting at each other... but I had to study or do my homework alone"

"Now am lonely, I miss my dad although I realize that it is wrong, I can't stop drinking now because... because... it's the only solution for..." (Just decides to stop talking)... yah so it has affected me so bad" (sadness and pain in the voice)

Still hurting and cannot stop drinking and drugs

P 13 "Before, it was very nice, because everything we were doing, we did it together, like shopping and going to church"

"During their divorce I didn't know what to do and at the same time having the hope of maybe changing their minds"

Anger and hope of them coming together again still exist

"Every day I am feeling more and more pain and am getting angry"

Participants 5, 11, and 13 did not experience any kind of a problem in the pre-divorce family life, there seemed to be care, love and support in their previous life which lead to shock when the divorce happened. There has been an exception of one participant, 7, who is aged 15 and who talks about the anger towards her dad for abusing her mother and at the same time feeling that it was not fair for her mother to divorce her father. The after effects became severely negative and for the participant, there has been a lot of anger and disappointment leading to long term effects like not associating with other people and resorting to drugs.

5.4.2. Parental disclosure to their children

As stated in the background analysis of participants on page 52, the divorce issue was not communicated in the right way to almost all the participants in the present study. Participants one, two, four and five found the divorce papers by themselves and read them; participants three, eight and nine, made their own conclusion based on what they experienced; participant 12 heard about the divorce from other children while playing with them while participants seven and eight were set down and told by their mothers. One participant stated, *"I hated my mother for not telling me[4]"* another one [12] said, *I was playing in the street with my friends and one of the older kids asked me how come my mom is pregnant while my dad is away. That hurt me so much I went home crying that day."*

5.4.2.3 Gender as an influencing factor

Although it was expected that there would be gender differences regarding the psychological effects of divorce on these adolescents, the results of this study have shown little differences in gender influence. Both boys and girls that took part in the study revealed anger and depression levels in a similar way depending on the pre-divorce experiences as discussed later in the findings. Except for change of roles after divorce and custody, whereby boys face

more challenges in case of the mother being the custodian parent as they will grow up under the care of an opposite sex parent, there were no differences observed. It was also comprehended that in most cases fathers are the ones who leave and the children remaining in the custody of the mothers. In this study, this affected the males more than females.

Males. Boys need their fathers as they grow up, *“My mother took custody of me and up until now I’ve been staying with her. It has been very hard for me not having my father, as I am a boy and can’t talk to my mother about some things.”*

Females. Females are mostly affected by the change of roles since the custodian parent who, in this case, is the mother who, because of lack of finances, cannot afford to hire a helper. *“... like taking good care of my siblings since I am the eldest, washing and cooking just to help my mom, because before the divorce we had a domestic worker, but now we don’t have one since my mom cannot afford to pay her.”*

5.4.2.4 Age as an influencing factor

Younger children might face a higher risk of negative effects, because they cannot comprehend the causes of the divorce and have fewer resources from which to seek help outside the family environment. In this study, one participant who is aged 15 years, was the most affected, angry and confused, *“sometimes when I see my friends come solid families whose owners are my mother’s age but because of us she is deprived all these things but with dad everything is just ok... that is what makes me angry (stressing the age)... maybe he will change sometime and they hopefully might get back together”* as compared to her 17 years older sister, *“so I just left it like that and told myself that I have to accept what happened”* The girl experienced the divorce at the age of 8 years and , became angry and was still very angry at the time of the data collection.

5.4.2.5 *The custodian parent.*

Almost all the participants were under the custody of their mothers. Some who were still very angry even after five to six years of the divorce, were worried and emotionally affected by the change of behaviour that their mothers display, *"The challenges I'm faced with are very difficult, my mom always comes home with different guys of whom she expects me to call each and every one of them my father..."* One said sadly, *"Now that we live alone we don't have a maid, I have to do all things because my mother is busy running around with boys (pause) younger boys than her age, so now I have to just take care of everything because am the eldest at home, (short pause) yah."*

