

Stepparenting: A comparative study of community perceptions towards stepparenting, stepparents' personal experiences and coping strategies used by rural and urban stepparents: The Case of Gutu and Harare

By

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DEDICATION

To my maternal grandmother, who nurtured me from infancy up to this day .You are my mother.

In loving memory of my father..... You should have seen all these achievements.

To my mother for your question “*Zvino munopedza rini iyo dzidzo yenyu?*”

To Loveness, you are the precise definition of a wife and caregiver.

To Tendeuakai, Tandiwe, Tafadzwa, Ropafadzo and Munashe, my stars.

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To the Almighty God I say “Ebenezer, For God has taken me this far”, for his guidance.

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ABSTRACT

Much has been said in the media and documented about stepparents elsewhere. However, little is known about the psychological experiences of stepparents caring for stepchildren in Zimbabwe. Most of the research that has been done was Eurocentric and utilised quantitative approaches to investigate the social, economic and legal challenges bedeviling stepfamilies and stepparents.

The main aim of the present study was to explore, using a qualitative grounded theory approach, the community perceptions towards stepparenting and coping strategies used by stepparents in Gutu and Harare. A total of 20 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), 30 key informant interviews (KIIs), and 30 in-depth narrative interviews (IDNIs) were conducted with members of the general populace, key informants and stepparents respectively in Gutu and Harare. The grounded theory (GT), Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Thematic Narrative Analysis and the Qualitative Software Research (QSR) NVivo Version 2.0, guided and assisted in data analysis.

The findings of the study highlight the negative perceptions, which the rural and urban communities hold against stepparents. Stepfamilies and stepparents were viewed as disintegrated entities, and stepparents were perceived as incapable of true love toward stepchildren. The behaviour of stepparents on the other hand was characterised by self-monitoring. Chief among the perceived stepparenting stressful issues was introducing stepchildren to others, perceived spousal cheating, being called or addressed by the ex-spouse's name, being a stepparent versus being a biological parent, legal issues like dispossession of property, relocation following divorce, offering social support to a spouse embroiled in legal contests with an ex spouse, stepchild caring fatigue and coping with in-laws. The results also revealed that not only do stepfamilies experience stressful events, but happy moments too.

The stepparents reported using interim coping strategies, adaptive coping strategies, preventive coping strategies, corrective coping strategies and passivity (which signaled failure to cope and adopting helplessness). The stepparents were also reported to use, obliging, avoiding, dominating and compromising as coping strategies. The study highlights the importance of offering support to stepparents. There is need to advocate for fair treatment of stepparents and stepchildren and to improve stepchild-stepparent relationships. The setting up of a Stepfamily Association in Zimbabwe can be a giant step towards understanding and meeting the needs of the stepfamily. A stepfamily discussion forum can be the starting point.

Key words: grounded theory; community; stepparenting; stepparent; perceptions; stepparenting stress; coping strategy

ACRONYMS

BF- biological father
BM- biological mother
BP- biological parent
CC- child custody
CSA- child sexual abuse
CS- child support
DH- dear husband
OSS-older stepson
SD- stepdaughter
SF- stepfather
SM- stepmother
SS-stepson
YSS- younger stepson

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Death, divorce and separation tend to precursor marital and family life dynamics. These changes in family structure, family composition (reconstituted) and marital life usher uncertainties among the family members. These scenarios often bring stress, which may be incompatible with developmental tasks among family members.

Remarriage may emanate for one or both spouses following death or divorce. This subsequently results in reconstituted families and stepparenthood for either one or both parents. The stepparent role tends to tax the psychological resources of the spouses. It is grappling with the stepparent role which necessitates achievement of step family homeostasis if the stepfamily and remarriage are to the survive.

In the area of child and family studies, researchers and educators tend to cling to the Western conceptualisations of the family. However, many families in our society do not fall under the sociological definition of the nuclear family that includes a father, mother and their biological children (Kompara, 1981). One variant family form that deserves attention is the stepfamily.

Turnbull and Turnbull (1983) postulated that the stepparents often find themselves ill- equipped to deal with the myriad of adjustments and emotions they experience in their new roles. Becvar and Becvar (1996) assert that

developmental challenges of family contexts punctuated by divorce, single parenthood, remarriage or step parenting, or by various cultural differences offer a broad range of family styles and types. Therefore given the reality of our so-called “melting pot” society (i. e. volatile and ever changing society) as well as the current context of change, awareness of different family forms is essential to full understanding of family process.

Visher and Visher (1996) pointed out that stepparents also show feelings of anger, guilt and low self-esteem and a need to hide these feelings. On the surface their problems appear identical to those that arise without trauma in the daily lives of all parents. These issues, however mundane, are imbued with extra meanings for the stepparent who is striving for perfection. There is need for more understanding of the problems faced by these stepparents and explore their coping strategies. This will help to provide support and encouragement.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Over the past few years or so Zimbabwe has witnessed an increase in media reports on the ill treatment of stepchildren by stepparents (See for example “The Herald”, March 25, 2000; “The Financial Gazette”, May, 2002 and “The Herald “, February13, 2005). Clearly this necessitated the need to conduct a study to explore community perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and views on stepparenting, stepparenting stressful events and how Zimbabwean stepparents cope with the psychosocial contexts in which they find themselves in, with a

view to find psychological solutions to the problems encountered in stepparenting.

1.3 Objectives

The broad objective of the study is to investigate community perceptions, feelings, attitudes and views on stepparenting from a Zimbabwean perspective.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. assess the community perceptions, feelings, attitudes and views on stepparenting
2. adopt an epidemiological approach and categorise stepfamilies in terms of the relationship between the background (divorce or death) of the stepparents and stepfamilies and the time following remarriage.
3. Categorise the most stressful events in stepparenting
4. Compare coping strategies between rural and urban stepparents.

1.4 Key research questions

The study seeks to answer the following fundamental questions:

1. What are the community perceptions, feelings, attitudes and views towards stepparenting in Zimbabwe?
2. How many types of stepfamilies are there? Does the background of a stepparent or biological parent have an impact on the current stepparenting relationship?
3. What are the personal experiences of stepparents in Zimbabwe and are there any perceived stepparenting stressful events?

4. How does coping with perceived stepparenting stress differ between rural and urban stepparents?
5. What are the policy implications and interventions required to mitigate the identified negative impacts of stepparenting experiences?

1.5. Justification of the study

The present study differs from previous studies (Carter and McGoldrick 1989; Becvar and Becvar 1996) in that, while appreciating the role of socio-cultural factors in stepparenting, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of stepparenting from a *psychological point of view, community level* and at an *individual level*. The explorative nature of the study entailed that the grounded theory be used in conducting the present project. The study also aims to generate theory and add to the family therapy knowledge base from a Zimbabwean perspective. Considering that stepparenting is a multi-faceted phenomenon, the findings of the present study will help ascertain whether the existing coping strategies used by stepparents are effective, not only to the stepparents but to the stepfamilies, their extended families and the community at large. This will help to avoid the general psychological demise associated with stepparenting by assisting stepparents to maximize positive coping and minimize negative coping. It is also aimed to identify existing gaps in policy with regards to laws governing family relations and conduct following death or divorce. The results will also aid in providing recommendations for the protection of the stepchildren against ill-

treatment by stepparents and biological parents based on the findings of the study.

1.6 Conceptual framework

While a considerable amount of literature exists on families and stepfamilies, this research is greatly influenced by Carter and McGoldrick's (1989) changing family life cycle model. Their model purports that the family is a system moving through time. Unlike all other organizations, families incorporate new members through, birth, adoption, or marriage, and members leave only by death. Family stresses are likely around life cycle transitions (Carter and McGoldrick 1989; Walsh 1978; and Orfanidis 1977). The model also proposes that cultural factors play a major role in how families go through the life cycle. It is for this reason that urban and rural stepparents are included in the sample to investigate the impact culture of stepparenting experiences.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The area of focus for this study was;

Community perceptions towards stepparenting and stepparents' personal experiences and stepparents' perceived coping strategies in Gutu (Mukaro and Mushaviri) and Harare (Highfield and Waterfalls) in Zimbabwe that were explored.

In this study the respondents were members of the general populace in Gutu (Mukaro and Mushaviri) and Harare (Highfield and Waterfalls), the stepparents

in Gutu (Mukaro and Mushaviri) and Harare (Highfield and Waterfalls) and the keys informants were the community relations liaison officers from the police, counsellors, lawyers, community leaders, church leaders, nurses, marriage officers and others in the helping profession in Gutu (Mukaro and Mushaviri) and Harare (Highfield and Waterfalls) only.

1.8 Methodological Issues

The research was carried out using the Grounded Theory Approach. The Grounded theory begins with a research situation. Within that situation, the task of the researcher is to understand what is happening there, and how the players manage their roles. This is mostly done through observation, conversation and interview. Over time, a grounded theory study works through the following mostly-overlapping phases (Dick, 2002; Pandit, 1996; Baucer and Gaskell, 2000 and Glaser and Strauss, 1998).

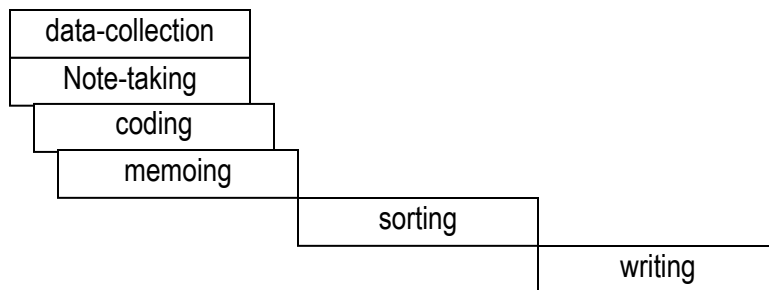


Figure1: The phases of the grounded theory

In short, data collection, note taking, coding and memoing occur simultaneously from the beginning. Data collection and analysis are deliberately intertwined to help the researcher to identify areas that may have been missed. This has the advantages of shaping subsequent data collection, following up new insights and clarifying emerging theory. Sorting occurs when all categories are saturated (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992).

As with grounded theory the explanations emerge gradually from the data as the study proceeds. All interviews begin open-ended. In the later interviews there are more probe questions. And more of those probes are specific. The theory emerges from the data, from the informants. In the early stages it consists primarily of themes. These become more elaborated as the study develops.

This is depicted diagrammatically below (Dick 2002).

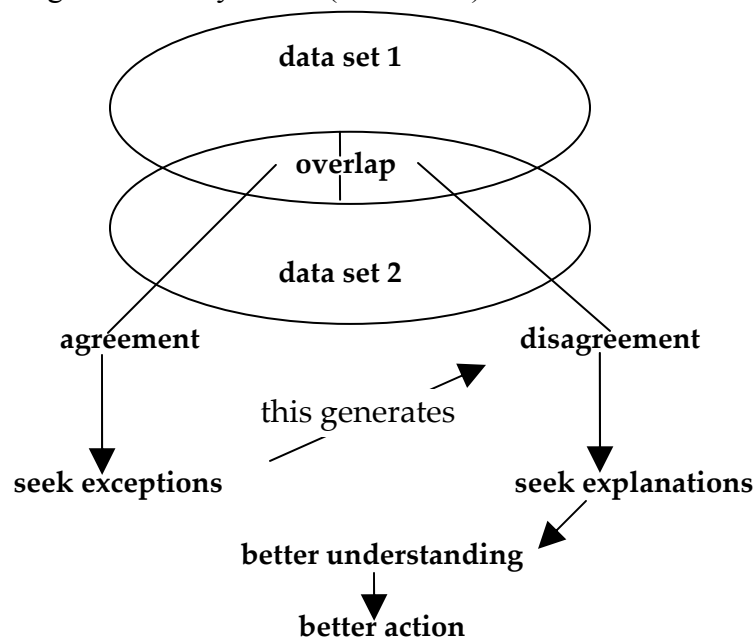


Figure 2: Proposed data collection and analysis using grounded theory approach.

Data collection and analysis precede literature review. According to Chamberlain (1999), this is intended to ensure that the analysis is strongly based in the data and that pre-existing constructs do not shape the analysis and subsequent theory formation. Literature review is thus delayed and not omitted.

1.9 Pilot Study

A pilot study was carried out to check the user-friendliness of the instruments and their ability to extract information required.

1.10 Data analysis and presentation

The quantitative data from the pilot study and the main study were input into and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Word version 11.00. The qualitative data were input into and analysed using the Qualitative Software Research (QSR) NVivo version 2.0 so as to identify the main themes emerging from the open-ended questions. The grounded theory (GT), Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Thematic Narrative Analysis and the Qualitative Software Research (QSR) NVivo Version 2.0, guided and assisted in data analysis.

1.11 Limitations

Selection bias

The research was confined only to two settings; rural (Mukaro and Mushaviri) in Gutu as well as urban (Highfield and Waterfalls) in Harare. There is a bias in the selection of the locations for the research. However, this bias was influenced

by the purposive nature of the sampling adopted for the present study. Two rural communities in Gutu (Mukaro and Mushaviri) and two urban communities (Highfield and Waterfalls in Harare) were chosen for the main study. This left the other rural and urban communities from other geographical locations of Zimbabwe. The research was not entirely conclusive, as it did not cover, all the rural, mining, farming and urban communities of Zimbabwe. The study therefore lacks external validity, as results from the sample cannot be generalized to the entire Zimbabwean community and stepfamilies.

Time and financial Constraints

The limited time and financial resources available did not enable the researcher to travel to all places and to contact all the stepparents and communities in all rural, urban, farming and mining communities of Zimbabwe. For example other rural and urban communities in some provinces and districts like Nkayi in Matabeleland North, Mutare in Manicaland, Magwegwe in Bulawayo and Mutoko in Mashonaland East could have been researched.

Pseudo-challenges for stepparents and social desirability

It is envisaged that some stepparents, community members and key informants may have negatively responded when in actual fact there may be no discrimination against and challenges faced by stepparents in managing the affairs of the stepfamilies in Gutu and Harare. No one wants to appear wrong or bad. For these reasons respondents are more likely to have respond in favourable

light and fail to give a true picture. Stepparents are likely to hide gender imbalances, prejudice and discrimination against partners, stepchildren and the extended family networks in general and female stepparents in particular. Key informants and members of the community are also likely to report low levels of gender imbalances, prejudice and discrimination against stepparents in Gutu and Harare.

Refusal Rate and Subject Attrition

Considering that researching on the family in general and the stepfamily interactions in particular can be treated with a lot of negativity by the respondents and that gaining access to respondents may pose some challenges, in Zimbabwe, the following problems were likely to happen:

- Some key informants particularly lawyers, counsellors and nurses had tight schedules and work on shift basis and could not avail themselves for participation
- Some respondents refused to take part in the research.
- Some respondents asked the researcher to make appointments and come back to do the interviews sometime later or kept on postponing.
- Some respondents did not complete the whole interview.

Factors raised above may have affected the quality of the results obtained in the present study. However the refusal and attrition rates were calculated and presented in chapter three. These were however not calculated and reported as a

percentage for each group of respondents. The actual number of respondents who withdrew from the study is given in chapter three.

1.12 Definition of Terms

Community--A settlement of people in one geographical area. The defining feature of a community is a “self-consciousness” that each member has, that the group is a social unity and that he or she shares group identification with the others. In this research a community is a group of people living in a particular local area.

Attitudes-- This term refers to a favourable or unfavourable evaluative reaction towards stepparents and stepparenting exhibited in one’s beliefs, feelings or intended behaviour.

Perceptions—opinions, views, beliefs and attitudes towards something. A way of looking at something .

Stepparent--This is term is used to refer to a spouse by a subsequent marriage. The stepparent is the individual who marries someone who has children from a previous marriage or relationship.

Stepfamily--Is one in which one or both parents are from a previous marriage or relationship.

Marriage--Is a heterosexual union between a man and a woman. Homosexuals were not in any way included in the sample in the study.

Stepparenting stressful events--These are the perceived challenges, problems or obstacles experienced in stepparenting. They may be behavioural, physical, emotional and social. These are the psychosocial challenges stepparents face in their stepparenting role.

Coping strategy--is how an individual deals with a presumed problematic situation. This may be behavioural, psychological and emotional.

1.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has highlighted that stepparents in stepfamilies are facing challenges within their marital circumstances. It has also been realised that external factors like cultural and societal views have played a pivotal role in causing some of these challenges. The study objectives have been given. The limitations, scope of the study, operational definitions of key terms have also been spelt. The next chapter looks at the review of related literature.

1.14 Thesis Synopsis

The present thesis will be divided into five chapters. Chapter one focuses on the background of the research including an overview of the theoretical framework adopted for the present study. Defining the problem and placing it in its proper context is central to this chapter. Objectives and research questions of the study are stated. The chapter also presents the definition of key terms used in the study. An overview of the whole research process is also given.

Chapter two presents the review of literature relevant to the present study. This chapter aimed among other things to examine the theoretical underpinnings of previous general family, stepfamily and stepparenting studies. This chapter highlights the major classical general family studies findings and the more contemporary stepfamily studies.

Chapter three focuses on methodological issues. Procedures used in the gathering and analyses of data are presented. The criteria used in selecting respondents are specified. The study was qualitative, specifically from the Grounded Theory Analytic Paradigm. Semi-structured interview schedules were employed. Mainly focus groups discussions, key informant interviews, and in-depth narrative interviews were done with purposively selected respondents. Within this Grounded Theory Paradigm, the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and Thematic Qualitative Analysis were used. The qualitative Software Research QSR Nvivo version 2.0 helped the researcher in coding, searching and grouping of qualitative responses for subsequent analysis.

Chapter four presents the results and demographics of the gathered data. Chapter five discusses the research findings. They are related to the empirical issues raised in the literature review and the research questions and objectives. This chapter winds up the study by giving the conclusions drawn from the discussion, the clinical implications of the study and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a divorce can without doubt be considered a life-altering experience. The marriage one had thought was everlasting may turn out quite differently and the conflicts preceding the break-up most likely change your way of living and your perspectives on life (Booth & Amato, 1991; Coombs, 1991; Brown et. al, 1990). Since divorces and deaths of spouses have become more and more common during the second half of the 20th century and thus, appears as a quite prominent feature of our society, closer studies of the

exact effects of such events are needed if we are to understand the dynamics of our society. If for instance experiencing a divorce or death of a spouse alters a person's attitudes towards the ideal marriage, the increased amount of divorcees and deaths of spouses could potentially change the gender roles and norms of society and society's attitudes towards remarriage. The focus of this study is therefore to examine the effects of being divorced or widowed on attitudes society has towards the ideal marriage. The study further looks at the effects of remarrying and on how the community views the marriage and how the stepcouple adjust to these societal perceptions as well as to the stepparenthood role.

As noted above, the study of causal relationships from marital transitions to a change in attitudes towards marriage has been somewhat neglected in general, but especially during the past few years. Hence most of the studies within this field have been conducted during the 1980's in Europe and America (Amato & Booth, 1995).

But when looking at the existing studies, the hypothesis of a causal effect between experiencing a divorce and changing ones attitudes towards the ideal marriage finds mixed support. In Thornton (1985) where both the causality from attitudes to social roles (e.g. being a married person or being a divorced person) and the causality from holding a certain social role to holding certain attitudes is analysed, only evidence of the existence of the latter type of causality is found. The study hereby supports the idea that experiencing a divorce alters one's

attitudes towards marriage (see also Kiecolt, 1988). Also Thornton, Alwin & Camburn (1983) considered the effect of divorce on attitudes towards marriage and for them here the dependent variable was sex-role attitudes, i.e. if a person favours an egalitarian or traditional organisation of his or her marriage or remarriage. Their results show no effect of divorce on sex-role attitudes. Hence, their conclusion is that experiencing a divorce does not alter a person's attitudes towards marriage (see also Amato & Booth, 1995).

In Thornton and Freedman (1979) a similar analysis is conducted with the same dependent variable, but on a sample consisting only of women and here only a small effect of divorce on attitudes towards marriage is found. The explanation presented here is that the total effect of a divorce is the combination of two opposite reactions. On one hand, the divorce radicalises the woman's ideas about sex-roles due to the stress and bitterness caused by the divorce. She therefore becomes more egalitarian. On the other hand the financial hardship that arises in the wake of a divorce makes her idealise traditional sex-roles. Because these two effects point in exact opposite directions, the combined effect of divorce on attitudes towards marriage is close to zero (Amato & Booth, 1995).

Lastly Brown et al (1977) finds that the process of divorce alters attitudes towards ideal sex-roles significantly; when going through a divorce the respondents become less traditional with regards to their sex-role attitudes. In addition to this Baxter & Kane (1995), find that married people hold more

traditional sex-role attitudes than unmarried people. On a more general level, the idea of a causal relation from social roles and attitudes finds support in Huber et al (1978), who show how experiencing a divorce affects one's attitudes towards equal rights (see also Myers & Booth, 2002). And in Plutzer (1988) it is shown how women who have experienced a divorce hold more feminist attitudes than other women. All in all the findings of the previous studies provide mixed support to the idea of a causal relation between changes in social roles and changes in attitudes toward marriage and remarriage despite the fact that several of the studies used exactly same data (i.e. Thornton, 1985; Thornton, Alwin & Camburn, 1983; Thornton & Freedman, 1979), and two used almost identical specifications of the dependent variable (Thornton, Alwin & Camburn, 1983; Thornton & Freedman, 1979).

Where the differences can be explained by different specifications of the key variables and population, also the methods applied in the studies give a clue. Since most of the studies are more than 20 years old, and thus conducted before social science started discussing the issue of unobserved heterogeneity, neither study takes this aspect into consideration directly. However, given the publication dates of the studies, the methodological applications are still rather impressive. The study conducted by Thornton & Freedman, (1979) almost presents a model based on a fixed effects estimator in that it uses *changes* in sex role attitudes between 1962 and 1977 as dependent variable and includes time-variant explanatory variables. However, the fact that they also include *time-invariant* explanatory variables in the analysis prevents their model from being a

standard model based on a fixed effects estimator. Therefore the design of the study prevents the results from being unbiased by the unobserved, individual characteristics of the respondents.

The later study by Thornton, Alwin & Camburn (1983) that used the same panel data as Thornton & Freedman (1979) comes even closer. In the study, the data was analysed using a structural equation model that allows for correlation between the measurement errors of the variables measured at different times (the same strategy was applied in Amato & Booth, 1995). They furthermore divide the sample into two subsamples assumed to be more homogenous than the original sample, whereby they deal with the unobserved characteristics that are directly linked to observed characteristics (here: gender). By doing so, their model takes into account both random and non-random errors of measurement. But still, several aspects related to the design, make the model unsuitable for genuinely controlling for unobserved heterogeneity.

2.1 THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR STEPFAMILY AND STEPPARENTING STRESS

Although views vary widely in the scholarly community regarding the effects of stepfamily living (e.g., see Booth and Dunn, 1994), the prevailing perspective was that living with a stepparent was harmful to children and adolescents. Parental remarriage and cohabitation generally were viewed as family disruptions that negatively affected children, similarly to parental divorce or residing with a never-married mother (see Amato, 2000, for a discussion of the

explanatory models used in divorce research). Although many explanations were proposed, based on systems theory (Hetherington & Clinempeel, 1992; Hetherington, Henderson & Reiss, 1999), role theory (Skiopin, Newman, & McKenry, 1993; Whitsett & Land, 1992), gender theory (MacDonald & DeMaris, 1996), exchange theory (Marsiglio, 1992), Bronfenbrenner's social ecology model (Bogenscheider, 1997; Fine & Kuderik, 1992), and the life course perspective (Aquilino, 1994), among others, most explanations for stepparent effects on stepchildren could be categorised as variants of stress models, (step)parent involvement rationales, (step)parent style models, and selection.

Stress models

This paradigm views parental repartnering as stressful for children and adults (e.g., Henry & Lovelace, 1995). Parental remarriage and cohabitation involve many changes for adults and children, such as moving to a new residence, adapting to new household members, and learning new household routines and activities. These changes are thought to increase stress for children, which in turn leads to poorer performances in school and more internalising and externalising behavior problems (Menaghan, Kowalski-Jones & Mott, 1997).

A related stress model, the *cumulative effects hypothesis*, proposed that the more marital disruptions experienced by a parent, the more internalising and

externalising problems children exhibit as a result of having to cope with these multiple transitions (Capaldi & Patterson, 1991). Support for this hypothesis was found; children whose parents had several partners over time had more problems than children who lived with a parent who had repartnered only once (e.g., Capalidi & Patterson, 1991; Kurdek & Fine, 1993a). Another stress model proposed that *parental competencies are compromised* when beginning stepfamily relationships (e.g., Hoffman & Johnson, 1998). Stepchildren's problems are therefore attributed to the diminished or poor-quality parenting they receive from stressed parents who do not have the personal resources to monitor children's behavior, participate in school activities, or interact with their children at the same levels that they did prior to remarriage or cohabiting (Dawson, 1991). A variation of this explanation proposed that the stepparent, as an added adult, would reduce familial stress related to economic burdens and the monitoring of children (e.g., Bulcroft et al, 1998; Hawkins & Eggebeen, 1991).

Conflicts between divorced parents and within stepparent households also were hypothesised as stress-related explanations for stepchildren generally faring worse on behavioral and psychological outcomes than children living with both parents (e.g., Downey, 1995; Hanson, McLanahan & Thomson, 1996). Researchers attributed higher rates of early home leaving (e.g., Kierman, 1992) and lower rates of coresidence of adult children in remarried families (e.g., Aquilino, 1991a) to the stressful atmosphere in step-households. Stepchildren may withdraw as a way to keep peace in the family and to try to maintain their own well-being (Hanson et al, 1996). Although not all researchers reported more

conflict in stepfamilies than in nuclear families (Barber, 1994; Salwen, 1990) and studies did not always find that intra- and interhousehold conflicts were related to stepchildren's outcomes (e.g., Hanson et al, 1996), stepfamily conflict was a viable explanation for poorer children's outcomes in many investigations (Kurdek & Fine, 1993a).

The amount of conflict in stepfamilies may be related to the ages and sexes of the stepchildren. Adolescent stepchildren often reported more conflict with stepparents than did adolescents from first-marriage families (Barber & Lyons, 1994; Kurdek & Fine, 1993b). Adolescents may be more resistant to accepting authority from a stepparent than younger stepchildren. Gender also may be relevant in predicting how stepparents relate to stepchildren. For example, Vuchinich, Hetherington, Vuchinich and Clingempeel (1991) found that adolescent girls had more difficulty than boys interacting with stepfathers and had more extended conflicts with and were more likely to withdraw from stepfathers and treat them like outsiders.

Another explanation for the greater risk of problems for stepchildren was the *economic deprivation hypothesis*, which postulated that stepchildren and children living with a single parent were at a disadvantage compared with children living with both parents because of economic hardships and the associated deficit conditions that accompany poverty, such as inadequate schools, dangerous neighbourhoods, and adults working long hours (e.g., Pong, 1997). Evidence to support this hypothesis was mixed; when researchers

controlled for differences in household income or socioeconomic status, effects were sometimes attenuated (e.g., Pong, 1997)) but not always (e.g., Hoffman & Johnson, 1998).

The final explanatory model related to stress was the *incomplete institutionalisation hypothesis*. Over three decades ago, Cherlin (1978) proposed that the absence of societal norms for remarried families regarding role performances; the dearth of established, socially acceptable methods of resolving problems; and the lack of institutionalised social support contributed to greater stress for remarried families. In this view, stepchildren fare worse than children in first-marriage families because, lacking culturally institutionalised support, stepparents are unsure about how to relate to stepchildren, and remarried adults lack appropriate solutions to family problems. Critics have argued that Cherlin's views overstate the degree to which remarried families lack institutional support (Jacobson, 1995), and some researchers have not found support for all of his contentions (e.g., Coleman, Ganong & Cable, 1997). However, there is support for the claim that expectations for stepparents are less clear than expectations for parents (e.g., Bulcroft et al 1998; Fine, Coleman & Ganong, 1998). There needs to be more research on this popular hypothesis.

(Step) parent involvement models

Many researchers sought to explain stepchildren's behaviors as the result of reduced involvement in their lives by either parents or stepparents. For example, stepparent households were hypothesised to lack social capital, defined as time

and energy engaged in positive interactions with children. That is, remarriage disrupts parents' abilities to competently raise their children because they are investing time and energy in new partners rather than in childrearing (e.g., Downey, 1995; Pong, 1997). Similarly, stepparents do not invest as much social capital in stepchildren because they are expending resources on the adult relationship or on their children from prior unions (e.g., Bogenscheider, 1997; Teachman et al, 1996). Consequently, children in stepparent households have more problems than other children do because they are thought to be receiving inadequate parenting and adult support. Researchers often employed the *social capital model* to investigate stepparent effects on stepchildren's academic achievement; generally, stepparents and remarried parents were reported to spend less time working with stepchildren on schoolwork and being involved with school-related activities than were parents in nuclear families (e.g., Leung, 1995; Pong, 1997). Also, support for the social capital model was found in studies of behavior problems (e.g., Kim, Hetherington & Reiss, 1999). However, cooperation between the parent and stepparent in raising children from prior relationships may be nearly as important as the level of stepparents' involvement with the stepchildren (Bronstein, Stoll, Clauson, Abrams, & Briones, 1994).

In general, stepparents interacted less with stepchildren than parents did. In addition to the social capital explanation, a number of other explanations for their lower involvement have been investigated. For instance, stepfathers may find it hard to break into tightly knit mother-child systems because of efforts by both mothers and children to keep them at a distance (Hetherington &

Clingempeel, 1992). Social cognitive factors also may play a role. Several studies showed that people generally expect stepparents to be less supportive and less close to stepchildren than parents (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 1995). Moreover, the stepparent role has low salience for the identities of many stepparents, so they may find more satisfaction in work, marriage, or raising their own children than they do in relating to their stepchildren (Thoits, 1992).

Evolutionary scholars postulated that stepparents invest little of themselves in their stepchildren because they are not genetically related to them (Daly & Wilson, 1996). This theory proposes that stepparents who also are parents discriminate in favor of their genetic children and that stepfathers interact with stepchildren to impress their new partners rather than to foster stepchildren's growth and well-being. The parental investment-parental discrimination proposition was supported in some studies (e.g., Flinn, 1999; Mekos, & Hetherington, 1997), but not in all (e.g., Bulcroft et al, 1998; Menaghan et al, 1997). For example, stepfathers who lived with their children spent more time with stepchildren than did stepfathers who just had stepchildren (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996).

Not only was the evolutionary theory used to explain relative emotional distances and disengaged parenting practices for stepparents, it was also the theory receiving the most attention in research on child abuse, although several other theories also were proposed to explain child abuse in stepfamilies (Giles-Sims, 1997). The more than two dozen studies on child abuse in stepfamilies

were evenly divided between investigations of physical and sexual abuse. Most researchers reported that children in households with nonnatal adults, particularly stepfathers, mothers' boyfriends, and other nonnatal males, were at much greater risk for sexual abuse (Marsh, 1990) and physical abuse (Daly & Wilson, 196). However, others argued that stepchildren were not more likely to be abused by stepparents (Gelles & Harrop, 1991; Malkin & Lamb, 1994). Unfortunately, given how abuse data are recorded, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the perpetrator of child abuse is a stepparent or another adult. For example, mothers' boyfriends and legally remarried stepfathers are often categorised as one group. The recent study by Chiroro et al (2002) on child sexual abuse prevalence in Zimbabwe also supports the idea that despite being raped by stepfathers, child sexual abuse is also a multi-perpetrator phenomenon. Strangers, acquaintances (inclusive of priests and pastors) and family friends were also implicated. Children are more at risk for abuse if they live in a household with an adult who is not their genetic parent, but the extent to which stepchildren are at greater risk for being abused by a stepparent continues to be debated (Giles-Sims, 1997).

(Step) parental style

Some researchers examined differences between parenting styles of stepparents and parents that may have placed children at risk for problems (e.g., Fine & Kurdek, 1992; Salem et al, 1998). Most compared parenting styles in stepparent households with other types of households, but a few compared stepparents in

various types of stepfamilies (e.g., Crosbie-Burnett & Giles-Sims, 1994). Unfortunately, most researchers developed their own measures of stepparenting styles. This renders comparisons across studies difficult.

Consistent with the research on stepparents' involvement with stepchildren, the parenting styles of stepparents were more disengaged than were those of parents. On average, stepfathers showed less affection toward stepchildren and engaged in less supervision of them (e.g., Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Kurdek & Fine1995). Similar findings were reported for stepmothers (Kurdek & Fine, 1993b).

However, not all investigators found differences in parenting style between stepparent households and first-married–parent households. For example, stepfather households containing adolescents did not differ from nuclear families in permissiveness and in democratic decision- making (Barber & Lyons, 1994); in support and monitoring of adolescents (Salwen, 1990); or in permissive, authoritarian, or authoritative parenting styles (Abarbanel, 1979). Also, no major differences were found in adolescent independence-giving (i.e., staying home alone, household rules, and weekend curfews) between nuclear, single-parent, and stepparent households (Bulcroft et al, 1998).

Researchers generally found that authoritative parenting (high warmth and high control) was positively related and that authoritarian parenting (low warmth and

high control) was negatively related to adolescent well-being, suggesting that the same family processes that influence adolescent well-being in first-marriage families are also associated with well-being in stepfamilies (e.g., Hertherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Fine & Kurdek, 1992). Stepparent support was a better predictor of stepchild adjustment than stepparents' monitoring behaviors (Crossbie-Burnett & Giles-Sims, 1991).

Although several studies identified gender differences in stepchildren's perceptions of stepparents' warmth and control, consistent patterns are difficult to discern (e.g., Kurdek & Fine, 1993a, 1993b). There are indications that stepmothers have a harder time raising stepchildren than stepfathers do (MacDonald & DeMaris, 1996; 2002). Additionally, Thomson, McLanahan & Curtin (1992) found that parenting was less gendered in father-stepmother families than in mother-stepfather or first-marriage families, although the differences were considered to be "relatively small".

Selection

A few researchers examined the selection argument that differences between stepchildren and children living with both parents were due to factors that predated parental remarriage or cohabitation (see Amato, 2000). Because correlational data do not allow causal inferences, some researchers questioned whether differences between stepchildren and other children were due to pre-existing factors, such as parental psychopathology or poverty, which influenced both family transitions and child problems (Capaldi & Patterson, 1991).

Findings regarding selection factors have been mixed, with some reporting that children's behavior problems predated parental remarriage (e.g., Capaldi & Paterson, 1991; Cherlin et. al, 1991) and others finding that girls showed negative effects before parental separation but that boys showed more negative effects after separation (Doherty & Needle, 1991).

Nearly one fourth of the studies in this decade dealt with stepfamily relationships or dynamics. Stepfathers' and fathers' relationships with children were studied much more often than stepmothers' and mothers' relationships with children, as was true during the 1980s. Relationships between siblings and stepsiblings and between children and grandparents or stepgrandparents were rarely studied. There is a dire need to also explore these areas.

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism proposes that either by taking the perspective of particular others, or by viewing ourselves from a community perspective and community values (generalised others), we see ourselves as others do (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). Many theorists' opinion is that possession of a stigmatised attribute is likely to have negative effects on self-evaluation. Goffman (1963:130) indicates "Given that the stigmatised individual in our society acquires identity standards which s/he applies to him or herself in spite of failing to conform to them; it is inevitable that s/he will feel some ambivalence about his/her own self". This assumption is also prevalent in social psychological writings on low status groups (e.g. Alport; 1954; Blanz,

Mummendey, Miekle & Klink, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wright, 1997). Stepparents are viewed as a low status group from a societal perspective. A number of authors have reiterated that, people may not agree with others' views of themselves, and that the relationship between stigma and self-esteem is not inevitable (Camp et. al., 2002; Fine & Asch, 1998; Finlay & Lyons, 2000; Jones et. al, 1984).

Modified labeling theory

Modified labeling theory (MLT) (Link, 1987; Link et. al., 1989, 1997; Rosenfield, 1997) suggests that stepparents are likely to have internalised negative representations of stepparenting before they are labelled. The stepparents adopt strategies such as withdrawal, secrecy or educating others, in anticipation of devaluation and discrimination. Different negative consequences are thought to occur as a result of both discrimination and the effects of coping (e.g. in social interactions in the family and in public). Low self-esteem is assumed to arise from these processes, and also because individuals apply unfavourable social conceptions of stepparenting to themselves (Link, 1987; Link, Mirotzink, &Cullen, 1991). Accordingly it can be a very isolating experience being married to a widower and being a stepmother to children whose mother has died.

Stepparenting as an identity

Before discussing the identity issues associated with stepparenthood,

stepmotherhood, and stepfatherhood, fundamental issues relating to the concept of identity itself must be addressed. Critical distinctions between key terms will be made. An attempt will be made to construct a framework for understanding identity management.

Identity can be defined as an individual's self-concept (McGuire, 1989). An individual's identity also involves beliefs about who s/he perceives is, how s/he would be perceived and treated by others in social life (Schelenker, 1980). Identity may involve role performance and identity management. Role performance is the individual's day-to-day behaviour associated with a given role. In this case, stepparenthood, stepmotherhood or stepfatherhood role is a role to be performed. Identity management on the other hand encompasses the individual's efforts to foster perceptions (usually positive) relevant to his/her role. These definitions may imply that an identity is chosen. However, it should be born in mind that individual stepparents do not entirely have discretion in the roles they will enact and the perceptions that others have about them. Stepparents do not choose a stepparent personality. It is thrust upon them when they choose to marry a spouse with their own children. Dainton (1993) suggests that identity management for stepparents is two-fold. It involves maintaining preferred perceptions and also preventing unwanted perceptions associated with preconceived evaluations of a given social role.

Stepparenting Identity Dilemmas

Generally speaking identities are inferred by appearances and actions for

example *mutsvuku* (s/he is light in complexion) and *anoruma* (s/he bites). In the case of stepparents, however, the perceptions associated with stepparenthood are not conveyed by appearance or actions but are label-bound (Dainton, 1993). In accordance, stepparents, fulfil the requirements of being a stigmatised group. Stigmas being definitional processes in which defining attributes (such as stepmother) often overshadow other aspects of the stigmatised person, including individual personalities and abilities. The stepparents (stepmother in particular) are treated and perceived as incapable of being good mothers). The “hallo effect” in which one attribute is used to judge an individual either positively or negatively is a likely process associated with the stigmatisation of stepparents.

Goffman (1963) elaborates that stigmatisation is a result of the relationship between a particular attribute and a stereotype about that attribute. Goffman, (1963: 2) asserted that “Society establishes the means of categorising persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories”. Society has established for stepmothers (through myths) the inherent wickedness, yet also capable of providing instant love. This highlights the inconsistencies and absurdities prevalent in the way society views the stepparents. Goffman (1963) further proposed two primary types of stigmas: the discredited and the discreditable. Discredited individuals are those in which the stigma is immediately apparent (for example those with physical deformities). Discreditable individuals are those whose stigma is not known or immediately perceivable. In view of the above definitions, the stigma of stepparent or stepmother is not visually apparent. This would lead one to

conclude that they have a discreditable stigma as they just look like real mothers and fathers. A critical analysis would show that stepparents are sometimes discredited. In Dainton (1993) s' opinion, the stepfamily sees the stepmother as discredited, whilst the general public considers her as merely discreditable. This scenario brings about a contradiction and may impact on the way the stepparent manages their identity. The dilemma of managing a stepparent identity is a public-private dichotomy. This stems from stepparents' belief that they are being judged based on the stepparent myths in both the public and private spheres of social life. This results in the stepparent being paradoxically inconsistent in identity management of their identity.

2.2 MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT DIVORCED FATHERS

In many ways, research reminds us that divorced fathers are often demoralised and demeaned in ways that make it difficult for them to maintain close relationships with their children. Not only many of our attitudes about motherhood and fatherhood, but many of our personal and legal beliefs about divorced men and divorced women work against fathers. And not only a mother's feelings about her ex-husband, but also her own family background, mental health, marital status, guilt, and attitudes about money influence how supportive she is of the father's relationship with their children. Then too, each

child's own memories, gender, and mental health work either for or against the father after the parents' divorce. At a societal, legal, and personal level, we still have far to go in providing the support and the compassion that divorced fathers deserve as adults whose marriages have ended, but whose feelings, needs, and desires as parents endure.

Perceived Financial Support

Contrary to the popular image of "deadbeat dads", 75% of divorced fathers in the United States of America are fully meeting their financial obligations to their children. Four million fathers are paying 12 billion dollars a year in child support. Moreover, those divorced men with the highest incomes are usually paying for most, if not all, of their children's expenses, especially when the mother did not work full time outside the home throughout their marriage (Artlip, Artlip, & Saltzman, 1993; Farrell, 1994; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Sheehy, 1998). And when the mother grants the father some voice in how his child support money is being spent, the father rarely fails to pay and often pays more than is legally required of him (Arditti, 1992; Bender & Brannon, 1994; Depner & Bray, 1993; Blau, 1994; Dudley, 1991; Kelley, 1995; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1994; Parke, 1996; Pasley, Ihinger-Tallman, & Lofquist, 1994; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994; Teachman, 1991). The picture depicted above is not always the case in Zimbabwe due to the current socio-economic hardships; many fathers are likely to be defaulters in the payment of child support following divorce or separation.

The one million “deadbeat dads” who create such a negative image of divorced fathers are usually the most poorly educated men, with very low or no incomes and men who never married the mother of their children (Arditti, 1992; Pettys, 1993). This isn’t to say that because a man is poor or because he never married he should be allowed to abandon his children financially. We might, however, wonder why poor fathers are legally required to pay child support whereas poor mothers are not required to pay anything when the children are living full-time with the father (Mo-yee 1995). It’s also worth noting that some fathers who refuse to send any more money to their ex- wife for child support have their children living with them more than a third of the year, and have an ex-wife who lives with the man she committed adultery with while married (Bender & Brannon, 1994).

In any case, official government statistics underestimate how much money most fathers actually provide because only court-ordered child support is documented and because the money that fathers give voluntarily for such things as college is not recorded at all (Cohen, 1994; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Teachman. 1991). Moreover, a father is often required to pay much more in child support than he would have been spending on the children if he was still married (Bender & Brannon, 1994).

Another potentially damaging misconception is that divorced fathers and their new spouses (stepmothers) are enjoying a much higher standard of living than

the children and divorced mother. But in reality most mothers lose about 20%-25% of the income they had access to before their divorce, while most fathers lose 10%-20% (Stroup & Pollock, 1994). Also 80% of women remarry within a few years and regain a standard of living at least equal to what they had before their divorce (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1994). In contrast, most divorced men who remarry cannot provide their new family with as high a standard of living as they gave their former wife and children (Artlip, Artlip, & Saltzman, 1993; Bender & Brannon, 1994; Ganong & Coleman, 1994). Yet despite these realities, too many children are still operating under the assumption that after their parents' divorce their father "got everything" while they and their mother "got nothing" (Beer, 1992; Blau, 1994; Einstein, 1994; Frieman, 1994; Ganong & Coleman, 1994; Jones & Schiller, 1992). This picture depicts a perceived better life quality for the stepparent and the biological parent at the expense of the divorcee and her biological children.