5.4.2.6 *Time as related to events (Chronosystem experience)*

Past experiences: According to Bronffernbrenner's ecological system's theory, the chronosystem incorporates the dimension of situations that happened within time, relating to what happened in an individual child's environment as they are growing. The situations may be either external, whereby it is about the timing of a parent's death, or internal, such as the physiological changes that occur with the aging of a child. As children get older later in time, they may react differently to the environmental changes and may be more influenced by what may happen to them in the future. *"I can't concentrate at school now, I keep on hearing my mother and father shouting at each other I couldn't concentrate well so that is why I even...am even repeating grade 11"* To the other, the effects lead to mistrust of boys at the present time, *"I don't trust boys mm I just believe that every man is an abuser so mm because my dad abused my mom."*

Future effects. These effects may be permanent and therefore cause the child to conclude issues that will have negative impacts on them for the rest of their lives. *"I have actually lost the meaning of what a family means... this has made me to never ever (stressing*

the words) *depend on or trust a man on anything.*” “*In short, it means that I will never have a proper and functional family.*” To one participant “*It means I must think carefully before getting into marriage, because it is confusing especially when you have children. I don’t (pause) I don’t want it to happen to my children, because I know how painful it is and how it’s disturbing and traumatizing. It’s means I must not trust any man anymore.*” Marriage is meaningless, “*I just think that people shouldn’t get married because of what I’ve experienced.*”

5.4.3 Theme three: What helps children cope?

Table 4

What helps adolescents cope?

THEME	SUB-THEME
What helps adolescents cope?	I. Resilience (gender, age) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychological resilience. - Spiritual resilience. ii. Social resilience Social support (peers, parents, psychologist) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. Healing with time. iv. Positive replacement

5.4.3.1 Resilience

Most of the participants have reflected some kind of adjustments through resilience. Resilience is the capacity to deal with change and continue to develop the power or ability to return to the original form or position, etc., after facing some challenges that may have caused some damage in one’s life.

Psychological Resilience. This is a type of resilience that can be defined as the capacity to deal with change and continue to develop despite the impact thereof. The study revealed that some of the participants are resilient to the changes and the situations around

them; *"Looking it with a mature eye presently, I think I meant that things were not as good as I thought they were while they were still together. As for me, I know they still love me..."* to the other; *"it's when I said it's done, it's done and there is nothing I can do to change that... maybe it was meant to be like this..."*

Spiritual resilience. Some of the participants see God as the spiritual being who exists and is able to see them through and carry them through the pains. *"...I honestly felt it's the same, no doctor or psychologist will erase the fact that my parents are divorced, they will always be divorced, so you could say I healed myself and am still healing and that by the grace of God he will see me through and help me through each and every obstacle I come across.... He has been behind me all this time."*

5.4.3.2 Social support.

Communication, openness and interrelations seem to be one of the remedies of the emotional impact on these young people.

Peer support. One participant is able to cope because of the support of her friends; *"My two best friends... as I was telling them... what really surprised me was that I was already okay by the time they were talking to me, they advised me about how life is so important..."*

Parental support. Some participants manage to cope because of talking to their parents. One of the participants stated that; *"These are the wise words that my mom taught me;"*

LEARN L= Listen, hear and understand me

E= Even if we disagree, don't see me as a bad person

A= Acknowledge the greatness in me

R= Remember to look for my good intentions (if I come out hard on you)

N= Never deprive me of the truth, however tell me the truth with respect... ”

Psychologists. *“I really got helped by a psychologist... I have now moved on with my life and replaced the negative thoughts about this by the positive ones.”*

“I went to see the psychologist and that was one of my coping strategies and it does help me a lot.”

5.4.3.3 Healing with time.

As time goes by, healing comes; *“It has been six years... The first years were very difficult as I also lost my grandmother few months later. But I eventually got used to it and now I think I can handle speaking out about it”*. Another stated that, *“...but now, in the process of time and much prayer I’ve learnt to forgive them.”* With the other participant, *“It hurts at first but when time goes on you just accept that your parent divorced and you have to live it because there is nothing you can do or say.”*

5.4.3.4 Positive replacement.

Although the participants went through a lot of pains during and after their parents’ divorce, some participants decided to focus more on positive things that make them feel better in order to cope with the situation. *“Drinking was my habit but I started surrounding myself with good friends.* The other one said, *“I also joined the football to distract myself from thinking too much.”* Some participants would break things to replace their uncomfortable feelings *“I would collect glass bottles and go to a place where no one would see me and break them and at the same time it was fun.”* The breaking of the glasses was meant to release the anger on the object rather than on people.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to determine the extent to which the research questions have been answered. The researcher provides a detailed discussion of themes and sub-themes derived from the findings of this study. This chapter ends with recommendations and conclusion.