Men, Women and Infidelity

Still another way in which divorced fathers can be demoralised and demeaned is through our misconceptions about divorce itself. These are the misconceptions, which surely have a negative impact on many children's views of their fathers and stepmothers. For example, strong beliefs held indicate that men are more likely than women to leave their marriage because they have fallen in love with someone else. Men are perceived as the chief initiators of divorce. In reality the wife initiates 75% of all divorces (Adler, 1996; Pittman, 1990). And though in

many cases the wife initiates the divorce for such reasons as the husband's alcoholism or physical abuse, in many cases the wife wants the divorce because she has fallen in love with someone else or because she does not feel emotionally fulfilled enough in the marriage. Indeed women are now almost as likely as men to commit adultery and are *more likely* than men to get divorced because they have fallen in love with someone else.

Some women also leave their husbands for a man with whom they have had little, if any, actual sex. So while claiming that they did not technically "commit adultery", these wives have nonetheless betrayed and been unfaithful to their husbands (Adler, 1996; Pittman, 1990). As one such divorced fathers explains: "She would tell me about her boyfriend to impress on me that she didn't love me. I just couldn't take it anymore, so I finally had to move out" (Zipes, 1994). In any event, the point is that less often than his children or the general public might assume, the divorced father is often not the person who was unfaithful or who caused the divorce due to such serious problems as alcoholism or abuse (Adler, 1996; Berman, 1992; Flynn & Hutchinson, 1993; Gottman. 1994; Pittman, 1990; Reibstein & Richards, 1993). However, the gender disparities prevalent in Zimbabwe tend to tilt the scale against women who bear the brunt of everything evil.

The Emotional Impact of the Divorce

A considerable number of us, including the millions of children whose parents are divorced and have remarried, also do not seem to understand that fathers and

stepmothers suffer as much or more emotionally as mothers after a divorce. Indeed it seems as if people more readily envision the divorced father as a carefree “swinging bachelor” rather than as a depressed, lonely, disoriented human being. Many children, therefore, might be surprised to learn that men are *more likely* than women to become depressed, commit suicide, or develop a stress-related illness after their divorce. Most divorced fathers are extremely lonely, overwrought, and disoriented, mainly because they have lost daily contact with their children. Unlike mothers, almost all fathers are essentially rendered childless as soon as their marriage ends. In part because men are so reluctant to let people know how miserably unhappy and depressed they are or to ask for help. In addition, many people including the divorced fathers’ own children do not appreciate the extent to which most men suffer after a divorce (Beer, 1992; Bender & Brannon, 1994; Buehler & Ryan, 1994; Depner & Bray, 1993; Flynn & Hutchinson, 1993; Kruk, 1991; Pledge, 1992; Pruett, 1992; Warshak, 1992).

What Are The Perceived Benefits Of Relationships With Fathers Versus Mothers?

The belief that children benefit far less from a relationship with their father than with their mother can also be demoralising to divorced fathers. Moreover, this demoralising belief is not supported by most recent research on child and adolescent development (Goodman, 2002; Jayakody, & Kalil, 2002; Steinberg & Steinberg, 1994; Warshak, 1992).

Depression, Anxiety, and Eating Disorders

Teenagers and young adults who have close relationships with their fathers are less likely to become clinically depressed, to develop eating disorders, and to develop anxiety disorders (Caron, 1995b; Cryster, 1990; Phares, 1997; Scarf, 1995; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994; Steinberg & Steinberg, 1994; Warshak, 1992). So for example, teenage girls often become less clinically depressed after they start spending more time with their divorced fathers (Bassoff, 1994a; Maine, 1993; Pipher, 1994). Since depression is much more common among girls than boys, especially during adolescence, having a close relationship with her divorced father might be especially important for a daughter (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Ebata, Patterson, Reid & Dishion 1992; Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991; Harrington, 1994; Nielsen, 1996; Pipher, 1994). The above situation in Zimbabwe presents a lopsided scenario in which the girls considering the strictness most father who cherish virginity among females than they jealously guard against the boys. In addition, both male and female adolescents look for their fathers when they want to marry or they expect him to make important life altering decisions. Thus, a close association with a divorced father is equally important for both male and female adolescents.

Dating, Sexuality and Social Maturity

Children who are able to maintain a close relationship with their father also tend to be more socially mature and to have fewer problems related to dating and sexuality, particularly if their divorced mother has not remarried (Bassoff,

1994a; Bingham, 1995; Caron. 1995b; Debold, Wilson, & Malave. 1992; Flaake, 1993; Glickman. 1993; Burgoyne & Morison, 1995; Maine, 1993; Mens-Verhulst, Schreurs, & Woertman, 1993; Thompson. 1995; Tolman, 1991). For example, many daughters who live with an unmarried mother and have little or nothing to do with their father either tend to grow up too fast by dating, having sex, or getting married at an early age or behave as if they are afraid to grow up and are extremely uncomfortable with dating and sexuality (Aquilino. 1991; Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1992; Hetherington, 1991; Maine, 1993; Minninger & Goulter, 1993; Pipher, 1994; Mandell, 1995).

Generally though, the son seems to pay a greater price than the daughter when he has little or no relationship with his father after divorce. Usually those boys who live with their unmarried mother and see little or nothing of their father are more socially immature, aggressive, delinquent, defiant, and psychologically or emotionally disturbed than other boys their age (Baker, 1992; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch. 1997; Biller. 1993; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Corneau, 1991; Emery, 1994; Furstenberg & Cherlin. 1991; Guttman, 1993; Hetherington, 1991; Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kiernan, 1995; Parke, 1996; Wallerstein. 1991; Thomas & Forehand, 1993; Weiss, 1994; Zimiles & Lee, 1991). In Zimbabwe, the daughter can also pay the greater price in the event that she marries without the consent and knowledge of the father. The problems normally emanate from scenarios during which the daughter may fail to conceive. Under such circumstances, the family of procreation may presurise the daughter to get in contact with her father, whose whereabouts she

may fail to figure out. Most mothers tend not to disclose such information to their children fearing that the father will appropriate the bride price when in fact he did not participate in child rearing following divorce or separation.

Self-reliance, self-discipline, and self-motivation

In most families and stepfamilies it is also the father who contributes most to the children's becoming self-reliant, self-disciplined, and self-motivated. For instance, teenagers of divorced parents say it is their father who gives them the best advice, who teaches them the most, and who pushes them more to do their best (Marcia, 1994). And after parents divorce, those girls who live with their unmarried father have higher educational goals and higher achievement test scores than girls who live with their unmarried mother (Daly & Wilson 1996). Although most teenagers talk more to their mother than to their father about their social lives, they usually turn to their father to solve other problems, to get advice on education and jobs, and to get encouragement for self-reliance (Larson, 1993; Montemayor, McKenry, & Julian, 1993; Parke, 1996; Snarey, 1993; Welsh & Powers, 1991). So although teenage children might see their father as more demanding or more judgmental than their mother, those who remain close to their father often end up being the most self-reliant, self-disciplined, self-motivated, academically and vocationally successful, and achievement oriented (Downey & Powell, 1993; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Lamb, 1997; Parke, 1996; Pittman, 1993; Pipher, 1994; Snarey, 1993; Warshak, 1992).

Protection from a Depressed Mother

Having a close relationship with their father can also be a protective buffer for a child whose mother is clinically depressed or has extremely depressed ways of thinking and behaving. In such cases the father can teach the children less depressive, less self-defeating ways of thinking and behaving (Buchanan & Seligman, 1994; Downey & Coyne, 1990; Seligman, 1991; Waxler, Denham, Iannotti, & Cummings, 1992). The father can also help to counteract the overly indulgent, lax parenting that is common among depressed mothers (Ahrons, 1994; Chapman, Price, & Serovich, 1995; Cummings & O'Reilly, 1997; Downey & Coyne, 1990; Hetherington, 1991; Hops & Biglan, 1990; Rubin, Lemare, & Lollis, 1990; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994). Staying involved with his children after a divorce can also be especially beneficial because a depressed mother tends to relate to the children in ways that interfere with their social skills and self-reliance (Ahrons, 1994; Bassoff, 1994a; Gottlieb, 1995; Harrington, 1994; Hetherington, 1991; Karen, 1994; Miller, 1994; Pittman, 1993; Scarf, 1995; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). The father might also be the only parent who can help the children recognise and deal with their own problems because a depressed mother often ignores or denies whatever problems her children are having (Ambert, 1996; Block, 1996; Downey & Coyne, 1990; Dreman & Aldor, 1994; Pittman, 1993; Radke-Yarrow, 1991; Scarf, 1995; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994). For example, depressed mothers whose sons continue to have serious psychological problems as adults often claim that there is nothing wrong with their sons other than being “shy and sensitive” or

“needing a little more time to grow up” (Block, 1996; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994). A depressed woman is also the least likely to get remarried after her divorce, which is unfortunate for her children, for reasons I will soon discuss (Ambert, 1996; Chapman, Price, & Serovich, 1995; Dreman & Aldor, 1994; Emery, 1994; Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993; Hetherington, 1991; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Sadly too, the depressed mother is often the least willing to share her children with their father after the divorce (Ambert, 1996; Downey & Coyne, 1990; Pelham, 1993; Radke-Yarrow, 1991; Todorski, 1995). In the words of one depressed mother, “I can’t bear the thought that anyone else can do as good a job parenting my children as I can” (Hops & Biglan, 1990). In any case, a close relationship with their father can be a special blessing for children whose mothers are depressed or chronically unhappy and discontented with their lives.

2.3 WHY AREN'T DIVORCED FATHERS MORE INVOLVED WITH THEIR CHILDREN?

So if most fathers have much to offer and since most dads are so upset about being separated from their children, why do many men spend so little time with their children after divorce? The answer seems to lie in five areas: (1) Our society’s attitudes about fathering; (2) the ways in which we idealise mothers and motherhood; (3) the legal system’s treatment of divorced fathers; (4) differences in the mother’s and father’s parenting styles; and (5) the mother’s attitudes and behavior.

Societal beliefs about fathers and fatherhood

While we chastise fathers for not being more involved with their children, we simultaneously promote beliefs that make it more difficult for many fathers to be as close to their children as are most mothers, especially after a divorce. Among the most insulting and damaging are that divorced men and their newlyweds are “naturally” or “instinctively” inferior to their previous wives when it comes to caring for and raising children and that fathers are far less interested in and committed to their children than mothers. Indeed while many of us are offended if someone claims that certain races are genetically or “instinctively” superior to others, we often seem to accept the assertion that divorced men and their new weds (stepmothers) are genetically or “naturally” inferior to first wives as parents (Farrell, 1994; Fine & Kurdek, 1994; Griswold, 1993; Lamb, 1997; Parke, 1996; Pittman, 1993; Warshak, 1992). Moreover, the assumption that men are inferior to women as parents is not supported by the research. To begin with, most of what women know about mothering is learned, not instinctive, as is true for men and fathering.

And there are human biological mothers who do not love, bond with, or take care of their children (Allport, 1997; Blakely, 1994; Eyer, 1994; Parke, 1996; Thurer, 1994). Likewise, among other mammals there are mothers who ignore, abandon and even kill their young, while the fathers take charge of the feeding and nurturing (Redican, 1976; Eyer, 1996). More to the point, how human biological fathers and mothers relate to their children is heavily influenced by

what their particular society and their ethnic culture at a particular time in history has taught them. For instance, in colonial America fathers were generally considered more important than mothers when it came to the moral, religious, and intellectual upbringing of children. As a result, most books and advice on child rearing were addressed to fathers, not to mothers. But as our country grapples to become industrialised, most fathers and mothers are no longer able to work in or near home providing equally for the family's economic needs. As most men were driven further from home into salaried jobs, most women were gradually left at home in charge of the children. But the tide changed again during World War II when mothers were needed in the workforce. In Zimbabwe prior to independence, the same trend was evident. Only when returning veterans needed their jobs back were we told that "good" mothers should not be employed and that "good" fathers should provide 100% of the family's income. Yet even during this brief period of the 1980s, and 1990s only 60% of all parents were able to achieve this concept of "good" parenting. By the 1990s and 2000s the majority of fathers and mothers once again assumed new definitions for the "good" family, a family where both parents provided for the family's economic needs. But the point is that the way fathers and mothers relate to their children is heavily influenced by what they have been taught, not by their genes or by instincts (Coontz, 1997; Griswold, 1993; Parke, 1996; Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Thurer, 1994).

Neither is it true that most fathers are less interested in and less committed to their children than are most mothers. First, many fathers resent having to be

away from their children so much because of their long work hours and the demands of the job (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Coltrane, 1996; Gerson, 1993; Griswold, 1993; Larson, 1993; Levant & Kopecky, 1995; Pleck, 1997). Second, when both parents are employed full-time, fathers and mothers generally do similar amounts of housework and childcare (Deutsch, 1993; Pleck, 1997). However, in Zimbabwe the woman has a double burden or shifts that burden to another women, the child minder. Third, many fathers are more stressed and more worried about their children than about work-related problems. As Barnett and Rivers (1996:56), experts in family process, who have reviewed the research, put it: "It is simply not true that a job is more important to a man than his family." For example, many fathers suffer from just as much separation anxiety as do mothers when leaving their young children in day care (Deater, Scarr, McCartney, & Eisenberg, 1994).

Fourth, when given equal time with their children and when not having to shoulder the family's financial burdens alone, fathers are generally just as nurturing, attentive, and involved with their children as are mothers. So although most men interact differently than women do with children, fathers are not inferior parents (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Bramlet & Mosher, 2001; Coltrane, 1996; Feldman, 1990; Griswold, 1993; Lamb, 1997; Bottigheimer, 1987).

When it comes to the commitment of divorced fathers, two other findings are worth noting. First, divorced fathers who give their children lots of time and attention seldom receive much credit or public recognition (Teachman, 1991;

Warshak, 1992). Second, when a couple is having marital problems, the husband often reacts by spending less time with the children and less time at home; while the wife often does the reverse (Cummings & O'Reilly, 1997; Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Gold, Bubenzer & West, 1993; Pleck, 1997; Scarf, 1995). So in some cases where it might seem as though a father is losing interest in his children prior to divorce, he may just be reacting differently than the mother does to their marital stress.

Finally, upper and middle class white beliefs about motherhood can make it more difficult for fathers to remain closely bonded to their children after divorce. Compared to other races and to lower income groups, these white mothers are less likely to believe "it takes a whole village to raise a child." That is, the white mother from a middle or upper class background is the most likely to be too possessive and uncooperative when it comes to sharing "her" children with other adults, including their own father (Ahrons, 1994; Bell-Scott, 1991; Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis, 1993; Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1992; Greene & Leslie, 1989).

Idealising Mothers and Motherhood

Another way of demoralising fathers is by representing motherhood in overly idealized ways. For example, mothers are often portrayed as the more virtuous, honest, unselfish, and self-sacrificing parent. And motherhood itself is typically presented as the most perfect, the most intense, and the most ideal love that any adult can have for a child (Ackerman, 1996; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan,

1997; Miller, 1994; Parke, 1996; Parker, 1996; Thurer, 1994). Then too, we tend to idealise mothers when it comes to sex in that fathers are more likely to be portrayed as being unfaithful and being promiscuous (Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1992; Mens-Verhulst, Schreurs, & Woertman, 1993; Thurer, 1994; Tolman, 1991). In reality, though, women in our country are almost as likely as men to commit adultery and are *more likely* to leave a marriage because they have fallen in love with someone else (Adler, 1996; Ahrons, 1994; Braver, 1993; Chapman, Price, & Serovich, 1995; Emery, 1994; Guttman, 1993; Pittman, 1990; Reibstein & Richards, 1993; Ripps, 1994). Many of us also seem to be the most forgiving and most understanding when it is the woman who commits adultery. That is, when a mother commits adultery, we are more likely to tell ourselves that she “couldn’t help it” because she was so lonely or so misunderstood by her husband (Pittman, 1990; Ripps, 1994; Roiphe, 1997). The scenario depicted above is slightly different in Zimbabwe, as the people do not easily condone and accept adultery by a woman but selective condone and accept adultery by men. Statements like “a powerful bull is seen buy having some markings (*bhuru rinorwa rinoonekwa nemivare*)” are common. However, with the advent of HIV/AIDS, such behaviours have been put under a spotlight. Not surprisingly then, too many children wrongly believe that it was their father, not their mother, who caused the divorce by being unfaithful or by falling in love with someone else (Bassoff, 1994a; Black, 1993; Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1992; Flaake, 1993; Flynn & Hutchinson, 1993; Thurer, 1994; Tolman, 1991). And sadly it seems that too many children end up with little or no

relationship with their father after divorce partly because they have such idealistic notions about mothers and motherhood (Ackerman, 1996; Berman, 1992; Block, 1996; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Karen, 1994; Miller, 1994; Parke, 1996; Parker, 1996; Scarf, 1995; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Warshak, 1992).

The legal system's treatment of divorced fathers

Our idealised beliefs about motherhood and about men's inferiority as parents are also reflected in our divorce laws. Too few fathers are considered equal to mothers in the standard divorce agreement. Almost 90% of mothers are awarded full custody, while most fathers are restricted to two-weekend "visits" each month and scattered vacation days. Indeed a number of fathers do not fight for joint custody or for more time with their children because they know how unlikely it is that they will be granted equal rights as parents. In other words, divorce laws still tend to reinforce the idea that what children need most from their divorced father is his money, not his involvement in their daily lives (Farrell, 1994; Friedman, 1994; Griswold, 1993; Parke, 1996; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1994; Pruett, 1992; Warshak, 1992).

Partly because the law gives most mothers the legal right to move whenever and wherever they want, 40% of divorced fathers do not live in the same state with their children (Bender & Brannon, 1994). Not surprisingly then, many divorced fathers cannot see their children more often because they live so far apart (Bender & Brannon, 1994; Blau, 1994; Depner & Bray, 1993; Kierman, 1992,

Parke, 1996). Fortunately though, if the divorced father has managed to maintain his relationship with his children, as teenagers the kids say that the quality of their relationship with their father is far more important than how much time they actually spend with him (Amato & Rezac, 1994; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1997). Nevertheless, there is a growing demand for changing our divorce laws and adopting a zero tolerance for gender discrimination and gender based violence. The advantage is that fathers will have a better chance of staying bonded to their children (Barnett & Rivers. 1996; Cohen. 1994; Farrell. 1994; Pleck. 1997).

Mother's and father's parenting style

The father's relationship with his children can also be influenced by how different or how alike his style of parenting is to their mother's. When both parents are similar in terms of setting limits and disciplining the children, then the father isn't as likely to end up being criticized or shunned. But in cases where the mother continually excuses and tolerates the children's infantile, aggressive, or inappropriate behavior, then the father can come across as much too uptight, inflexible, or demanding. Especially as teenagers, children in such situations sometimes pull away from their father after the divorce in part because he has higher expectations for them and is willing to discipline and to stand up to them when they are out of line (Beer, 1992; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1997; Depner & Bray, 1993; Jones & Schiller, 1992; Pipher, 1994).

The bad news for many divorced fathers is that many mothers abdicate too much power and control to their children - especially if the mother hasn't remarried and especially if the child is a boy. And sadly, these children often end up less socially mature, less self-reliant, less self-disciplined, and less psychologically well-adjusted than their peers (Blau, 1994; Brooks-Gunn, 1994; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1997; Depner & Bray, 1993; Emery, 1994; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Pasley, Ihinger-Tallman, & Lofquist, 1994; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994; Warshak, 1992; Weiss, 1994).

These differences in parenting styles after divorce are not especially surprising, however, since it is often the father who is primarily responsible for setting the limits, encouraging self-control, and disciplining the children in married families (Caron, 1995b; Lamb, 1997; Larson, 1993; Montemayor, McKenry, & Julian, 1993; Parke, 1996; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Snarey, 1993). Moreover, even well-educated mothers with ample money after their divorce often provide too little supervision, household order, and discipline as single parents (Beer, 1992; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1997; Depner & Bray, 1993; Hetherington, 1991; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Parke, 1996; Pasley, Ihinger-Tallman, & Lofquist, 1994; Pipher, 1994; Todorski, 1995; Wallerstein, 1991). It has also been shown that regardless of income, education, or marital status, the woman who did not have a secure, loving relationship with her own parents while she was growing up is the most likely to be overly indulgent and overly submissive with her own children (Ainsworth & Eichberg, 1991; Main,

1993; Pianta, Egeland, & Stroufe, 1990; Sameroff & Emde, 1989; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994; Todorski, 1995). This then has a bearing on how they interact with their ex spouse and their newweds.

This certainly isn't to say that divorced mothers are always more indulgent and more lax than divorced fathers. In fact, whichever parent feels the guiltiest about the divorce is often the one who does the worst job when it comes to setting limits, saying "no" to, or disciplining the children (Ahrns, 1994; Berman, 1992; Chapman, Price, & Serovich, 1995; Gottlieb, 1995). And whichever parent is guilt-ridden often goes to great lengths to deny that a deeply troubled child has any problems whatsoever (Ambert, 1996; Brockner, Dreman & Aldor, 1994; Harder, 1992; Lerner, 1993; Lengua, Wolchik, & Braver, 1995; Minuchin & Nichols, 1994; Warshak, 1992).

The Mother's attitude towards the father

When it comes to how close children and their fathers are after divorce perhaps the single most important factor is the mother's attitude towards the father. That is, fathers and children usually remain close only if the mother actively encourages and facilitates their relationship. This isn't to say that mothers always recognize how much power they have in this regard; nor that most mothers intentionally set out to hard the father's relationship with the children. Nevertheless, after divorce too many mothers do not support and may even work against the father-child relationship. As opinionated by Berman, (1992: 102), adult children often put the situation this way: "I wish my mother had allowed

me to like my father without guilt and that she hadn't made so many negative comments about him". Einstein (1994: 89) also concurred when he echoed the sentiments of these children as follows, "Her tearing down of my father made me obsessed with finding him. When at 18 I did, I learned that there was a positive side to him that my mother had never told us about". In tandem with the first authorities, Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1989: 193) reported that one child lamented, "I remember I hurt my dad over and over again because mom filled me with so many ideas that he was a bad person". This then may strain relationships between the father and his new wife if he had not disclosed that he has children from the previous relationship. Research also indicates that there are even mothers who have gone so far as to offer to return some of the child support money if the father will agree to spend *less* time with the children (Pruett, 1992). As one commentator put it, many men who are accused of being "deadbeat dads" are in fact "beat-dead dads" whose former wives have dead-bolted the kids' hearts against them (Shectan 1991). In other words, too many divorced fathers end up with little or no relationship with their children in part because the mother has not been supportive (Ahrons, 1994; Bender & Brannon, 1994; Blau, 1994; Braver, 1993; Buehler & Ryan, 1994; Depner & Bray, 1993; Dudley, 1991; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Ganong & Coleman, 1994; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Hoffman, 1995; Hoffman & Ledford, 1995; Mandell, 1995; Wallerstein, 1991; Warshak, 1992). However, when the child resurfaces tension erupts within the stepfamily. These children are likely to

have those bad memories about their father revived should anything go amiss once they have joined the father and his new found.

This isn't to say that there aren't fathers who abandon their children after divorce no matter how hard the mothers work to keep these relationships alive. And this isn't to say that there aren't divorced mothers who dedicate themselves to strengthening the father's bond with their children. As one divorced woman explains in Berman (1992:227): "My mother forced me to make a choice between her and my dad when they divorced, so I see to it that my kids spend time with their dad and stepmom." And another mother changed jobs and moved to a new town just so her ex husband could have joint custody of their two sons. Later she even allowed the boys to live with their father part-time even though he was not paying her any child support (Blakely, 1994). So there are many women who consider themselves to be "good" mothers only when they succeed in keeping the children and their father closely bonded after a divorce (Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1992; Glickman, 1993; Morrison, 1995).

How Divorced Mothers Influence the Father-Child Relationship

But exactly how do mothers help or hinder the father's relationship with their children after divorce? And what kinds of behavior can therapists, teachers, and friends encourage the mother to develop that might help fathers and children maintain good relationships after the parents divorce?

Messages about the father's parenting

To begin with, the mother can either encourage or discourage the children to believe that their father is a good parent. Negatively, the mother's seemingly harmless jokes or casual remarks about the father's abilities as a parent can lead the children to believe that she is the far superior parent. According to Bassoff, (1994: 106) one adult child put it: "I was made to believe that my mom was the competent parent and my father was nothing but a buffoon". But positively, the mother can continue to let the children know that she believes their father is a good parent, regardless of how she might have felt about him as a spouse. Sadly, divorced mothers too often portray the father as the vastly inferior or as a worthless parent (Ahrns, 1994; Bassoff, 1994b; Bassoff, 1994a; Beer, 1992; Berman, 1992; Blankenhorn, 1994; Farrell, 1994; Blau, 1994; Hoffman, 1995; Wallerstein, 1991; Warshak, 1992).

Of course, some women are much more willing than others to give their husband or ex-husband credit for what he actually does as a father. For example, mothers who have always worked full time outside the home usually give the father much more credit than do full time housewives (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1994; Pleck, 1997). And mothers who had good relationships with their own fathers tend to be the most complimentary of their own husband or ex-husband as fathers (Caplan, 1990; Pleck, 1997; Sameroff & Emde, 1989; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994; Todorski, 1995). Likewise, women who believe that fathers are just as important as mothers for a child's well-being are usually the least critical of their husband as a father (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Blakely, 1994; Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1992; Glickman, 1993; Pleck, 1997;). And, for

whatever reason, women are generally less likely than men to give the other credit for what they actually do in raising the children (Clingempeel, Colyar, & Hetherington, 1994; Cohen, 1994; Deutsch, 1993; Teachman, 1991).

In this vein, one of the ways in which children learn how their mother feels about their father as a parent is through her ways of sharing information to him. For example, a mother can imply that their father is insensitive and harsh by making such comments as: "Don't let your dad find out that your brother is still coming home every weekend from college because he'll get mad." , "It's a good thing your dad doesn't know about this!" or "I promise not to tell your dad about this." Over time, keeping secrets and withholding information from the father can build an alliance between the children and their mother that works against him and his newlywed. In contrast, the mother can strengthen the father's image as a compassionate, sensitive, and valuable parent by refusing to keep secrets or withhold information from him (Black, 1993; Lerner, 1993; Miller, 1994; Minuchin & Nichols. 1994; Scarf, 1995).

Along the same lines, the mother can let the children know that she sees their father as a competent, skillful parent by not continually advising, overseeing, or criticising his ways of relating to the children. A number of divorced fathers say they become closer to their children after the divorce because the mother is no longer there to correct, supervise, and criticise them as parents (Ahrons, 1994; Depner & Bray, 1993; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1994; Van Wert, 1992). Unfortunately some men who were the most involved with their children before

divorce end up the least involved after divorce. In these cases it seems that the most involved father has more conflicts with his ex-wife over the children than the man who was not a very involved father before the divorce.

Financial Matters

The mother also influences the father's relationship with their children through the messages she sends the children about financial matters. Harmfully, the mother can reinforce the idea that the best way for children to measure their father's love is by how much he gives them financially: "If your father really loved you, he would pay for that." Or the mother can lead children to believe that their father and stepmother deserve no thanks or appreciation for what they give them financially. Sadly, many fathers who buy things for their children that the mother is legally supposed to buy with the child support money seldom get any credit for being so unselfish and generous (Cohen, 1994; Teachman, 1991). In any event, too many fathers end up feeling like these two divorced men do "My kids don't even call me dad. They don't want me to be any part of their life. They just want my money" (Mandell, 1995: 111). "I feel like I'm just a wallet, you know, help pay the bills but not good for much else with my kids" (Maglin & Schneidewind, 1989). In contrast, the mother can encourage the children to appreciate their father's financial support and to recognise that his love should not be measured solely by what he gives them financially. Unfortunately, the father often finds that the mother works against him in these respects, even when he is paying all of his child support and even when the mother is a well-educated

woman with an income of her own (Artlip, Artlip, & Saltzman, 1993; Bender & Brannon, 1994; Ahrons, 1994; Berman, 1992; Blankenhorn, 1994; Blau, 1994; Ganong & Coleman, 1994; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1994; Mandell, 1995; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994).

A mother can also make the father look good or bad in the children's eyes when it comes to giving him some say in how his child support money is being spent. Positively, the mother can let the children know that it's perfectly alright with her for their father to make suggestions about how his money is spent. But negatively the mother can make the children feel that their father is doing something wrong or is being mean to her if he ever asks questions about or disagrees with how his money is being spent. As already mentioned, those mothers who do allow the father to have some voice in how his money is spent usually find that he spends more time with the children and voluntarily spends additional money on them.

Mothers can also convey either positive or negative messages in regard to money that the father sends the children after age 18 when he is no longer legally required to support them. Even in cases where the children have refused to have anything to do with their father for years, the mother sometimes conveys that she believes he is being mean and selfish if he does not send money for such things as college, cars, and weddings (Ambert, 1996; Beer, 1992; Bender & Brannon, 1994; Einstein, 1994; Jones & Schiller, 1992; White, 1994). Recognising this, some states have legislated that a divorced father is not

required to send money to those children past the age of 18 who have alienated themselves from him. Some researchers have even suggested that part of the reason why some children see more of their divorced father if he is well-educated than if he is poorly educated is because they need his money beyond the age of 18 when he is no longer legally required to support them (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990). Given the ways in which money affects their relationships, many divorced fathers end up wondering: How much would my kids have to do with me if I wasn't giving them this money? Why is it that no matter how much I do for them financially, they never feel it's enough and they rarely thank me? Why do they expect so little from their mother financially when they expect so much from me?

Finally, the mother presents the father in either a positive or a negative light by what she leads the children to believe about how he has treated her financially. She can convey that their father was fair and generous with her in their divorce agreement. Or she can portray him as selfish, greedy or mean-spirited. For example, without criticising him outright, a mother can imply that the father mistreated her if she often seems sad or "jokes" about her not being able to afford nice clothes or a nice house like his. And even in cases where the father is actually paying for almost all of the children's expenses, the mother can make the children believe that their financial situation is far worse than it is. Regardless of how well-educated the mother is or how much money she receives from the father, she can still send children potentially damaging messages such as: "I don't know why your dad wants me to pay for part of your college when

he makes more money than I do.” or “If it weren’t for your dad, I’d have a better job now.” In contrast, even when she did not get her fair share financially in the divorce, the mother can keep her anger to herself rather than risk hurting the children’s relationship with their father. Unfortunately, far too many children get the message that their father mistreated their mother financially (Ahrns, 1994; Beer, 1992; Berman, 1992; Blau, 1994; Cohen, 1994; Depner & Bray, 1993; Guttman, 1993; Hoffman, 1995; Martin & Martin, 1992; Warshak, 1992).

This certainly does not mean that all divorced mothers make the fathers look bad when it comes to financial matters. Nor does it mean that the father’s sending money is always a concern for the divorced mother. For example, some mothers who are legally entitled to receive child support refuse to take any money from their former husband (Blakely, 1994; Crosby, 1993; Glickman, 1993). For Crosby (1993:107) one mother said: "I get a great deal of satisfaction out of knowing that I am supporting myself and my daughter". And there are divorced mothers who realise that the anger they feel over financial matters after a divorce is often a result of their own choices during the marriage. In another episode, Crytser (1990:104) reported that one such mother put it as: "I could have avoided much of my anger and what I put the kids through if I had just chosen to be more financially self-sufficient throughout the years of my marriage"

Mother’s Self-Reliance

Leaving aside financial matters, a mother can also strengthen or weaken the father’s position by how self-reliant and emotionally independent she appears to

be. The mother who shows the children that she can take care of herself emotionally, has a satisfying life apart from them, and does not need or want to be mothered or pitied by them makes it easier for them to maintain a relationship with their father. In contrast, the mother whose children generally feel sorry and responsible for her because they see her as so dependent, needy, and fragile can inadvertently encourage them to feel disloyal and guilty about being close to their father. In support of the above argument, Maine (1993:116) revealed that one adult child put it, "I felt guilty all the time - guilty because I was angry with mom for needing me so much and guilty for wanting more time with my dad."

In extreme cases a mother and child can become so overly dependent on one another and so overly involved in one another's lives that they are referred to as being "enmeshed". In such cases, the parent and child react and think almost as if they were one person. Divorced women who have not remarried are the most likely to be enmeshed with a child (Amato, Rezac, & Booth, 1995; Ambert, 1996; Bassoff, 1994a; Berman, 1992; Dreman & Aldor, 1994; Emery, 1994; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Guttman, 1993; Hetherington, 1991; Minuchin & Nichols, 1994; Pittman, 1993; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Warshak, 1992). Similarly, those women who did not have close relationships with their own parents while they were growing up tend to be the most enmeshed with and overly dependent on their own children (Ainsworth & Eichberg, 1991; Karen, 1994; Main, 1993; Miller, 1994; Sameroff & Emde, 1989; Scarf, 1995; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994; Todorski, 1995). A mother is also the most likely to become enmeshed with a child who has a chronic illness such as

asthma or epilepsy (Ambert, 1996; Cohen, 1990; Minuchin, 1995; Minuchin & Nichols, 1994).

In any case, even though many enmeshed children, most of whom are boys, are very angry at their mother for reasons having to do with the divorce, they still tend to side with her against their father, sometimes rejecting him altogether. And even when the mother and children are not enmeshed, after a divorce the children's relationship with their father too often suffers if the mother is emotionally fragile, needy, and dependent in ways that make the children feel that they need to protect, to pity, and to take care of her (Ackerman, 1996; Bassoff, 1994a; Berman, 1992; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1997; Caron, 1995b; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Pittman, 1993; Todorski, 1995; Wallerstein, 1991; Warshak, 1992; Weiss, 1994).

The Father's Remarriage

The mother also affects the father's relationship with the children by what she says and does when he remarries. Although 80% of all parents remarry within four or five years after their divorce, the father usually remarries first (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Cherlin, 1992). And since 90% of children live with their mother after divorce, her feelings about his marriage and about his wife are easy to detect. Unfortunately what most children see is that their mother is not happy about their father getting married again, in many cases, even when the mother initiated the divorce or left the marriage for another man. Although she may be unaware of the negative impact she is having, the mother too often reacts in

ways that weaken the children's relationship with their father when he remarries (Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1994; Nielsen, 1998; Scarf, 1995; Todorski, 1995; Visher & Visher, 1996; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

The mother's reactions take many forms. And many of her feelings and opinions are conveyed most powerfully in nonverbal ways. For example this can be done through her tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. Negatively, the mother can send children the message that because their father has remarried, he is no longer being nice to her. In reality, what the mother is often upset about is that her ex-husband is no longer willing to behave as if they were still married to each other. For example, until he remarried, one father explained how his ex-wife continued to violate his privacy: "Their mother would walk right into my house when she came to pick the kids up, help herself to a cold drink, use the bathroom, and make a phone call" (Visher & Visher, 1991, p. 197). In many cases then, the children do not understand that their father is not "being mean" to their mother, but is behaving, as a loving husband should in regard to his new marriage. For example, some mothers try to engage the ex-husband in lengthy or daily discussions about very inconsequential events in the children's lives. In these cases, the mother is often trying to continue an intimate, marriage-like relationship and becomes angry when her ex-husband refuses to relate to her this way (Dozier, 1993). Unfortunately though, some children think their father is mistreating their mother when he is doing the kinds of things necessary to create a private and separate life.

On the other hand, the mother can support the father-child bond by not planting ideas that might cause the children to see their father or his wife in a negative light. For example, the mother can refuse to make such comments as these in front of the children: "Your dad was nicer before he met her.", "Your dad wasn't cheap and selfish before she came along." or "I don't know what's come over your father since they got married." Unfortunately, in many cases the father's wife is continually blamed for the ongoing problems in everyone's lives. As two stepmothers explain: "My stepkids blame me for every problem their mother has. Supposedly I even prevent their dad from giving her more money." and "Their mother always bad-mouthed me, but I never knew exactly what she said, so I couldn't defend myself" (Jones & Schiller, 1992:51 & 109). Fortunately, some mothers go to great lengths to reassure the children that they should never feel guilty or disloyal for enjoying their father or his wife. Sadly though, many children end up feeling the stress represented by this stepdaughter's remark: "I didn't dare say anything good about my stepmother to my mom even though my mother divorced my dad" (Berman, 1992:159). Without saying so directly, a mother can still let the children know that she feels sad, insecure, lonely, hurt, or jealous when they are with their father and stepmother. Some may even go so far as to suggest that the children should have had the final say over whether or not their father should have gotten married, by making such remarks as: "I won't get married again unless you kids tell me it's ok with you." , "I don't know why they didn't wait longer to get married." or "Your dad always does what's best for him no matter how it affects us."

Faulty memories and family myths

Neilsen (2004) asserted that if a man was a good father while he was married to their mother, then won't his children's happy memories of him offset the other factors that might work against their relationship after a divorce? No, not necessarily. Amazingly, even when a man has been a good father, it is still possible for his children's memories to work against him. Why? How? Part of the answer lies in what researchers are teaching us about how human memory actually operates (Gilovich, 1991; Grimm, 1995; Lown & Dolan, 1994; Nisbett & Ross, 1991; Schacter, 1996). And other answers involve our need to create consistent stories about our lives, even when we have to distort the truth and invent memories about things that never happened (Gergen, 1992; Howard, 1991; Miller, 1990; Schacter, 1996).

To begin with, our memories, especially memories about what happened in childhood, are largely shaped by what other people tell us, not by what we ourselves actually saw or heard. In fact, what other people tell us about our childhood can literally make us "remember" things that *never* happened. Making things even more complicated, we seldom remember *how* or *when* a particular memory came about. That is, we seldom remember who told us the stories that shape our memories or under what circumstances they told us these things. For example, the negative things that you "remember" about your father might actually have come from what your mother told you *during or after* their divorce. Likewise, we construct memories bit by bit in erratic ways. Our

memories sometimes take great leaps across time, omitting certain crucial events along the way. And events which actually had no relationship to one another or which actually occurred far apart end up being remembered in ways that bare very little resemblance to what really happened. Even our memories of recent events can be distorted in such ways. We also patch scraps of information from the past together and force them to fit the stories that we have been told by people we love and trust. As a result, a family can bury itself in its own fairy dust by creating false memories about people or events that threaten what the family *wants* to believe.

More troubling still, we tend to forget and to distort the memories that create the most pain or most shame, especially when those memories involve a parent. And we often forget and distort the memories about whichever parent did the most damage to us or to our family. Especially as young children, we do not want to acknowledge that our parents do such things as commit adultery, abuse drugs, lie, cheat, or physically abuse us. Moreover, we have an especially difficult time remembering or accepting painful truths about our mothers for fear of ngozi the avenging spirit. So after our parents' divorce, we too often end up wedded to inaccurate, negative memories about our fathers (Ackerman, 1996; Berman, 1992; Block, 1996; Karen, 1994; Main, 1993; Miller, 1994; Minuchin & Nichols, 1994).

Our memories can also fool us because we have the tendency to create a consistent, logical “story” about our lives, a story that supposedly explains the past and the present in an organised, predictable way. The story around which we organise our memories also tends to be one that makes us feel good about ourselves and that cast the people we happen to like in the most favorable light. That is, we have a hard time remembering those situations in which someone we dislike actually said and did “good” things. We often develop memories that confirm *only* what we *want* to believe, rather than what actually happened. So for example, if a son has created a story about the past in which his mother is “a saint” and his father or stepmother is “evil”, then his memories will conform to that vision, regardless of the facts. As one stepmother explains: "My stepson is determined to prove that his father and I have ruined his life. Everything he does to destroy his own life is completely his father's fault and nobody can persuade him otherwise" (Jones & Schiller, 1992:32). In short, when it comes to our memories and our beliefs, we tend to “see it only *after* we are *ready* to believe it”.

Finally, what we remember about the past is heavily influenced by how we are feeling about our present lives. That is, people with serious social, emotional or psychological problems tend to remember and interpret the past in the most negative, most inaccurate ways (Gergen, 1992; Harshaw, 1997). Young people who are clinically depressed or who have personality disorders rarely recall what was good about their parents or their childhood, and they rarely let go of their angry, negative memories even when confronted with absolute proof that

those memories are completely untrue (Knox & Zusman, 2001; Weiner, 1992). Given this, the best chance a divorced father has for being remembered accurately is when his children are relatively happy, well-adjusted people who are basically satisfied with their lives. This isn't to say that everything we remember is untrue. Nevertheless, we should not assume that our memories alone are accurate proof of what really happened or of what a person was really like, especially not when it comes to such volatile events as our parents' divorce or our perceptions of a father we may seldom or never see after that divorce.

Given how our memories are formed and influenced, the divorced father can often be at a disadvantage when it comes to what his children do and do not remember. To begin with, since 90% of all children live with their mother after divorce, it stands to reason that she has the most power to shape and to create memories, memories about the father, about the divorce and repartnering. And since most children see less of their divorced father as time passes, they may have to rely heavily on their memories to form their opinions of him. Remember too that if it is the mother who feels especially guilty about the divorce, then she is the most likely to distort the truth and to create memories for the children that cast their father in the worst possible light (Ahrns, 1994; Chapman, Price, & Serovich, 1995; Lerner, 1993). Sadly, the myths and inaccurate memories created within our families wield tremendous power over our feelings and behavior towards our parents and stepparents (Black, 1993; Gergen, 1992; Howard, 1991; Lerner, 1993). And sadly, young people in therapy often have to be helped to remember anything loving or good about their father because the

family myths and inaccurate memories have literally erased all positive memories of him (Black, 1993; Block, 1996; Minuchin & Nichols, 1994).

Divorced Fathers and Their Sons

A final factor influencing the father's relationship with the children after divorce is the child's gender. Generally after divorce fathers have a harder time maintaining a close relationship with their sons than with their daughters. Why? To begin with, the divorced mother is more likely to say and do things around her son that damage his relationship with his father and his new wife (Depner & Bray, 1993; Greene & Leslie, 1989; Kalter, 1990; Pianta, Egeland, & Stroufe, 1990; Thomas & Forehand, 1993; Wallerstein, 1991; Warshak, 1992). As one expert on children of divorce sums up the research, "A mother's negative opinions of her former spouse, if conveyed to her son, can do more harm to him than the lack of contact with his father" (Warshak, 1992:163). Also the son is more apt than the daughter to become overly involved or even enmeshed with his mother in ways that hurt his relationship with his father and his new wife, especially when the mother has not remarried (Corneau, 1991; Emery, 1994; Guttman, 1993; Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994; Wallerstein, 1991). Then too, the son seems to be especially affected by a divorced mother's bad moods, her depression, and her conflicts with his father (Capaldi, Forgatch, & Crosby, 1994; Colten, Gore, & Aseltine, 1991; Emery, 1994; Pianta, Egeland, & Stroufe, 1990; Wallerstein, 1991).