6.2 DISCUSSION

This study focused on 13 adolescents from a coloured and black community who have experienced parental divorce. The focal point was to explore the psychological effect of parental divorce on these adolescents. The main outcome of the study was in agreement with some previous research findings that divorce, from a general point of view, is a traumatic and a depressing experience for the children of the broken families (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Chen & George, 2005; Van Jaarsveld, 2007).

In order to arrive at the general focus of the study, four areas were pursued to guide the study. The first one was to explore the experiences that adolescents go through before, during and after parental divorce. From the analysis of this study, the participants' experiences were mentioned in relation to the feelings that the adolescents had after the divorce and in line with the level of the impact, the experiences made. This result, being the principal outcome of this study, revealed pre-divorce experiences as having an impact on how the adolescents handle the matter in a later stage. The principal observation noted through the analysis was that the experiences differ according to each individual adolescent based on the multi-dissimilar contributing factors around the experience.

The traumatic experiences that the adolescents went through reflected poor psychological functioning as they could not control their emotions and with some of their actions some ended up using self-mutilation as a distraction of the pain they experienced. In the analysis, participants who were exposed to some kind of violence and abuse in their pre-divorce lives demonstrated a kind of relief and acceptance, and were able to cope faster than those who thought there was peace and love in their parents' lives. This is in agreement with some studies that, in some instances, some children who experience conflicts and fights in the pre-divorce life, wish for divorce at times since they believe there will be peace with each member of the family, including them as kids (Stambaugh, Hector & Carr, 2011). On the other hand, the participants who were exposed to peace in the family during their pre-divorce life became more affected by the divorce and were more in denial than the other group (Booth & Amato, 2003).

In this study, the various experiences of the participants' pre-divorce life experiences as well as experiences, during and after the divorce were brought together in an interrelated manner in an attempt to have a clear understanding of the role played by divorce in the psychological functioning of the children. As a result, the internal aspects related to the adolescents' pre-divorce experiences and the reality of their psychological effect were revealed. Although Booth and Amato (2001) saw no relations between post-divorce conflicts and after divorce adjustment in children, this study revealed that pre-divorce conflicts and abuse between parents have led to a fast adjustment and acceptance in the post divorce life of the children, hence less psychological effects.

New findings were discovered on the phenomenon. However, it was noted that regardless of the pre-divorce experiences as indicated earlier, the first months following the time the children learn about their parental divorce were the most critical times to almost all the