Finally, sons have more serious psychological and social problems than daughters from childhood on, whether or not their parents divorce. And many of these sons' problems are related to their being too close and too dependent on their mother and too distant emotionally from their father. In these families the mother is more likely to be the parent who tolerates and makes excuses for the son's dysfunctional, infantile behavior. When these parents divorce then, the troubled son is more likely to withdraw from his father and seek refuge with his mother (Berman, 1992; Corneau, 1991; Guttman, 1993; Hetherington, 1991; Pittman, 1993).

2.4 MOTHERS WHO SUPPORT THE FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Although there is no reliable way to predict which divorced mothers will be the most supportive of the father's relationship with the children, there are a number of characteristics that supportive mothers usually have in common. This is in the author's opinion, will have positive impacts on the stepparenting experience.

Mother's Education

Contrary to what we might expect, a well-educated mother does *not* necessarily make the father's relationship with the children better than does a less-educated mother. In fact, well-educated mothers often make the situation more stressful. Why? First, as already discussed, well-educated white women tend to have the most possessive, most jealous attitudes about mothering. In Zimbabwe, the most

educated women are enlightened to challenge the patriarchal nature of society including their ability to contest child custody and maintenance. Second, a well-educated mother is often the angriest and most resentful after divorce because her standard of living generally takes the greatest plunge and because she is often forced to go to work full-time outside the home (Cohen, 1994; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Wagner, 1993). Third, just because a mother is well-educated does not mean that she will be free from the kinds of situations that often make the father's relationship with the children more problematic. That is, there are well-educated mothers who are clinically depressed or chronically unhappy with their lives after divorce (Ahrons, 1994; Karen, 1994; Minuchin & Nichols, 1994; Radke-Yarrow, 1991), who have such poor relationships with their own parents that they relate to their own children in ways that can hurt the father's bond with the children (Ainsworth & Eichberg, 1991; Main, 1993; Miller, 1994; Sameroff & Emde, 1989; Scarf, 1995; Todoroki, 1995), and who are too indulgent and lax as single parents (Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1992; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Guttman, 1993; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). In other words, being well-educated is no guarantee that the mother will be supportive of the father's relationship with the children after divorce.

Mother's Perceived Guilt or Ambivalence

How guilty or ambivalent the mother feels about the divorce can also influence how supportive she is of the father's relationship with the children. When a mother does not feel especially guilty or ambivalent about the divorce, she often

has an easier time portraying the father in a positive way to the children and supporting his relationship with them (Ahrons, 1994; Braver, Whitley, & Ng, 1993; Chapman, Price, & Serovich, 1995; Gottlieb, 1995; Guttman, 1993; Lerner, 1993; Minuchin & Nichols, 1994; Martin & Martin, 1992).

Mother's Employment

As already mentioned, when a mother works full time outside the home throughout her marriage, the children and their father are often closer than when the mother is not employed. In part this happens because the father and children generally spend the most time together when both parents are wage-earners and because employed women often relate to their children in ways that make it easier for the father and children to bond. So for example, children often say they feel much closer to their father when both parents are employed than when their mother is a housewife (Richards & Duckett, 1991). In any case, whether the parents remain married or get divorced, fathers and children usually have closer relationships when the mother has always worked outside the home (Blau, 1994; Chira, 1998; Cohen, 1994; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Hetherington, 1991; Larson, 1993; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1994; Morrison, 1995; Lerner & Galambos, 1991; Parke, 1996; Pleck, 1997; Warshak, 1992).

Mother's relationship with her parents

The kind of relationship the mother has with her own parents also seems to influence her feelings about the father's involvement with their children. The

mother who had a close, loving relationship with both of her parents tends to relate to her own children in ways that make it easier for the father and children to be close to one another. In contrast, the mother tends to be overly jealous, critical, and unsupportive of her husband's relationship with their children when she did not have a good relationship with her own father and mother (Ainsworth & Eichberg, 1991; Main, 1993; Miller, 1994; Minuchin, 1995; Pianta, Egeland, & Stroufe, 1990; Sameroff & Emde, 1989; Scarf, 1995; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994; Todorski, 1995).

Mother's marital status

For reasons already discussed, when the divorced mother has remarried, the father and children generally get along best. Although 80% of divorced mothers do remarry within 4 years, the fathers usually remarry first. So at least for a brief period of time, the mother is usually still single when the father remarries. Unfortunately, those mothers who never remarry or who only remarry long after their divorce often have extremely dependent or enmeshed relationships with their children which, in turn, makes it more difficult for the father and children to be close (Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994). But regardless of the reasons, a divorced mother who has remarried is usually the most supportive of the father's relationship with the children (Ahrons, 1994; Ambert, 1996; Beer, 1992;

Berman, 1992; Blau, 1994; Bray & Kelly, 1998; Buehler & Ryan, 1994; Cohen, 1994; Crytser, 1990; Emery, 1994; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991).

Mother's mental health

Finally the mother who is mentally well-adjusted and relatively content with her life after a divorce is usually much more supportive of the father's relationships with the children than the clinically depressed or chronically unhappy woman (Ambert, 1996; Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993; Gottlieb, 1995; Pittman, 1993; Scarf, 1995; Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994; Todorski, 1995).

Use of Proverbs, Metaphor and Idioms in the Zimbabwean context

While culture includes everything individuals learn from conception to death, there is no guarantee that every generation will inherit from previous generations. According to Bourdillon (1993:7), "members of each generation change what they think needs changing, and add new ideas from other peoples they meet." In line with this assertion, metaphors of stepparenting can be changed to meet the ever-changing needs of a society. The need to capitalise on any situations that will have arisen was found to be the crux of the matter in the following proverbs as espoused by Bourdillon (1993:8) "*Ukashaya nyama kumavhiyiro hauchaiwani kumba.*" (lit. If you do not get meat where an ox was

killed, you should not expect any in the house). These words were usually cited by elderly men to express the wisdom of the ancestors. Thus, Shona proverbs can also be insightful in showing how people interact, relate and behave in a stepfamily. Another avenue through which we can explore humanity and human experience is the use of proverbs in the human factor approach to sport. As opined by Mudariki (2006) a sense of oneness and national unity can be ushered by such proverbs as “*Chara chimwe hachitswanyi inda.*” (lit. One finger can not crush a louse). On the same note, stepparenting issues can not be solved or dealt with by an individual. Any wrong can be easily forgotten by the wrongdoer than by the recipient as shown by the following proverb “*Chinokanganwa idemo, chitsiga kana muti watemwa hachikanganwi* (lit. It is easy for the axe to forget that it once cut a tree, but the tree stump is a permanent reminder of the results of its work). This proverb may illustrate the reluctance for people to forgive one another, “*kusaregererana*” particularly between stepparents and stepchildren and stepparents and biological parents. Such a scenario illuminates the impending discourses, as well as the verbal and non-verbal exchanges likely to characterise the stepfamily relational dynamics.

In addition, stepmothers can use the following proverb to justify their ill treatment of stepchildren. This may be marked by failure to leave some food for them, after the stepchildren have gone to play elsewhere. “*Mwana wehuku anodya ndearipo*” or “*Mwana wehuku anodya ndeari munyasi.*” (lit. A hen’s pullet which feeds is that one which is closer by when the mother finds some worm or locust). Therefore, proximity to the mother, who is highly likely to be

associated with a source of food, is an advantage to the biological children than it is to the stepchildren who may also have been sent on some errand.

Stereotyping widows, widowers and their offspring in Shona society.

According to Chitauro-Mawema (2003), the way people use language is a key in understanding of the nature and status of women and men. In particular, many attributes of women are transmitted through language. In her study to analyse Shona people's attitudes towards single motherhood and children born and raised by single mothers, Chitauro-Mawema (2003) discovered that these women and their children are accorded second citizenship status. The following terms were used to describe the single mothers's child/children(*mwana /vana*): *chipo* (gift), *chikomborero*(blessing), *hazvinei* (it does not matter), *mugove* (it is one's share), *ma(gora)* (wild cat(s), *murambiwa* (rejected), *wedondo* (of the forest), *chemodondo* (thing of the forest/bush). In tandem, Pongweni (1983) and Mawema (1999) concur that the names given to the children reflect the circumstances of both the mother and then child at the time of birth.

Mberi 2003) also illustrated that metaphors characterise Bantu and Shona language on a daily basis. For Mberi such terms as *Tendai ishumba pabasa* (Tendai is a lion at work), *murume uyu ibere* (this man is a hyena), and *imbwa nyoro ndidzo tsengi dzamatovo* (soft dogs are the ones that chew animal skins) are common in daily utterances. These metaphors help to bring about the 'thisness' of that and the 'thatness' of this. The current study will also explore

how the Shona from Gutu and Harare, depict human interaction through metaphors and stereotypic terms.

CONCLUSION

All in all, then the stepparent would probably be less stressed if everyone saw the stepparent and the stepchildren as friends. Not only does this harmony need to be viewed from the stepparent –stepchild relationship mode, but also from a biological parent –biological child perspective. The stepparent should not also be viewed as an extra parent. Therefore the stepparent would not probably feel disheartened if he/ she is accepted from the outset that the relationship is formed.

2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has looked at theoretical explanations for stressful stepparenting experiences and perceived responsibilities of biological mothers, biological mothers and stepparents of either gender in determining stepfamily living. Attempts have also been made to explain how stepparents and living in a stepfamily are viewed from a community and individual level. The following chapter describes the methodology used in the present study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the study design and procedures, population and sample, data collection and ethical considerations.

3.1 The research design

This study was explorative in nature and used the grounded theory approach. The researcher chose the explorative and grounded theory method because

explorative studies which use grounded theory describe and explore specific phenomena or variables in detail. Such studies also find in-depth relationships between variables and phenomena. Pilcher (1990) maintains that explorative research describes and explores a situation in detail, using specific scientific methods for the purpose. Bryman and Crammer (1993) posit that explorative studies are used to extract attitudes and opinions from a sizeable sample of respondents. Hence the grounded theory was appropriate for the present study.

The study was also mainly qualitative with some quantitative demographic data about the respondents collected. Adopting the grounded theory enabled an in-depth investigation of community attitudes, perceptions, feelings, beliefs, values, knowledge and behaviour patterns and practices both past and present in relation to stepparenting.

3.2.Pilot study.

A pilot study was conducted at the Chihambakwe business centre in Gutu and in Tafara high-density suburb in Harare. A total of six stepparents, four Key Informants and two focus group discussions were done in each of the research sites. The results of the pilot study helped the researcher to reformulate the questions. From the pilot study, it was found that not all stepparents experience stepparenting challenges. This helped the researcher to include questions like “Has anything good come out of being a stepparent? What is it?”, in the face-to-

face interviews with the stepparents in the main study. The pilot study also helped the researcher to approximate the time and to identify any other areas critical to stepparenting that had not been yet captured in the initial version of the instrument. These included legal implications such as matters of abuse within the institution and skills developments.

3.2.1 How the pilot study was done

The pilot study for the current study used the systematic walkabout as a method during the preliminary visit to the study sites.

3.2.2 Systematic walkabout and what it is

This method is an adaptation of the transect, (a method within Participatory Rural Appraisal)) in which the researcher or study team spends one to four hours (depending on the distance to be covered) walking across the study site(s) in a meandering fashion. This was done alone, but is usually done in pairs or in triplets (not too many in a group to avoid attracting the unnecessary attention), to absorb the atmosphere of the study site(s) as the researcher(s) walk up and down the roads and foot paths, stopping to greet people of all walks of life. Spontaneous informal conversations and discussions on family life, family relations and related topics were done. Some of these conversations were done at places where people normally gather. These included water sources (for example wells and boreholes), grinding mills, market places, and townships, bottle stores. This systematic walkabout gave the researcher the opportunity to

identify key informants (for example community leaders, traditional healers, ward councilors etc). This exercise also enabled the researcher to identify individual stepparents, build rapport and make logistical arrangements prior to the main study interview dates.

3.2.3 Rationale for conducting the systematic walkabout

The purpose of the systematic walkabout was two-fold:

- To familiarise the researcher with the physical context in which stepparenting occurs. The specific objective was to find out where stepparents are located, and to make conversations on family relations in the community.
- To observe how people behave and interact with each other as they go about their daily routes of fetching water, tilling land, caring for children cleaning their homes. This gave the researcher an insight into what people do when they are not at workplaces, business meetings, community meetings and gatherings.

3.2.4 Instruments.

A checklist of what to look for was used. This spot-check observation schedule is shown in the appendix. The spot-check observation schedule also included some of the research question as contained in the interview guides. Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Key Informant Interview (KII) and In-depth narrative interview (IDN) interview guides were developed and used.

3.2.5 Procedure

1. The systematic walkabouts were done at dawn or dusk. I assumed that most of the family relations/ interactions occur very early in the morning or late in the afternoons or early in the evening. I thought that it was unlikely to observe many relevant activities in the middle of the day. The walkabouts were also done during midday in addition to the times stated above.

2. I looked and listened to people as they went about their normal life business.

3. I jotted down details of what I observed and made some notes of the things that were said that were pertinent to community perceptions towards stepparenting, stepparenting issues and coping strategies used by stepparents. The issues either emanated from my conversations with the people or from people's own conversations and interactions.

3.2.6 Ethical considerations

I was careful to observe local customs and social rules. I bore in mind that in some communities, it is not acceptable for women and children to walk about in the evening or walk about and talk to people they do not know. I tried to be sensitive to the acceptability of my gender (being male) by observing some of these rules. To that end the systematic walkabouts were done late in the afternoon or during the day where possible. During these embryonic stages of the study, I tried to balance between waving the spot-check schedule and or interview guides and discretely using them only as reminders, which I referred

to if need arose. The importance of this ethical consideration was to avoid raising the community's suspicion and make mistakes that may have endangered the rapport with the study population before a study sample can be extracted from this population.

3.3 Selection of research sites for the main study

The selection of the study sites was done with a view that both rural and urban communities, rural proper and resettlement areas, low density and high-density suburbs be incorporated in the study. The assumption was that there were more prevalent and easily identifiable cases of stepchild ill treatment by stepparents in rural than in urban areas and in high-density than in low-density suburbs. In order for the research to be manageable, I decided that two sites for the rural setting of Gutu and two sites for the urban setting of Harare were identified. These were Mukaro and Mushaviri and Highfield and Waterfalls respectively

I further saw the need to select a "rural proper", Mukaro and a resettlement area, Mushaviri in Gutu to be potential study sites. In Gutu district, Mukaro, a traditionally rural community was chosen as well as Mushaviri, a resettlement community, formed after independence was also chosen. These two communities were chosen because the interaction between community members was thought to vary greatly. The traditional rural community members were expected to interact more frequently than their resettlement counterparts who are expected to be engaged more in commercial agriculture. Another factor that I thought distinguished Mushaviri and Mukaro was that the houses of the people

in Mukaro are close (densely) populated whereas those of the inhabitants of Mushaviri are sparsely populated (refer to appendix for the maps of the research sites).

In Harare, Highfield represented high-density suburbs, while Waterfalls represented low-density suburbs. The two were chosen for convenience. Both have orphanage homes, where it is expected to find orphans from troubled families inclusive of stepfamilies. These research sites were chosen for the prevalence of street children in towns purported to be running away from abuse in stepfamilies (Muchini and Nyandiya –Bundy 1991) and largely to get an in-depth understanding of stepparenting and to enable comparison along rural and urban dimensions. The suburbs were just handpicked; there were no specific reasons why they were chosen instead of others. The researcher also considered the convenience and accessibility of the research sites. It was found quite easier to traverse from one research site to another even by foot on the same day and conduct interviews in both the rural and urban settings. The researcher also obtained the maps of the potential research sites from the Surveyor General's Offices in Harare.

3.4 Sampling.

The present study being qualitative and explorative in nature, aimed to get a convenience sample of respondents. In an attempt to obtain this convenient sample I adopted purposive sampling in which accidental sampling, that is the availability of the respondent to take part in the research was used for recruiting

focus group discussion (FGD) respondents and key informants. The respondents for in-depth narrative interviews were recruited through purposive, accidental sampling and snowballing, in which the various identified individuals referred the researcher to other individuals with similar characteristics (being stepparents).

3.4.1 Identification And Recruitment Of Respondents.

After the selection of the research sites, I purposively identified specific potential areas where to find the respondents from the maps. In the sections below I give details of how respondents for each phase of the research were identified and subsequently recruited.

3.4.1.1 Rationale for the selection / choice of respondents or sample

Focus group discussion respondents.

The respondents were people from the general populace. To be included in the sample the respondent would have shown their willingness to take part in the study after a brief description of the study by the researcher, during which the aims of the study and ethical issues were outlined. The aim of the FGDs was to explore community perceptions pertaining to stepparenting, stepfamily life and stepfamily interaction patterns. The sample consisted of male and female

members of the community. A total of twenty (20) FGDs, each consisting on average eight respondents, were conducted. Of these, 10 were drawn from Gutu while another 10 were done in Harare. This translated into 160 respondents for FGDs. The members of the general populace were chosen because it was thought that they represented the community at large and had no specific feature for inclusion save for their willingness to participate as earlier stated above.

Identifying and selecting respondents for focus group discussions (FGDs).

After selection of the research sites, I purposively identified shopping centers, grinding mills, churches, wells, community gathering places, as specific target sites where more than one individual are likely to be found for prolonged periods of at least thirty minutes.

I went to these potential selected research sites. At each shopping centre, the shopkeeper was identified. After a discussion of the purpose of the study, a suitable venue for FGDs was identified with the help of the shopkeeper. The respondents voluntarily participated in the FGDs. Where possible, I also made use of local leaders, (councillors, community workers, community coordinators and mobiliser), church leaders, institutional leaders and traditional leaders to recruit respondents for the FGDs. At grinding mills and market places, I made frequent visits in an attempt to familiarize myself with the politics of the place and the organizational dynamics. This helped to identify informal leaders who could be influential and assist in recruitment of the respondents. The same procedure was followed as described above for shopkeepers.

Basing on the paradigms of participatory action research, participatory rural and participatory urban appraisal and their usefulness in social science research, I designed focus group discussion guides to use in a PRA way. The following key groups were identified considering the sensitivity of the research topic and the power imbalances in society. This was mainly done to empower the respondents to freely express their views without fear of being heard or rebuked there after. Fontes (1995) warns against harming the research participants and their environment. It was in line with these ethical concerns that the following groups were chosen:

- Youths and children's groups
- Church groups, mixed with leaders and the congregation
- Women's groups aged 30 years and below
- Women's groups aged above 30 years
- Schoolteachers
- Police officers
- Men's groups
- Mixed groups of men and women.

Each focus group team had a discussion coordinator, a facilitator (the researcher) and a reporter for writing down the key points of the discussion. This method is a powerful tool for disseminating information about the ongoing research. Therefore the meetings with focus groups were held before key informant interviews and in-depth narrative interviews with stepparents. The key

informant interviews were also conducted first before the in-depth narrative interviews.

Interviewing procedure for focus group discussions

I introduced myself by name and welcomed all respondents to the focus group discussions by saying “*My name is Gwatirera Javangwe. I am a student at the University of Zimbabwe. As part of the requirements for my studies, I am carrying a national study on community relations, family relations, parenting issues, how parents and communities deal with these issues. I would be very grateful if you would take part in this study by answering the questions that I intent to ask you. Your will not be asked to supply me with your name or address so that no one will be able to relate the response you will supply me with, to you personally. You are also free to leave the discussion at any time. There is no right or wrong answer. Only your opinions are important.*” This phrasing was adopted throughout all the research sites. The phraseology was assumed to be vague enough and to cater for all the issues addressed by the research questions. The inclusions of the term national study was assumed to help respondents willingly take part knowing that others are taking part as well. These helped the respondents to quell any thoughts of being the only person taking part in the study. Although phrasing the research question in this way was done, social desirability and pseudo-social desirability were also assumed to stem from such phraseology. These created confounding variables for the current research. The ground rules were set as follows.

- Each member had an equal chance to speak
- No member to speak while the other member was still speaking
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Each member to lift up their hand in order to be accorded a chance to speak
- The group reporter to jot down the groups' main issues or concerns during the first 45 minutes.
- The group to sum up its main points or concerns following the reporter's narration. This step was done to ensure agreement on what the group members had articulated as the community perceptions towards stepparenting. It was meant to validate what the reporter had captured with what was actually said. Dictaphones or audiocassette recorders were used to collect data during FGDs. They were conducted in the participants' first language to ensure that participants will have a clear understanding of the questions.

Key informants

The key informants included councilors, village heads, chiefs, chairpersons of residence associations, headmasters of schools, business people (retail), community liaison officers from the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), nurses in clinics, social welfare officers in Gutu and Harare, church leaders, heads of

child welfare institutions, NGOs involved in child welfare and women's issues and legal practitioners. A total of 30 key informants were successfully recruited and interviewed. For interview schedule see appendices.

Identifying and recruiting key informants

I visited different potential key informants at their work place with an introductory letter to introduce myself and clarify the purpose of my visit. I also made requests to make appointments with the respondents at a time and date most convenient to the respondent. However, where possible and where permission to interview was instantaneously awarded, the interview proceeded forthwith following the agreement between the researcher and the respondent.

Interview procedure for key informants

I described the study as, “a national study on community perceptions towards stepparenting, stepparenting issues and how stepparents and communities deal with these issues.” This phrasing was adopted throughout all the research sites. The phraseology was assumed to be vague enough to cater for all the issues addressed by the research question. The inclusions of the term national study was assumed to help respondents willingly take part knowing that others are taking part as well. These helped the respondents to quell any thoughts of being the only person taking part in the study. Although phrasing the research question in this way was done, social desirability and pseudo-social desirability were also

assumed to stem from such phraseology. These created confounding variables for the current research.

Interviews with key informants were conducted at their workplaces at convenient times. The most convenient time was during the lunch hour. In a few exceptions interviews were done first thing in the morning, last thing after a day's work and invariably during normal working hours at the workplace. The interviews at the workplace were either done in the respondent's office, boardroom or some private room arranged for by the respondent where there was minimum disturbance. Some interviews were also done during weekends at the respondent's home, in the dining, lounge, and verandas. The actual interview time was 30 minutes.

Respondents for in-depth narrative interviewer-stepparents

Identifying and recruiting stepparents for in-depth narrative interviews

A total of 30 stepparents were interviewed. Of these, fifteen were from Gutu and the other fifteen were from Harare. Up to date most studies on stepparenting, remarriage and divorce or research focusing of family interaction the world over now relies on electronic recruitment of respondents and electronic distribution of

questionnaires and the returns of the responses thereto. In America and Australia, the stepfamily association, and discussions forums and organisations spearheading the interests of the particular groups have a database from which to recruit potential respondents for any study of this nature. Recruiting respondents proved to be one of the challenges faced in the present study. I used both purposive sampling and snowballing where possible to recruit the respondents for the present study.

However, in some cases the respondents were recruited through women's groups, key informants and those already known to the researcher particularly in Mukaro. A purposive and convenient sample was obtained through snowballing and social networking.

Care was also taken to make prior arrangements to see the stepparent at a convenient time and place. However, most interviews with stepparents were done in their homes. This gave the respondents territorial advantage over the researcher and the research process and helped the interviewee to be relaxed and feel less anxious. In some cases the stepparents were interviewed at their workplaces at convenient times. The most convenient time was during the lunch hour. In a few exceptions interviews were done first thing in the morning, last thing after a day's work and invariably during normal working hours at the workplace. Alternatively, interviews were done in dining or living/sitting rooms, in veranda and during the weekends.

Interviewing procedure for stepparents

This study used both an “open-ended” question format, and “focused” interviewing principles. This interviewing format allowed the respondent to elaborate on relevant points, while simultaneously exploring for signs of stepparenting stressful situations, and their relationship to the “step” status and stepfamily factors. Interviews were carried in the respondent’s home where possible or at some arranged place and in the absence of the spouse but with consent of the absent spouse to engage their partner in the present research. In this way it was hoped that the stepparent could express his or her views in a more relaxed way. The interviewer was sensitive not to insist on asking for the stepparent alone interview if he felt this would result in distrust on the side of the stepparent and the spouse.

Initially, the interview focused on eight core questions, which provided the foundation for further questions during the interview. As the interviews progressed, the previous interviews informed both the question content and order, causing revision of the core questions. The interview questions focused on the experiences of individuals in a stepcouple and stepparenting relationship. The issues respondents were asked to discuss were entirely subjective, addressing the individual’s descriptions of events and interpretations of meaning in their relationship. The questions were posed from the context of the relationship; although each individual’s opinions were solicited as data, they each were asked to consider their relationship as the context for the questions. This is consistent with the focus of the inquiry on the individual’s experience of stepparenting. The in-depth narrative interviews were timed on average for 45

minutes to one hour (1hour). Dictaphones or audiocassette recorders were used to collect data during interviews. The interviews were conducted in the participants' first language to ensure that participants had clear understanding of the questions.

The interviews were conducted in a relaxed and informal way often accompanied by jokes and laughter on the part of the respondents. The responses were recorded verbatim in the respondent's language of choice or Shona and later translated verbatim in English.

Data collection

Collecting data during FGDs

For each FGD, I sought permission from the respondents to record their narratives verbatim as well as taking some notes. In only one FGD, a respondent was not comfortable with having their responses audiotaped. I asked for permission to take some notes instead, to which the respondent granted permission. The notes were later expanded to give a rich text account of what had transpired during the FGD. Basing on the paradigms of participatory action research, participatory rural and participatory urban appraisal and their usefulness in social science research, the researcher designed focus group discussion guides to use in a PRA way. The rationale used to identify separate groups was the sensitivity of the research topic and the power imbalances in

society. This was mainly done to empower the respondents to freely express their views without fear of being heard or rebuked there after.

Collecting data during KIIs

I also sought permission from the respondents to record their narratives verbatim as well as taking some notes. Care was also taken to make prior arrangements and build rapport with key informants. This helped to familiarize the respondents with the researcher and the purpose of the study. This also made it easier for the respondents to allow the researcher audiotape their responses. In some cases the researcher asked for permission to take notes only. The notes were later expanded to give a rich text account of what had transpired during the KII.

Data collection during in-depth narrative interviews.

The researcher sought permission from the respondents to record their narratives verbatim using audiotapes or Dictaphones as well as taking some notes. Care was also taken to make prior arrangements and build rapport with stepparent informants. This helped to familiarize the respondents with the researcher and the purpose of the study. This also made it easier for the respondents to allow the researcher audiotape their responses. In some cases I asked for permission to take notes only. The notes were later expanded to give a rich text account of what had transpired during the IDNs.

Refusal rate and respondent attrition

Generally, a high level of participation was realised for all types of respondents in the present study. An approximately 80% response rate was recorded. According to Bless (1995), a return rate of 75% and above is acceptable, thus the return rate of 80% was accepted in this study.

Refusal rate for FGDs

Only two people refused to take part in the FGDs in Gutu while three in Harare also refused to take part in the study as respondents in FGDs. Four of the respondents cited time constraints as preventing them from availing themselves for the FGDs, while the other felt the topic was too sensitive, since she was already a stepparent. She did not feel comfortable discussing this issue in a group. The researcher then asked if she was free to discuss on a one-to-one basis, to which she acceded. I got other respondents from the general populace, who matched the dropouts who then replaced all respondents who could not take part in the interviews. This was meant to maintain constant numbers of respondents in the FGDs. However, no respondent left the FGD once it had started.

Refusal rate and respondent attrition for KIIs

In Gutu one respondent who had initially agreed to take part in the study failed at the end. The respondent had to attend a funeral. However I did not make a follow up or try to arrange for another interview date, but replaced the respondent with another key informant who had the same characteristics as the

first (being a nurse). In contrast, in Harare, four respondents did not take part in the study as had earlier been planned. Of the four, three had tight work schedules, while one transferred to another town before the interview date and the interview had to be cancelled. While some efforts were made to reschedule the interviews for weekends, this only worked for one respondent and I had to replace all the other three, with other respondents. While every care was taken to recruit replacement respondents with the same characteristics, one respondent could not be replaced with a respondent of similar characteristics (being a lawyer). This was due to the tight work schedules the lawyers were found to have. The lawyer was however, replaced by a police officer.

Refusal rate and respondent attrition for in-depth narrative interviews

In Harare, five stepparents refused to take part in the study. Four of these stepparents were male and felt uneasy discussing their private life with a stranger. However, this could have been avoided if the researcher had built enough rapport with the respondents. One respondent, a female refused to discuss the issues pertaining to stepparenting for fear of victimisation, by the husband despite the husband having granted permission to involve his wife in the study. In Gutu, six respondents refused to take part in the study. Three of the respondents were male who did not see it fit to delve into their private life, while the other three were women. Two of these women, refused for fear of victimisation, while one refused for fear of having her responses used by the researcher for whatever purpose. Over and above, other respondents were

recruited to replace all the respondents who had refused to take part in the study. Only one female respondent asked the researcher if the interview could be terminated and subsequently withdrew from the study. The respondent was from Mushaviri in Gutu.

Data Transcription and Translation

Full transcriptions of the interviews were done verbatim in Shona or the respondent's language at the time of the interview. These were later translated to English and back translated to Shona. This procedure was done to identify any discrepancies emanating from switching from one language to another. This had the significance of ensuring that the meaning of the respondent's story is not lost or distorted. The researcher sampled a few respondents to verify the trustworthiness of the narratives following transcription and translation.

Difficulties encountered during data transcription and translation

I discovered that in some instances it was quite difficult to get absolute equivalents for certain Shona terms. In the end I used these terms as possible themes. An attempt was however made to describe the phenomenon represented by these local terms. The local terms led to indigenous categories. These are concepts that are indigenous to the research sites, the respondents and the 'culture' of the respondents.

Ethical considerations

Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to all the respondents at the beginning and at the end of each interview. I was also careful to observe local customs and social rules. I bore in mind that in some communities, it is not acceptable for women and children to walk about in the evening or walk about and talk to people they do not know. I tried to be sensitive to the acceptability of my gender (male) by observing some of these rules. To that end the systematic walkabouts were done late in the afternoon or during the day where possible.

During these embryonic stages and throughout of the study, I tried not to wave the interview guides and discretely using them only during interviews and after potential respondents were identified. The importance of this ethical consideration was to avoid raising the community's suspicion and make mistakes that may have endangered the rapport with the study population before a study sample can be extracted from this population.

A debriefing session was held immediately after each session. I took this time to answer any questions that the respondents had as a result of having taken part in the current study. All the respondents found to have been traumatised and sensitised by the research were referred for psychological help from Connect (Z.I.S.T), the local clinic, local church and local organisations, which offered counseling in each setting (Gutu and Harare). One male FGD respondent in Gutu was referred to the local church pastor for counseling, following his revelations that he had family interaction problems with the wife. I had made

prior arrangements with the pastor. In another case involving a female stepparent, I referred the respondent to the women' coalition group for support. The woman had problems in getting her *maoko* property from her previous relationship. I also encouraged the respondent to engage the family of origin and family of procreation as alternative avenues to the solutions to her current problem. Thanking the respondents for their time closed each debriefing session. The stepparents and key informants were each handed Z\$50 000.00 by the researcher as a token of appreciation. The FGD respondents were not given any amount but had refreshments during the course of the FGD. The researcher thought that this also compensated the FGD respondents for their time.

Data Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study was the individual respondent's statements in most cases. However, in some instances, the researcher grouped the respondents' views and proffered a model that in the researcher's view was representative of the individual statements and sentiments of the respondents interviewed. An attempt was also made to capture the respondents' views verbatim on particular themes as emergent from the data. This was seen fit because the study aimed to investigate community perceptions towards stepparenting on one hand and the coping strategies used by stepparents on the other hand. In an attempt to identify the themes the following methods were utilised, key indigenous categories, proverbs, idioms, metaphors and analogies,

pawing through texts, comparing and contrasting narratives (constant comparison), and social sciences queries.

First, Key Indigenous categories were used to identify themes. One method to use in finding themes is to look for local terms that may sound unfamiliar or are used in unfamiliar ways. Patton (1990:306, 393-400) refers to these as "indigenous categories" and contrasts them with "analyst-constructed typologies." Grounded theorists refer to the process of identifying local terms as *in vivo coding* (Strauss 1987:28-32, Strauss and Corbin 1990:61-74).

The second method of looking for, proverbs, idioms, metaphors and analogies was also used in this study to identify themes. Anecdotal evidence indicates that, schema analysts suggest searching through text for metaphors, similes, and analogies (D'Andrade 1995, Quinn and Strauss 1997). The emphasis on metaphor owes much to the pioneering work by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and the observation that people often represent their thoughts, behaviors, and experiences with analogies.

In the present study a stepmother was perceived as a second wife. The respondents had this to say, "the second wife is as rough as a bed made of planks/ *mukadzi wechipiri ane rafu somubhedha wemapuranga*". This analogue is used to indicate the harsh treatment that the stepmother gives to the stepchildren. The stepmother is perceived as not offering comfort to the stepchildren, a quality synonymous with a bed made of planks, which does not have cushion and offer comfort to the users. Another example of an idiom used

by respondents in the current study, is the description of a man marrying a widow and accepting her and the children from a previous relationship. This is likened to “carrying a stick infested with ants/*kutakura chitanda china masvosve*.” In this idiom the stepfather subjects himself to potential risk by carrying a stick infested with biting ants (see the results below for an elaboration of this analogous proverb, idioms and metaphors used by respondents).

Third, pawing was used in identifying themes in the present study. This involved reading through text and marking themes and writing them in the margin of the text. Some authors highly recommend pawing through texts and marking them up with different colored highlighter pens. Sandelowski (1995a: 373) observes that analysis of texts begins with proofreading the material and simply underlining key phrases "because they make some as yet inchoate sense." Bernard (2000) refers to this as the *ocular scan method*, also known as *eyeballing*. In this method, you get a feel for the text by handling your data multiple times. Bogdan and Biklen (1982:165) suggest reading over the text at least twice. In the present study the I read the text many times. Researchers have been known to spread their texts out on the floor, tack bunches of them to a bulletin board, and sort them into different file folders (Dey 1993). By living with the data, investigators can eventually perform the interocular percussion test, which is where you wait for patterns to hit you between the eyes. This technique may not seem like a very scientific way to do things, but it is one of the best ways known to begin hunting for patterns in qualitative data. Once you

have a feel for the themes and the relations among, then there is no reason to struggle (Dey 1993).

Fourth, comparing and contrasting as described by Glazer and Strauss was pivotal in identifying themes for the present study. The compare and contrast approach is based on the idea that themes represent the ways in which texts are either similar or different from each other. Glazer and Strauss (1967:101-116) refer to this as the "constant comparison method." Further descriptions of the technique is shown by Glazer (1978:56-72) and Strauss and Corbin (1990:84-95). Typically, grounded theorists begin by conducting a careful line-by-line analysis. This is also called microanalysis. They read each line or sentence and ask themselves, "What is this about?" and "How does it differ from the preceding or following statements?," "Why is it happening?," This kind of detailed analysis helps to keep the researcher focused on the data themselves rather than on theoretical flights of fancy (Charmaz 1990).

This approach is like interviewing the text and is remarkably similar to the ethnographic interviewing style that Spradley used with his informants (1979:160-172). In this technique researchers compare pairs of texts by asking "How is this text different from the preceding text?" and "What kinds of things are mentioned in both?" They ask hypothetical questions like "What if the informant who produced this text had been a woman instead of a man?" and "How similar is this text to my own experiences?" Bogdan and Biklen (1982:153) recommend reading through passages of text and asking, "What does

this remind me of?" Researchers and investigators compare answers to questions across people, space, and time. I also compared the respondents' narratives in an attempt to identify the pattern of similarities and differences in respondents' perceptions towards stepparenting, stepparenting experiences, and coping strategies.

The fifth method, social science queries, also contributed in identifying themes in the current study. Besides identifying indigenous themes, themes that characterise the experience of informants, I was interested in understanding how textual data illuminate questions of importance to social science. Spradley (1979) suggested searching interviews for evidence of social conflict, cultural contradictions, informal methods of social control, things that people do in managing impersonal social relationships, methods by which people acquire and maintain achieved and ascribed status (in this case how people become stepparents and stepparenting experiences), and information about how people solve problems. Bogdan & Bilken (1982) suggested examining the setting and context, the perspectives of the informants, and informants' ways of thinking about people, objects, processes, activities, events, and relationships. According to Charmaz (1990:1163), "moving across substantive areas", fosters developing conceptual power, depth, and comprehensiveness.

Strauss and Corbin (1990:158-175) urge investigators to be more sensitive to conditions, actions or interactions, and consequences of a phenomenon and to order these conditions and consequences into theories. To facilitate this, they

offer a useful tool called the conditional matrix. The conditional matrix is a set of concentric circles, each level corresponding to a different unit of influence. At the center are actions and interactions. The inner rings represent individual and small group influences on these actions, and the outer rings represent international and national effects. In the present study, the onion diagram (Box 1.0 to Box 4 and figures 3 to 14), although slightly different from the conditional matrix in appearance, were used to analyse community perceptions of the problems found therein. In the figures 3 to figure 14 the main problem is presented in the middle, with causes and effects as the peripherals. This type of presentation helped the current researcher to code and analyse for stepfamily structure and process.

This is a powerful technique because investigators concentrate their efforts on searching for specific kinds of topics, any of which are likely to generate major social and cultural themes. By examining the data from a more theoretical perspective, however, researchers must be careful that they do not overfit the data. Overfitting the data is the trap of finding only that for which the researchers are looking. There is a trade-off between bringing a lot of prior theorising to the theme-identification effort and going at it fresh. Charmaz (1990), purported that prior theorising can inhibit the forming of fresh ideas and the making of surprising connections. The present researcher being a novice researcher was more comfortable with the tabula rasa approach. More seasoned researchers, who are more familiar with theory issues, may find the social science query approach more compatible with their interests.

Justifying The Choice Of The Techniques, Number Of Techniques And Types Of Techniques For Theme Identification In The Present Study

Theme identification is one of the most important tasks in qualitative research. It is also one of the most mysteriously done and elaborated in textbooks on qualitative data analysis. Explicit descriptions of theme discovery are rarely described in articles and reports and if so are often relegated to appendices or footnotes. These techniques tend to be shared among small groups of social scientists and are often impeded by disciplinary or epistemological boundaries. The lack of clear methodological descriptions is most evident in most textbooks and articles. Investigators struggle to clearly explain and justify plans for discovering themes in the qualitative data. These issues are particularly prevalent when funding reviewers are unfamiliar with qualitative traditions. In this case the grant-awarding agency may have a considerable grounding in the scientific method and little knowledge and insight into qualitative methodology. The present study used multiple theme identification techniques as already alluded to above.

(1) Which technique generates more themes?

A host of factors influence the number of themes that are generated, including the technique itself, who and how many people are looking for themes, and the kind and amount of texts being analysed. Jehn and Doucet (1996) advise that if the goal is to generate as many themes as possible, which is often the case in initial

exploratory phases of research, then more is better. This means using multiple techniques, investigators, and texts is mostly desirable.

(2) Appropriateness of the various techniques

The choice of techniques depends minimally on the kind and amount of text, the experience of the researcher, and the goals of the project. The present researcher being a novice used the only techniques he was familiar with. Word-based techniques (for example, word repetitions, indigenous categories, and key words in context (KWIC) are probably the least labor intensive and were mostly used in the present study as tools for theme identification. Computer software such as *Anthropac* and *Code-a-text* and *NUD*IST/ QSR Nvivo* have little trouble in generating frequency counts of key words. In the present study *Nvivo* was used to analyse the key informants' responses. This involved searching for key terms, phrases and words relevant to perceptions towards stepparenting issues, as well as stepparenting stressful events and coping strategies used by stepparents. A careful look at the frequency list and maybe some quick pile sorts are often enough to identify quite a few themes. Word-based techniques are also the most versatile. They can easily be used with complex texts, as well as, with simple short answers to open-ended questions. Novice and expert investigators can also use them relatively easily alike. Given their very nature, however, they are best used in combination with other approaches.

Scrutiny-based techniques (e.g., compare and contrast, querying the text, and examining absences) are most appropriate for rich textual accounts and tend to be

useful for analysing short answer responses. Some authors do not advise using the latter two techniques unless the investigator is fluent in the language in which the data are collected (Maxwell, 1996; Thorne 1997 and Sandelowski, 1994). They however, recommend that if the primary goal of the greater portion of the investigation is to discover as many themes as possible, then nothing beats using these techniques on a line-by-line basis.

Alternative scrutiny-based techniques, linguist-based approaches could have been used. Like scrutiny-based techniques, linguist-based approaches are better used on narrative style accounts rather than short answer responses. Looking for transitions is the easiest technique to use, especially if the texts are actually written by respondents themselves (rather than transcribed from tape recordings of verbal interviews). One reason for which these techniques were not used was that the narratives were researcher transcribed than the suggested rule of thumb stated in the preceding statement. The researcher opted for the search of metaphors for the following reason. Searching for metaphors is also relatively easy once novices have been trained on what kind of things to look for in the texts. Another potential method could have been the search for connecting words. For example, causal relationships are often indicated by such words and phrases as, *because*, *since*, and *as a result*. Words such as *if* or *then*, *rather than*, and *instead of* often signify conditional relationships. Looking for connecting words and phrases is best used as a secondary wave of finding themes, once the investigator has a more definite idea of what kinds of themes he or she finds most interesting.

In the early stages of exploration, nothing beats a thorough reading and pawing through of the data. This approach is the easiest for novice researchers to master and is particularly good for identifying major themes. As the exploration progresses, investigators often find themselves looking for subthemes within these major themes. The cutting and sorting techniques are most helpful here. Investigators can identify all text passages that are related to a major theme, cut them out, and sort them into subthematic categories. Likewise, if they are marking texts for each newly discovered theme, then they can apply the unmarked text technique as they go. We have seen these three techniques applied successfully to both rich narrative data as well as simple responses to open-ended questions.

An even more powerful strategy would be to combine multiple techniques in a sequential manner. For example, investigators might begin by pawing through the data to see what kinds of themes just stick out. As part of this process, they might want to make comparisons between paragraphs and across informants. A quick analysis of word repetitions would also be appropriate for identifying themes at such an early stage of the analysis. If key words or indigenous phrases are present, researchers might followed-up by conducting more focused KWIC analyses. If the project is examining issues of equality, investigators might also look for texts that are indicative of power differentials and access to resources. Texts representing major themes can be marked either on paper or by computer. Investigators can then search areas that are not already marked for additional themes or cut and sort marked texts into subthemes.