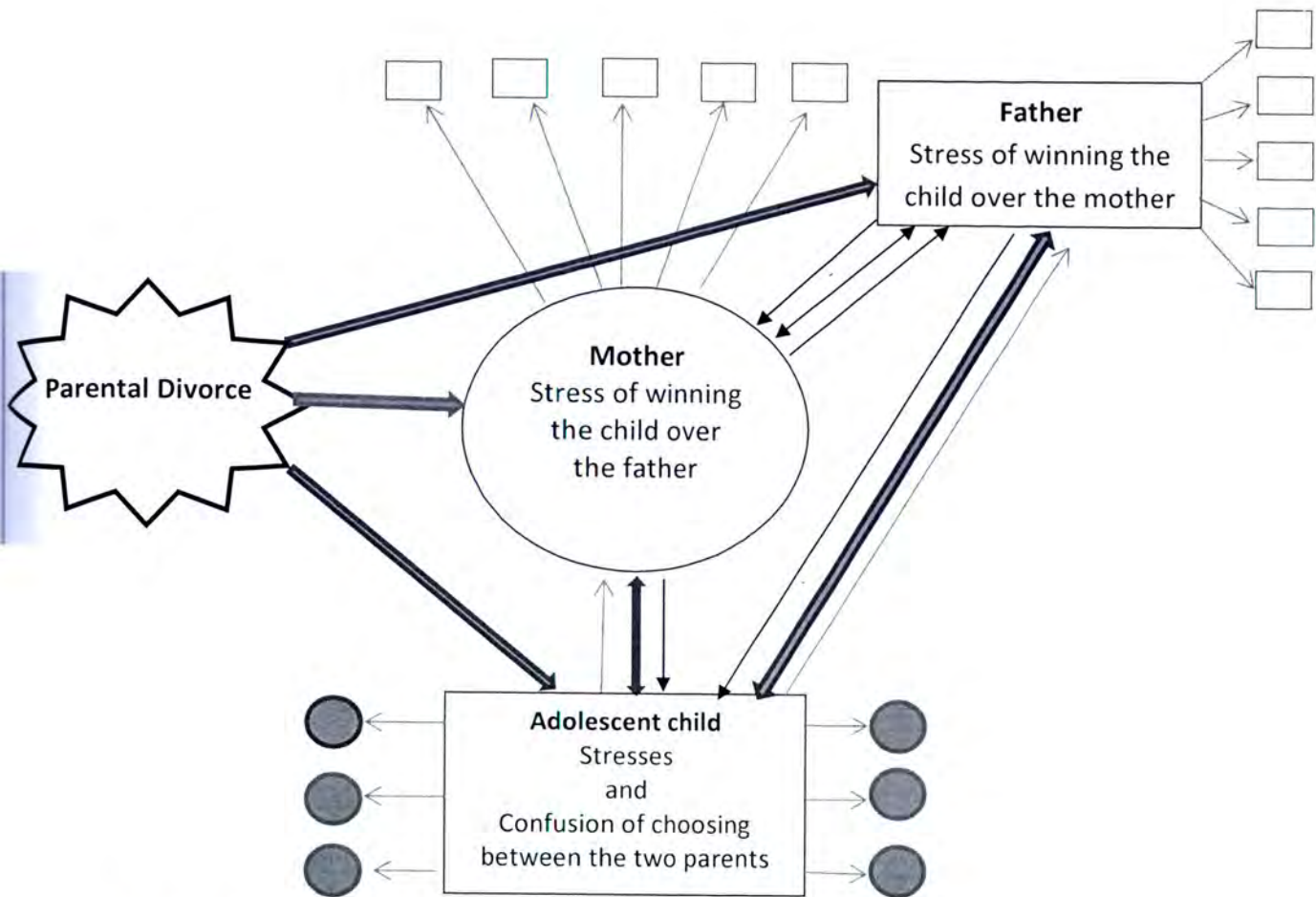
participants, since in most cases they stated shock being the first feeling they experienced (Cartwright, 2006), leading to a lot of emotional experiences.

Regarding the second focus of the study, which was to investigate the role of parental divorce in the psychological functioning of the adolescents, the results revealed that, with some adolescents, divorce may lead to a wide range of mixed psychological dysfunctions in a different way. Some adolescents experienced anger that later turned into pain, feelings of shame and helplessness whereby they ended up in depression which most researchers term psychological impact of divorce (Mauss et al., 2011).

The results of the present study on confusion about the divorce were also in agreement with Bowen's family system's theory that an ideal fully functioning family system consists of a father, mother and child who have a role each in the system. The effect is elaborated in Figure 1 below (Bowen, 1976).

Figure 1

Figure 1 below illustrates triangulation in the present findings of the study as according to Bowen's theory of family system.



↔ The flow of an inter-relationship from both persons

➔ A one sided strong flow of the impact of divorce

➤ A flow from one party to the other

□ Outcomes of the experiences and feelings caused by divorce

↔ A weak relationship of the parents after divorce, only existing because of the child

● Strong psychological challenges from the fighting parents

If the system is interfered with, its functioning is disrupted and hence some emotional feelings like confusion caused by playing roles that are irrelevant, anger towards the changed

system and its cause and fear of what will happen later that indicate low psychological functioning factors (Rabstajnek, 2011). According to Buehler and Welsh (2009), in most cases when parents divorce, they leave the child confused, not knowing which side to take between the two separated parents while the parents themselves fight for winning each child to their side.

To others, feelings of abandonment, depression and self-mutilation were experienced. Most of the participants in this study revealed anger as an immediate psychological problem that later turned into other feelings like shame, helplessness and self-blame (Afifi & McManus, 2010). Self-blame was, in most cases, stated by most participants alongside with feelings of helplessness. Shame, which is stated by earlier researchers as one of the first symptoms of the psychological effect of divorce (Lotter, 2010), was also one of the feelings experienced by the adolescents in this study it resulted from helplessness.