Researchers also might consider beginning by looking for all metaphors and similes, marking them, cutting them out and sorting them into thematic categories. There is no single way to discover themes. In theme discovery, we assume that more is always better.

(3) Deciding if all possible themes have been found.

The main question emanating from the above heading is, have all possible themes been identified? There is no single plan of action to use in answering this question. The problem is similar to asking members of a population to list all the illnesses they know. One can never be sure of the full range of illnesses without interviewing the entire population. This is true because there is always the possibility that the last person interviewed will mention a new disease. We can simplify the process considerably, however, if we are willing to miss rarely mentioned illness. One strategy would be to interview people until some number of respondents in a row (say five or more) fails to mention any new illnesses.

In text analysis, grounded theorists refer to the point at which no new themes are being identified as *theoretical saturation* (Strauss and Corbin 1990:188). When and how theoretical saturation is reached, however, depends on the number of texts and their complexity, as well as on investigator experience and fatigue, and the number of investigators examining the texts. Investigators who have more experience finding themes are likely to reach saturation later than novices. Wilson and Hutchinson (1990:123) warn against *premature closure* where the researcher "fails to move beyond the face value of the content in the narrative."

Difficulties With Microanalysis Coding Of Data And Subsequent Theme Identification There From.

This technique of identifying themes by microanalysis of data, word -for -word and line-by- line presented the researcher with two setbacks. Firstly, it was very time consuming. The researcher had amassed a lot of data that had to be scrutinised to obtain themes that are relevant to the study and the research topic of community perceptions towards stepparenting, stepparenting stressful events and coping strategies used by stepparents. Secondly, doing microanalysis led to confusion at times. This emanated mainly from dividing the data into individual words, which caused the analysis to be lost within the data. So many words were selected and some confusion set and focus lost at times. The researcher however, overcame this problem by constantly referring to the grounded theory literature particularly the rift valley that exists between Glaser and Strauss on this issue. Glaser (1992:40) criticised microanalysis as an approach leading to “overconceptualisation”. This was in line with the problems that the current researcher was grappling with. It was at this point that the researcher adopted Glaser (1992)’s proposition of selecting key points rather than individual words. This allowed concepts to be and themes to emerge from the data. Miles and Huberman (1984) also suggested that the selection of the points that pertinently addressed the research questions is central to qualitative coding. In tandem with the suggestions by Miles and Huberman (1984) of protection against data overload, Dey (1993), coined the term “ bits of data” which he considered important. The researcher therefore resorted to looking for key points in each

paragraph, which he marked ready for coding and analysis. The process of comparing the codes with each other, to find higher order commonality, produced the concepts from the codes.

Chapter summary

This chapter delved on the study design and procedures, population and sample, data collection and ethical considerations. Where possible the researcher tried also to critique certain aspects of the methodology. Justifications of certain procedures were also proffered. The chapter that follows details the analysis of results and presents the finding of the present study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

General Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the present study. The present study yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. The data were collected through focus group discussions with members of the general populace (community members), key informant interviews with community relations and liaison officers from the police, counselors, lawyers, nurses and community leaders (councilors, chiefs etc), and in-depth narrative interviews with stepparents.

The data for the present study was analysed following the rules of the grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The results of the focus group discussions were analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. The findings from key informant interviews were analysed using micro-thematic analyses of paragraphs and sentences to identify the main themes emerging from the data (i.e. the respondents' statements). The data generated from in-depth narrative interviews were analysed using thematic narrative analysis. Linkages diagrams, flow diagrams and tables were used to present the results. Micro-thematic presentations were also used to show the results. These methods of analysis and presentation were chosen because they conform to the presentation of qualitative data from grounded theory studies.

The study gathered data through focus group discussions with people from the general populace, key informant interviews with the community relations and liaisons officers from the police, counsellors, lawyers, nurses and community leaders. A total of 160 respondents took part in FGDs interviews. These comprised of 20 focus group discussion sessions for members of the general populace (10 in Gutu and 10 in Harare). Another 30 key informant and 30 stepparents took part in the study.

The data generated from in-depth narrative interviews were analysed using thematic narrative analysis. Linkages diagrams, flow diagrams and tables were

used to present the results. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), diagrams are valuable tools for the integration of phenomena. In addition the flow and linkage diagrams were chosen to help the researcher to distance themselves from the data. However, Strauss and Corbin (1998) warn that integrative diagrams should flow, with the logic apparent, without a lot of explanation. A further point is that researchers need to guard against making integrative diagrams too complicated. A potential weakness of the current use of the flow and integrative diagrams is that some are complicated and contain too many words, lines and arrows (see for example, figure 6, figure 8, figure 9, figure 10 and figure 12 to mention but a few). These are likely to make it difficult for viewers to read and comprehend the diagrams. A way to circumvent the problem has been to offer some explanation below the diagram. The aim was to help show the multiple relationships between the concepts and to spell out the major categories that emerged during the interviews (Smith, 2003).

4.1.1 The Problem

The main question that the study sought to address itself to, was an investigation of the community perceptions towards stepparenting and the coping strategies used by stepparents in Gutu and Harare.

4.1.2 Unit of analysis

The units of analysis in this study were the individual respondents' statements in most cases. However, in some instances, the researcher grouped the respondents' views and proffered a model that in the researcher's view was representative of

the individual statements and sentiments of the respondents interviewed. An attempt was also made to capture the respondents' views on particular themes as emergent from the data. This was seen fit because the study aimed to investigate community perceptions towards stepparenting on one hand and the coping strategies used by stepparents on the other hand. In an attempt to identify the themes the following methods were utilised, key indigenous categories, proverbs, idioms, metaphors and analogies, pawing through texts, comparing and contrasting narratives (constant comparison), and social sciences queries.

4.1.3 Methodological issues

This qualitative approach to community perceptions towards stepparenting, stepparenting experiences and coping strategies used by stepparents gave the researcher an insider's story. The respondents shared how stepparenting is perceived at a community level. The stepparents also gave insights into what it is like to be a stepparent, expressing feelings about being a stepparent, be it anger or pain, joy as well as needs.

The limitations of the qualitative approach are that the results do not establish a representative sample of community members, stepparents and key informants. Neither are the perceptions and challenges of stepparenting generalisable to all the potential respondents and the respondents concerned. This is the essence of adopting a qualitative research design. It gives an in-depth view of the problem being investigated from the different individuals' perspectives.

The data are:

-20 FGDs

-30 IDNs

-30 KIIs

-notes taken during the interviews.

Data reduction was done to come up with major categories and themes leading to analysis of these as they relate to stepparenting. This was done using a coding scheme. Each respondent's answers to each question were transcribed and translated. The translated data were input into and analysed using the Qualitative Software Research QSR NVivo version 2.0. Single text searches, proximity searches, involving finding the existence of certain vocabularies were central to QSR data analysis. In addition, answers to each question were read and reread and categorised into what was being said. The next step involved writing words or phrases that describe the content of the narrative. These were then listed to get topics that describe the data. They were first written in the left hand margin of the script and later the organising topics were written in the right hand margin. Key quotations and interpretations were fitted in the margin on separate piece of paper and then listed to give a list of themes, subthemes and issues that emerged from the data. The list of the topics that describe the data and that of the themes and issues were combined to come up with a coding scheme. Revisions were made on

the coding scheme whereby some codes were combined into one code, whilst in some cases new codes were added.

Having reduced the data to categories and themes, which were obtained inductively, the results were analysed thematically whereby the data were the descriptions, which were made according to the themes from each question asked.

The development of a coding scheme in this study involved three people these were the researcher, a colleague and the supervisor. This type of triangulation helped to ensure the validity of the coding scheme. It also helps to reduce the potential bias emanating from one-person analysis. This also provided with a means for directly assessing the reliability and validity of the obtained data. The data were independently analysed by two people and the findings were discussed to prepare a final draft of the coding scheme.

Verbatim quotations from the respondents are set apart from the text, in italics. They are used wherever possible to preserve the tone and context of what was said. The number of respondents who shared a particular opinion is shown immediately in front of the quotation. For example, “*I wondered what had happened.*” # 3 denotes three respondents sharing that sentiment.

4.1.4 Categories/themes

The categories or themes listed below were obtained inductively. There are four main categories based on the objectives of the study. These are: i) types of stepfamilies, ii) community perceptions towards stepparenting, iii) perceived stepparenting stressful events and iv) coping strategies used by stepparents.

Within these broad categories specific themes and subthemes emerged.

Types of stepfamilies

Fourteen different types of stepfamilies were reported

Community perceptions towards stepparenting

- Stepparenting as a precursor of delinquency and violence
- Stepfamilies as disintegrated entities
- Shona proverbs, idioms and metaphors of stepparenting.
- Stepparents as illegitimate parents and illegitimate spouses
- Thematic phrases used to describe stepparents
- Stepparenting is dogged with familial child abduction

Perceived stepparenting stressful events

- Psychosocial factors which determine how one will introduce stepchildren to others
- Coping with the psychosocial dimensions of perceived spousal cheating
- Using the ex spouse's name to call/address the current spouse
- Grappling with the psychosocial issues of trying to conceive

- Stepparenting fatigue
- Coping with in-laws

Psycholegal issues

- Conflict emanating from *kugarwa nhaka* or widow inheritance.
- Offering social support to a spouse embroiled in legal disputes with an ex spouse
- Relocating following divorce or relationship break up
- Criminalisation of ex spouse through voice recording conversations

Psycho –epidemiological analysis of the types of relationships some stepparents had prior to divorcing and subsequent remarriage

- Relationship with former spouse
- Decisionmaking
- Time spent together

Coping strategies

Stepparents' self reported coping strategies

- Interim coping strategies
- Adaptive coping strategies
- Corrective coping strategies
- Preventive coping strategies
- Contingency coping strategies
- Passivity

Key informant and generalised others' perceptions of stepparental coping

- Obliging

- Avoding
- Dominatng
- Compromising

4.2.0.TYPES OF STEPFAMILIES

The results of the present study revealed that there is no single type of stepfamily, but numerous variants as shown below. The results indicate how reconstituted some stepfamily units become. These results therefore help to shed some light on the multiplicity of stepfamily and stepparenting identities, as shall be shown in subsequent section of this thesis.

- man with children from a previous (divorce) #2
- man with children from previous family(widowed) #2
- wife with own children from previous marriage(divorced) #2
- wife with own children from previous marriage(widowed) #4
- husband's child from previous relationship emerges in the midst of a marriage (undisclosed) #2
- wife's child from previous relationship emerges (undisclosed) #4
- disclosed children from wife's previous relationship emerge to stay with family #2
- disclosed children from husband 's previous relationship emerge to stay with family #2
- husband inheriting brother's wife and children #5
- nephew inheriting cousin/cousin brother, widow and children #2
- elder son inheriting father's youngest wife and children #2
- wife inheriting sister's husband and children #3
- wife inheriting aunt's husband and children #4
- polygamous relationship –first wife staying with second and subsequent wife's children. #3
- polygamous relationship –second and subsequent wife staying and looking after first wife's children. #2

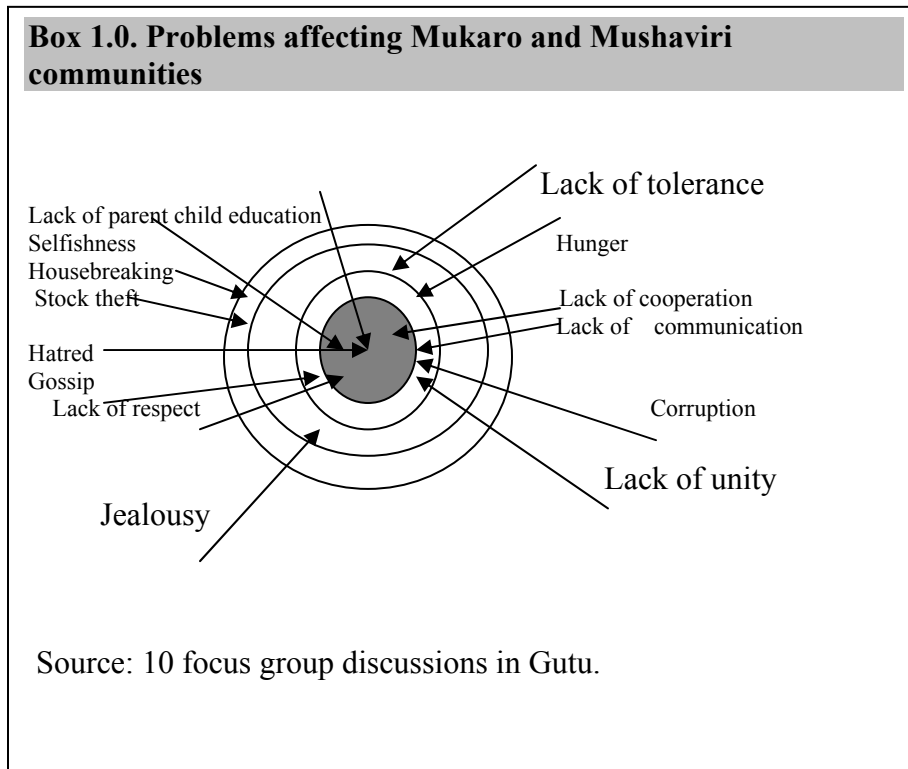
4.3. PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS STEPPARENTING

Rather than ask respondents about their perceptions towards stepparenting, I first focused on people's perceptions of the main problems affecting their community and family living. Thus, I assumed that stepparenting would not be an important issue in people's daily lives. The researcher employed this technique to allow the themes to come out of the respondents' narratives rather than impose preconceived ideas on the respondents. The next stage was to ask the respondents to describe their perceptions of family interactions in the community. The researcher then probed on the issues pertaining to stepparenting after the respondents had mentioned them. Transcriptions were coded using a framework developed through an interpretive analysis of recurrent themes (conceptual ideas and beliefs), expressions, and language. A thematic analysis of the interview data was conducted, whereby dominant, and idiosyncratic themes embedded within the text were identified through the coding process. The relationship between themes were then synthesised and contextualised in relation to community perceptions, feeling, attitudes, views on stepparenting and stepfamily interaction patterns. Linkages between concepts and themes were presented through linkage and flow diagrams where possible. These linkage and flow diagrams helped the researcher to link themes from the participants' responses. In some cases flow diagrams relevant to specific study sites and age groups of participants were done. This has the advantages of showing how social stratification, gender and age impact on the way the respondents perceive stepparenting. This also helps to reveal how stepparenting affects the different players along the same dimensions.

4.3.1. General problems affecting the rural and urban communities

Important differences exist in perceptions of problems affecting communities.

4.3.1.1 General problems affecting Mukaro and Mushaviri communities in Gutu



The focus groups conducted in Mukaro and Mushaviri communities cited and prioritised the serious problems affecting the community. The problems are presented using an onion diagram box 1.0 above. The most serious problems are

those at the centre going outwards. These were viewed as *matambudziko ari pamwoyo yavanhu munharaunda ino/* the problems at the hearts of the people in this community. The rural communities adopted a centre-peripheral conceptualisation of their problems. The most serious problems were placed in the centre of the diagram (the heart of the community), with lesser important ones in the outer rings. The most serious problems are lack of parent-child education, selfishness and lack of cooperation, hatred, and lack of respect. The least important problems were stock theft and housebreaking. Whilst the problems cited appear superficial, they helped the researcher to engage the respondents in dialogue. This helped the respondents to open up. The respondents' initial answers further helped the researcher to track and focus on some of the issues in subsequent interviews.

4.3.1.2. General problems affecting Highfield and Waterfalls communities in Harare

Throughout the two urban communities, the following problems were cited. The communities identified a total of 19 problems that are common (box 2.0). These problems are categorised into economic, health and well being, conflict and aggression. The economic problems are economic hardships, prostitution, unemployment, girls having sexual relations with sugar daddies, robbery and house breaking and car jacking and theft. The health related problems are physical and emotional trauma, drug abuse, HIV and AIDS. Conflict and aggression are prevalent in aggression between parents and children, rape,

fighting and domestic violence. Other psychosocial problems include street kids, street gangsters and baby dumping.

Box 2. 0 Problems affecting urban communities

- Robbery and house breaking
- Aggression against children by parents
- Abandonment of children
- Unemployment
- Economic hardships
- Fighting
- Street gangsters
- Baby dumping
- Rape of girls by fathers
- Rape of girls by lodgers
- Rape of girls by stepfathers
- Girls having sexual relations with sugar daddies
- HIV and AIDS
- Physical and emotional trauma
- Drug abuse
- Car jacking and theft
- Prostitution
- Domestic violence
- Street kids

Source: 10 focus group discussions with members of the general populace in Highfield and Waterfalls

4.3.1.3 General problem prevalent in rural families

The residents of Mukaro and Mushaviri in Gutu identified 11 main problems that affect families in general (see box 3.0) below.

Box 3.0. General problems prevalent among rural families in Mukaro and Mushaviri in Gutu.

- Misunderstandings over finances
- Infidelity and jealousy
- Violence between spouses
- Abandonment of children
- Extramarital affairs
- Children fight with parents
- Orphaned children
- HIV and AIDS
- Alcoholism
- Drug abuse
- Divorce

Source: 10 focus group discussions with members of the general populace in Mukaro and Mushaviri.

4.3.1.4 General problems prevalent in urban families

Box 4.0 General problems prevalent among urban families in Highfield and Waterfalls

- Divorce
- Fight over finances
- Drug abuse
- “Small houses”
- Alcoholism

While discussing the general problems that are found in families in Highfield and Waterfalls, the respondents pointed out 13 main problems as shown in box 4.0 above.

4.4.0. Community perceptions towards stepparenting

The stepparents were perceived as failing socialization agents. The stepparents were also been reported to be at the centre of the psychosocial problems that commonly affect the stepchildren, stepfamilies and the community. The sections that follow are a illustrative of these dimensions

4.4.1.1. Stepparenting as a precursor of delinquency and violence among boys and stepchildren

The results of the present study show that the communities in Gutu and Harare perceived the stepfamily and stepparents as having failed to properly socialise stepchildren.

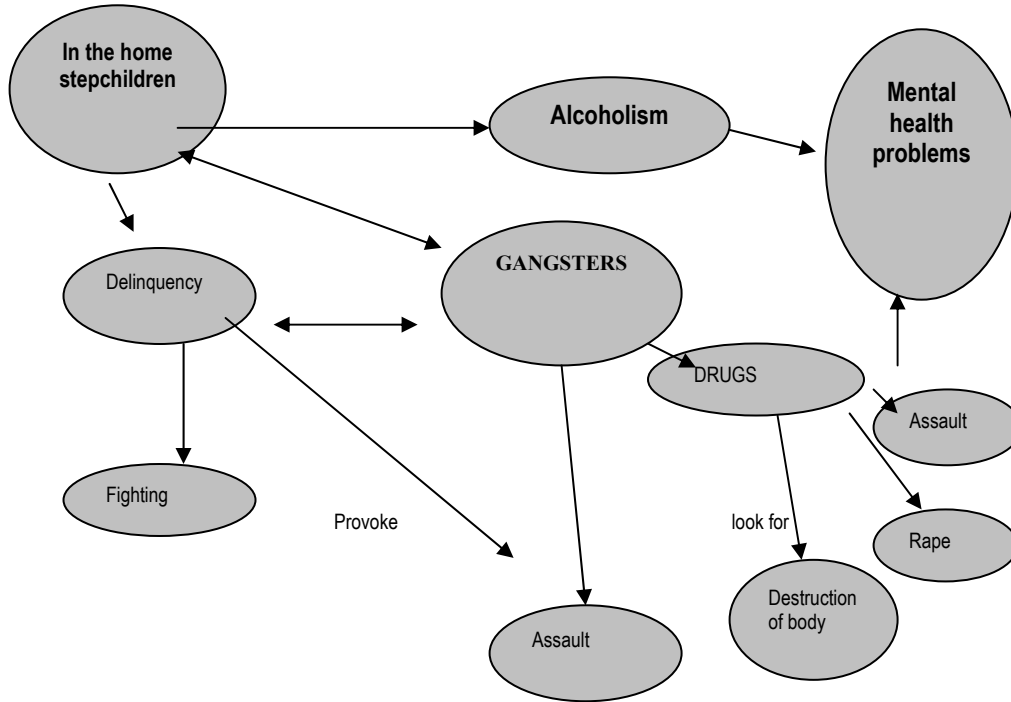
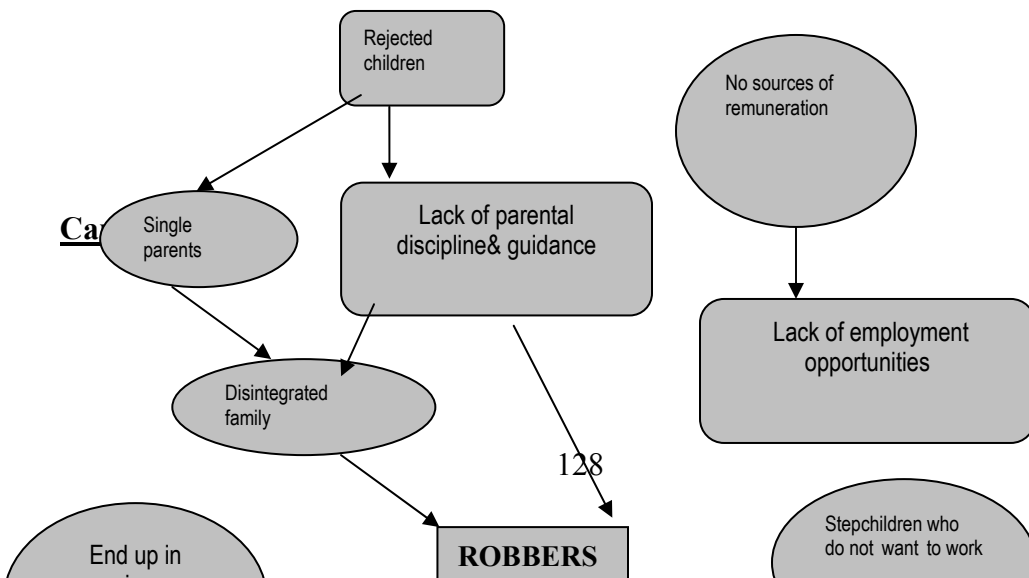


Figure 3: Delinquency-related violence as a proportion of lack of socialisation of boys by stepparents (by rural women from Gutu aged 25-45 years).