The feelings of shame may also have been the result of the adolescents' detachment from their beliefs like the life styles they grew up in, of a family of two parents, as well as the breaking of the norms and belief system of their culture (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The results were also in agreement with the second stage of Erikson' developmental theory, autonomy versus shame and doubt, which elaborates that if the child feels they have lost control over some situation in their lives, they see themselves as losers and therefore shame comes as a result. Parental divorce at this stage consequently will elicit feelings of shame on the adolescent (Allen & Marotz, 2003). Young (2009) and Lowenstein (2006) also highlight that traumatic experiences like divorce create a damaged self within the child experiencing it, leading to shame which later develops into self-blame within this individual child. This is in agreement with Erikson's third stage which is initiative versus guilt. In this stage, the adolescents feel they can project some changes which later turn into guilt if they feel they

have failed. In the case of parental divorce, the adolescents feel guilty that they are the cause of the divorce or they failed to control the situation (Bee & Boyd, 2004). Although most participants blamed themselves for the divorce of their parents, some showed a reflection of mixed feelings whereby the blame was shifted from one member of the family to the other before it settles with them.

Thirdly, despite the indications of the psychological effect discovered during analysis, further analysis led to an extraction of some factors that influence the severity of this effect and thereafter determining their duration and the transference of the effect into the adolescents' future. Pre-divorce, during and after divorce experiences, Parental disclosure to their children, gender, age and the custodian parent (Afifi & McManus, 2010; Liu, 2007), were identified as the factors affecting the intensity of the effect on the adolescents.

According to Schrodtt and Afifi (2007), parents' disclosure about their divorce to their children contributes to more stress and fear while Van der Merwe (2004) perceives disclosure as a way to enhance the psychological well-being of the adolescent. Nevertheless, Afifi and Mcmanus (2010) argue that the parental disclosure depends on the way the parent does it. Afifi, McManus, Hutchinson and Baker (2007) state that negative approach disclosures are the most damaging to the mental health of the children and may lead to unstable emotions of anger. In this study, most adolescents experienced more pain due to the fact that they were not told about the divorce and this contributed more to self-blame, anger and disappointment which was in line with some research (Afifi & Mcmanus, 2010; Van der Merwe, 2004) and condoning to some (Schrodtt & Afifi, 2007). The anger portrayed by some participants who were not told about the divorce in the present study and the contradiction with other researches may have been due to the fact that some had to hear from their friends or learnt

about it after some years, the divorce incidence. This was reflected to these participants as betrayal from their parents.

Through the analysis and the identification of the possible factors, answers to the third focus of the study, which was to analyse the influence of gender on the psychological functioning of the adolescents during the divorce experience were obtained. The analysis revealed that gender does not have much influence on the psychological functioning of the adolescents. Both males and females in this study were affected in the same way except for the different challenges that came along during the divorce.

One of these challenges is the custodian parent being of the opposite sex, mostly in boys. They feel they grow up lonely without a man figure to mirror and mentor them. The other challenge experienced was the change of roles which, in this case girls, are the most affected agreeing with some previous studies (Amato, 2003; Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Chen, 2008; Gruber & Colabella, 2008; Kalmijn, 2007) and condoning some that the in and out visits of the father or particular patterns of care do not imply any significant influence on the child (Adolescent Psychiatry, 2008; Nielsen, 2013).

The fourth focus of the study was to investigate the role played by age on the psychological functioning of the adolescents experiencing parental divorce. In line with what other studies have indicated (Ehrenberg, Pringle, Bush, Stewart, & Roche, 2006), young children feel threatened and feel vulnerable to life dangers once they realize that their family has been broken up, unlike those in middle and late adolescent stage. Størksen, et al., (2006) also state that some individuals in the mid-adolescent stage may be more vulnerable to the reaction of divorce. This was the case with some of the participants in this study whose parents were divorced when they were still very young within ages 8 and 9 years. The participants' psychological functioning was disturbed more than those who experienced the divorce after

the age of 12 years. These participants displayed more confusion and anger basically than other participants.

Moreover, this study further revealed the custodian parent, in this case the mother, as one of the most important factors contributing to the level of the impact of the divorce. The participants highlighted a multi-relationship new life that their mothers resorted to following the divorce stress as one of the most important things that cause the anger and the confusion during their attempt to find answers to the cause of their parental divorce. As the adolescent discovers, the custodian parent, who in this case was always the mother, has different affairs, they tend to develop anger and blame towards the parent.

Despite the fact that many researchers have considered going through divorce as one of the many life-altering events to manage (Chen & George, 2005; Faber & Wittenborn, 2010; Freedman, Knupp, 2003; Kelly & Emery, 2003), with the present research, it has been confirmed that some children are able to cope and become resilient to all these multiple changes (Greeff & Van Der Merwe, 2004). The results highlight some factors that are influential to children being resilient to the experience after the shock, leading to the fifth area of the study which was focused on determining the coping strategies used by adolescents during and after their parental divorce.

Some of the adolescents demonstrated some kind of resilience through the mist of the situation as indicated by Chen and George (2005). Snyder and Lopez (2009), on the other hand, state that, despite the traumatic experiences from the divorce and the significant stressors that the adolescents go through, a large percentage of children are still able to develop into a well-adjusted future which was one of the findings of this study. Most of the participants in this study were still below the age of 10 years during the divorce of their

parents and hence more trauma was experienced. Despite the trauma, some of these were resilient and therefore could cope during the experience.

Psychological resilience, Social support and Healing with time were the types of resilience that led to coping within the adolescents. With psychological resilience, the adolescents went through psychological counselling, spiritual resilience (Regnerus, 2003), where the adolescents prayed and set their faith in God; and social resilience which was obtained through social support which, in this, case the adolescents got from their peers, parental support (Garcia, 2012); and psychological support (Riggio, 2004). Some participants stated that they went through counselling, some went through support from their custodian parents and their friends while others gained peace after prayer and hope in God. Moreover, time was also identified as one of the coping strategies whereby after going through all the experiences, and the incident, the first experiences faded away with time, thereafter the child started to relax and accept and develop coping and healing (Chen & George, 2005).

The last aspect of resilience was positive replacement. In positive replacement it was reflected that the adolescents joined some sporting activities to ease the pain while some went out and broke things in order to cope with their pain, less discovered in the previous research work and mostly revealed in the analysis of this study.

6.3 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

- It was also realized during the study that the pre-divorce experiences play a critical role in the psychological functioning of adolescents and therefore seems to be the crucial part of divorce and considered as a gap in the exhausted topic of divorce. Some future studies are therefore recommended in the area.

- The study focused more on individual interviews and if at least one focused group interview had been conducted, the inner feelings and deeper understanding about the phenomena would have been reached through group member checking.

6.3.1 Recommendations for more research

- More research should be done on the topic expanding the result of this study whereby the specific focus will be to link, relate and find correlations between pre-divorce experiences and the after effects of divorce using the quantitative method.
- There is also a need to conduct some research based on the positive and negative replacement on the pain caused by divorce among adolescents as this was one of the new findings that came along in this study and was not clearly investigated and analysed.
- It was also revealed in this study that some adolescents engaged in Self-mutilation tendencies to cause physical pain in order to reduce the inner pain caused by parental divorce. It is therefore in this regard important for more studies to be undertaken under that outcome in order to give a comprehensive literature review based on self-mutilation and trauma caused by parental divorce in adolescents.
- Some research could also be done in future on parental (both custodial and non custodial) adjustment to divorce as it impacts on child/adolescent adjustment.

6.3.2 Recommendations to professionals and policy makers

- Children going through parental divorce experiences need to be identified and recognized as children in need of support. They should be provided with counselling and support groups be established for them in order to help those that are new in the experiences.

- Schools should also identify these children and recommend professional help since the situation affects their general wellbeing including their academic work as most of them drop out of school leading to a distorted future.
- The issue of the custodian parent should be reconsidered and negotiated between both the parents and the children since they are in the age of being able to comprehend the issue that is in adolescence in order to allow them freedom of choice as this will be of a great advantage on the gender issue and effects.
- Educating parents about the effect of divorce on the psychological functioning of their children may as well help show promise in the adaptation quotient of the adolescents dealing with their parents.

6.3.3 Recommendations to parents

- Parents should communicate their divorce plans with their children, prepare them and take them for Counselling in order to avoid the trauma experienced by their children.
- For adolescents to be able to cope well, they should be exposed to adolescent programmes that will assist them from being vulnerable to acting out and exhibiting problematic behaviour during and after the divorce.

6.4 CONCLUSION

This study was aimed at bringing clarity and understanding of the role of parental divorce in the psychological functioning of affected adolescents. The psychological functioning was reflected but the principal outcome of the study has been that the psychological impact of divorce is experienced on an individual basis, based on the general experiences of the pre-

divorce life that the child has gone through. The pre-divorce type of life experiences determine the level of the emotional impact on the individual child in a unique way. Secondly, it was reflected in this study that, despite the level of the emotional impact, most children stay resilient due to some social support, spiritual support, professional Counselling and peer support.

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FACULTY OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Informed consent letter: Participant

Dear participant

Thank you for participating in this research study.

You are requested to respond to questions asked as much as you can about your experiences on your parents' divorce, to the best of your ability. There is no right or wrong information, only **honesty** is requested.

NB: You have a right as a participant to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time. There is a likelihood that the information that you are requested to respond to may arouse painful feelings, in this regard the researcher will provide a debriefing session with you. The provision of information by you will help you to ventilate any ill feelings that you have not been able to deal with.

The researcher is an MSoc Sc (Clinical Psychology) student. The information you are going to provide will be used as part of the research study towards the degree requirements.

Please make a mark in one of the boxes below like in the following example;

YES	NO
X	

Mark the relevant box below to show that **you agree** to participate.

YES	NO
-----	----

Thank you for your time.

.....

Mr. D.M. Sehlabaka



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
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Informed consent letter: Parent

Dear Participant's parent/s

You are requested to allow the participant to participate in a research study by writing/verbal response reflecting his/her experiences concerning your divorce to the best of his or her ability. The participant will be interviewed by the researcher to get a clear understanding of his/her emotional experiences. There is no right or wrong information, only honesty is requested. The researcher is an MSoc Sc (Clinical Psychology) student. The information that will be gathered will be used as part of the research study towards the degree requirements of the researcher.

Please make a mark in the relevant box below with x to show that you agree that the participant may participate in this study.

YES	NO
-----	----

Thank you for your time in reading and responding to this letter. Your permission is highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Sehlabaka, D.M. Mr

ADOLESCENT'S SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

What is your Name (Please not real name) _____

How old are you? _____

Racial group:

- Black
- White
- Coloured
- Others (specify) _____

If black/African, what is your ethnicity? _____

What is the highest grade you have completed? _____

How many siblings do you have? _____

Are you schooling? _____ yes/no _____

If yes, what grade are you in? _____

Does your school require you to travel? _____ yes/no _____

How much allowance do you get per month? _____

INFORMATION ABOUT THE DIVORCED PARENT

How old are your parents? _____

Are your parents working? _____

What kind of a job is your father/mother doing? _____

INFORMATION ABOUT PARENTS' DIVORCE

When did the parents file the divorce? _____ (MM/YYYY)

PROMPT: Need month and year

When did you find out about the process of your parent' divorce? _____ (MM/YYYY)

PROMPT: Need month and year

How old were you when your parents filed for divorce? _____

Was there any physical abuse between your parents? _____

If YES, how many times has the abuse occurred? _____

How did you find out about the divorce? _____

PROMPT: referring to the course

The interview guide (Questions)

- a) What does it mean for you to lose a parent through divorce?
- b) What are the feelings that you were experiencing during and after the process of their divorce?
- c) How has their divorce impacted on your day to day functioning?
- d) What coping strategies have you adopted to deal with the divorce of your parents?

Probing Questions

- a) I understand that your parents have divorced. How long has it been?
- b) You stayed with your parents when they were still married. Who cared for you and how has it been after their divorce?
- c) There are many thoughts that may come to one's mind when one's parents have divorced. What did you think about your parents' divorce?
- d) Looking at how you lived before their divorce, how have you managed since they divorced?
- e) How did you feel after their divorce until now?
- f) Before the divorce of your parents you must have not cared about many things. What challenges do you experience now?
- g) What does the divorce of your parents mean to you?

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1st July 2013

CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING

TITLE OF DISSERTATION

Role of parental divorce in the psychological functioning of adolescents.

SUBMITTED BY

David Mochaka Sehlabaka

FOR THE DEGREE OF

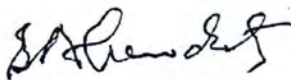
Master of Social Sciences
(Clinical Psychology)

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