Figure 3 above indicates that the rural women from Mukaro and Mushaviri communities viewed a stepfamily and stepparenting as possible precursors of psychosocial problems. The stepparent is considered to be an inadequate and inappropriate role model for the stepchild. A common psychosocial problem associated with failure to socialise the stepchild as revealed by the results is

gangsterism. Gangsters were thought to stem from lack of socialization and parent- child education of boys by stepparents and the remaining biological parent. The gangsters then engage in illicit activities like alcoholism, delinquency, and drug use. Numerous problems, which affect the community, the stepfamily and the stepchild, emanate as indicated in **Figure 3** above. The central theme to the way these gangsters interact with the community is violence. The violence manifests itself in rape, assault, and fighting.



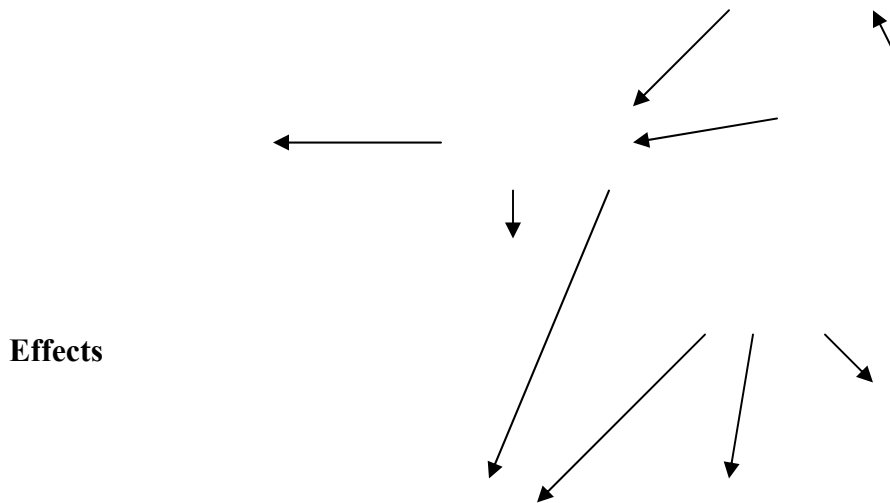


Figure 4: The causes and effects of robbery due to poor stepchild socialisation according police officers in Gutu.

Figure 4 above depicts the Gutu police officers' perceptions of the stepfamily and stepparenting. Stepparents were also considered as inadequate and inappropriate role models. The results show that poor socialization of stepchildren by stepparents and the remaining spouse leads to robbery. Robbery then escalates into other problems. A major problem that was reported to emanate from robbery is the fear that grips the community and the stepfamily. When stepchildren are not properly socialised, they feel rejected, lack parental discipline and guidance. This was reported to result in a disintegrated family. This culminates in robbery as indicated in fig 4 above.

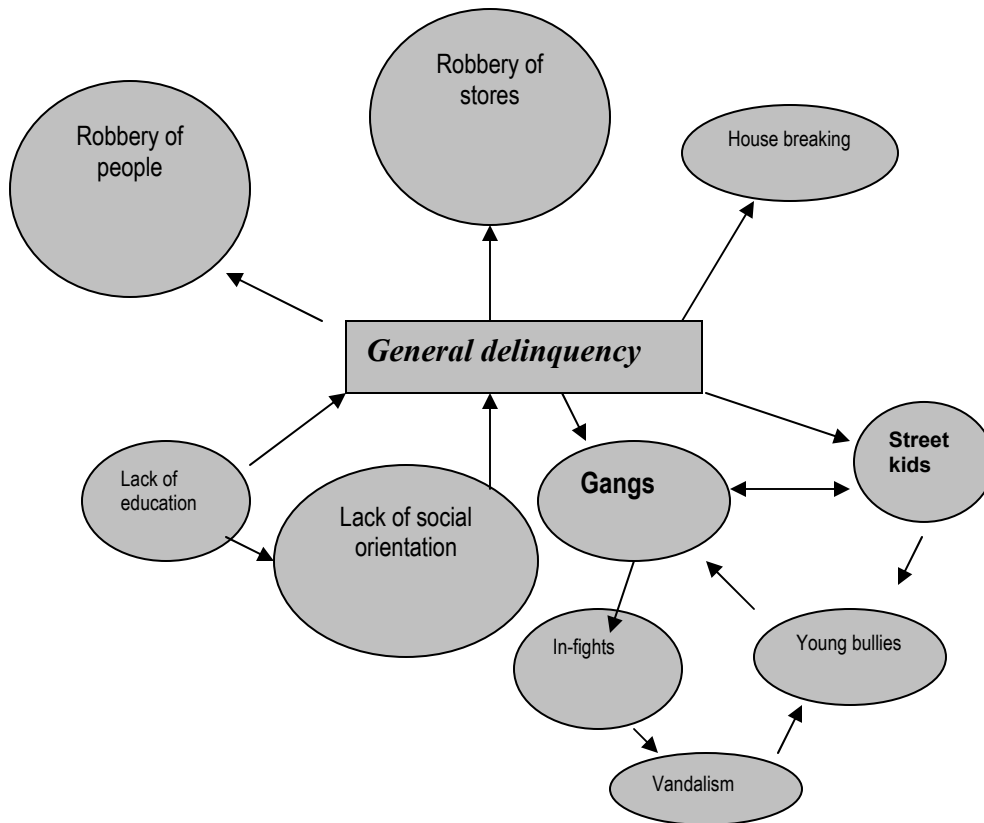
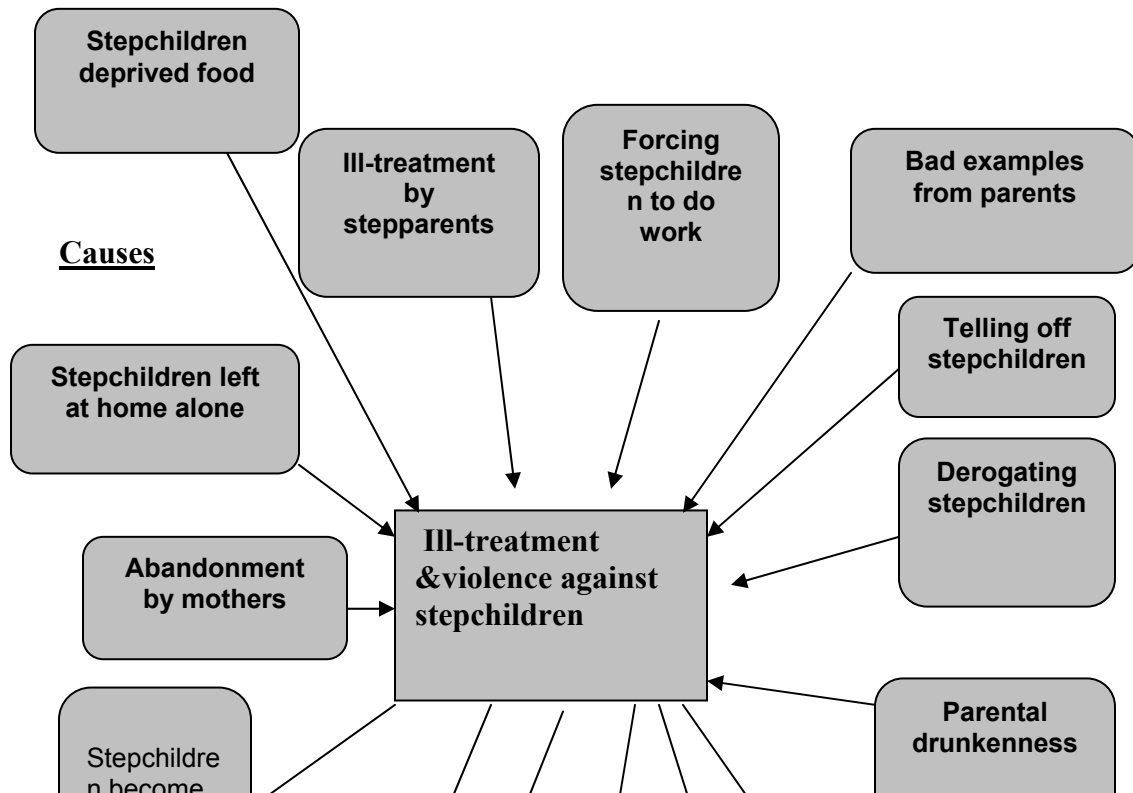


Figure 5: Linkages between stepfamily socialisation of stepchildren, delinquency and the emergence of psychosocial problems according to police officers in Harare.

In Harare, Highfield police also reported that there is a link between stepparenting, delinquency and the emergence of psychosocial problems. Figure 5 above indicates that stepchildren engage in general delinquency. The delinquency results in gangs, street kids, housebreaking, robbery, lack of social orientation, and school dropouts among others.



Effects

Figure 6:Causal impact diagram of the causes and effects of ill-treatment and violence against stepchildren in stepfamilies according to mixed groups of men and women in Harare.

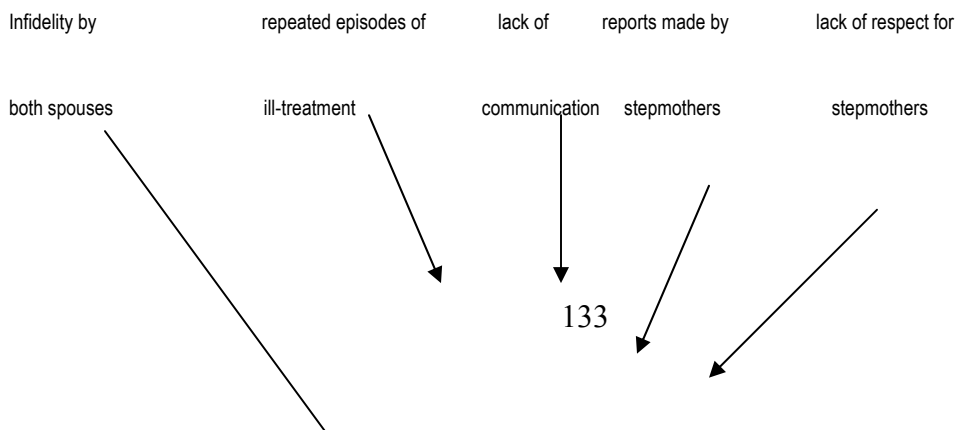
According to the focus groups conducted in Highfield and Waterfalls in Harare, stepparenting results in abandonment of stepchildren by biological parents, deprivation of food by stepparents, drunkenness of biological parents and stepparents, verbal and emotional abuse of stepchildren by biological parents and stepparents. Other problems emanating from stepparenting as stated by the respondents include telling off the stepchildren and derogating stepchildren. The study also reveals that the stepchildren are subjected to child labour (forcing stepchildren to do work). The respondents illustrated the disproportionate gender

disparities in stepchildren's vulnerability to child labour prevalent in stepfamilies. More girls than boys were reportedly given work that was incompatible with their age and were potential drop outs from school. In a number of cases the girls were reportedly betrothed or given to the rich or relatives who, used them as child minders under the guise of looking after the children, yet abusing them and depriving them of appropriate psychosocial development commensurate with their age. These moves violate the children's right to education. The study shows that the ill-treatment of stepchildren has far reaching effects on the stepchildren. The stepchildren have been shown to become violent in the home and community, develop hatred towards stepparents and biological parents, and engage in prostitution and drug and substance abuse. The results indicate that the stepchildren also develop mental health problems (figure 6 above).

4.4.1.2 Stepfamilies as disintegrated entities

The focus group discussions showed that stepfamilies are perceived as disintegrated entities.

Causes



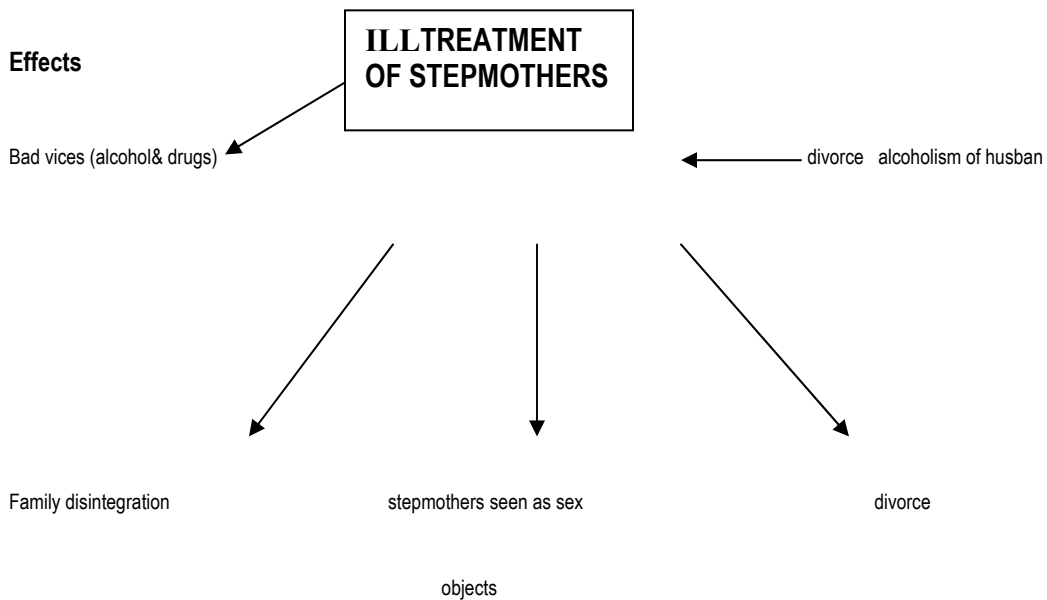
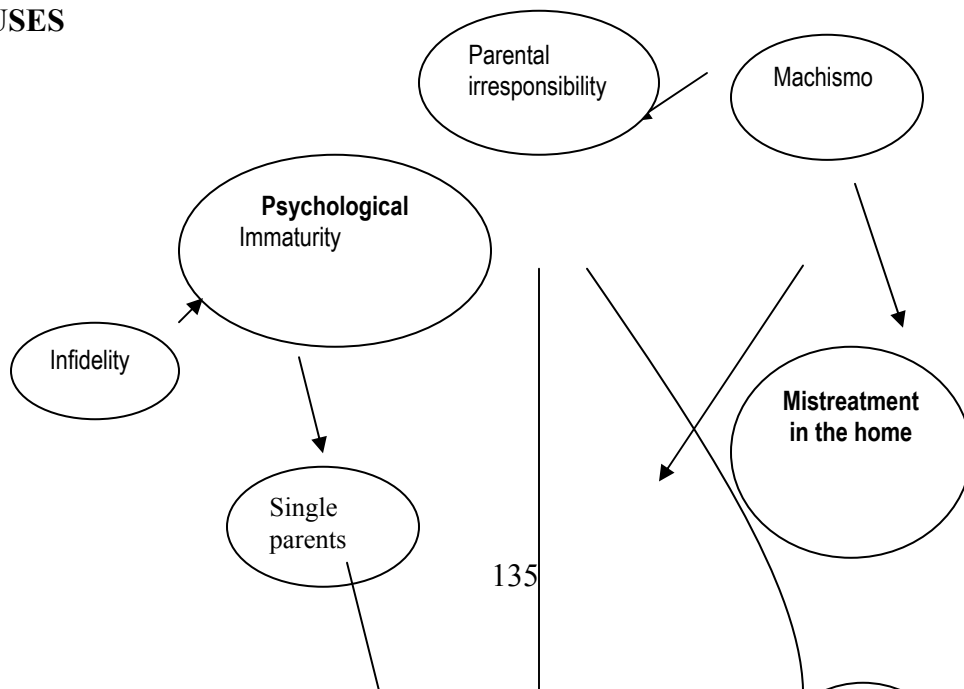


Figure 7: Causal impact analysis diagram of ill-treatment of stepmothers in Gutu Growth Point and Waterfalls.

Figure 7 above depicts the causal impact analysis of the ill-treatment of stepmothers. In the respondents' views, a host of psychosocial factors interact to bring about the ill-treatment of stepmothers. A comparison of the results revealed a uniform pattern on how respondents from the two research sites perceived this aspect of stepparenting. A stepparent from Mukaro in Gutu who was also part of the FGD had this to say;

"He used to call me whenever he was going to work late, but now I have no idea whether or not he will be home at all! When I ask for an explanation, he loses his temper."

CAUSES



EFFECTS

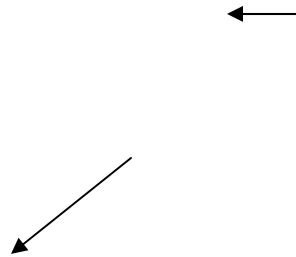


Figure 8: Causal impact diagram of stepfamily disintegration in Harare

In figure 8 above, a causal impact analysis of stepfamily disintegration is shown. The causes of stepfamily disintegration were, reported to be infidelity among spouses, psychological immaturity, parental irresponsibility, machismo (excessive masculinity) that leads to mistreatment of spouses and children in the home.

“The spouses can cheat and have extramarital affairs.” #12

“Mvana dzinenge dzajaira kurara nevarume zvokuti kunyangwe ukamuroora haadzikami/ Divorcees may have been accustomed to sleeping around with man. Even if you marry her, she will not easily abandon that practice.”

“Vanhu vacho havafungi (these people do not think.”# 25

Another factor that was reported to contribute to stepfamily disintegration is the migration of stepparents and stepchildren to the towns, cities and the diasporas.

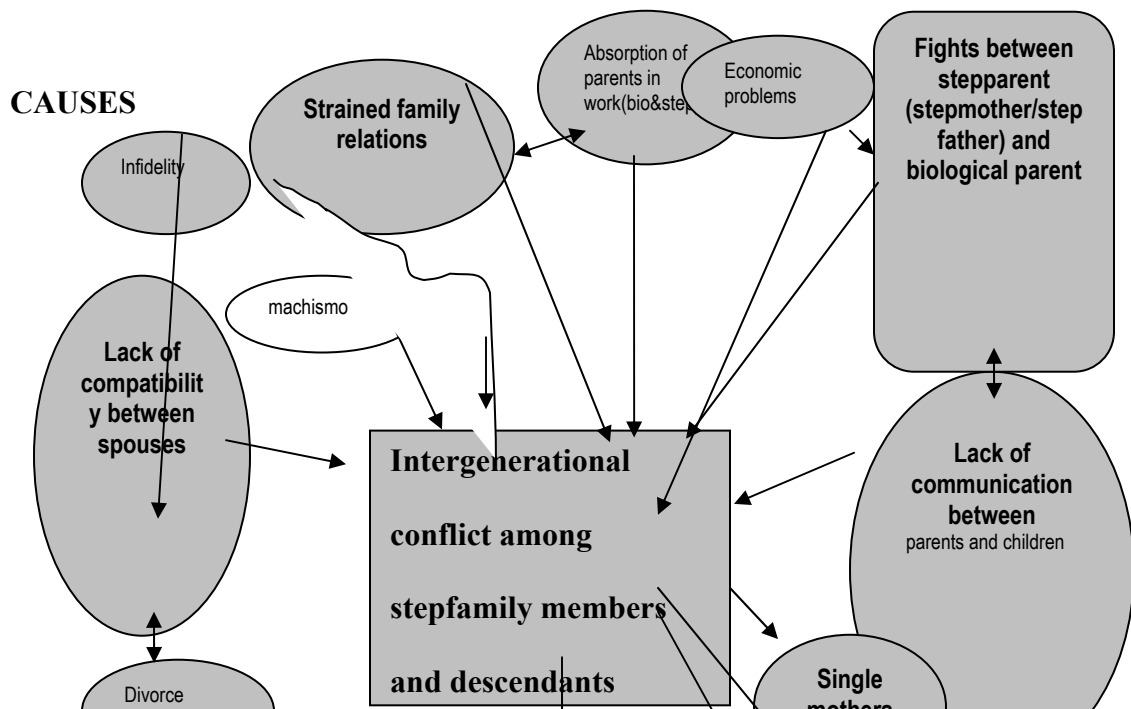
“ The father usually goes to town with his new wife. They stay there and forget about the children from the first marriage.”# 15

“The stepchildren may go to towns to look for jobs.” #10

“ Some mothers remarried and went to the diasporas with their husbands leaving the children from the previous relationship suffering.” #5

The results also indicate that when the stepfamily has been disintegrated other problems emanate too. These include drug abuse among stepchildren, suicidal ideation among stepchildren, and exploitation of stepchildren by the rich. The stepchildren also become gangsters, and delinquents. On the other hand, the respondents felt that redivorcing is prevalent among remarried couples. This divorce renders some women as single mothers. The stepchildren can also marry very young leading to immature marriages and marriages of interest. The

stepchildren marry without proper marriage counseling and guidance from parents.



EFFECTS

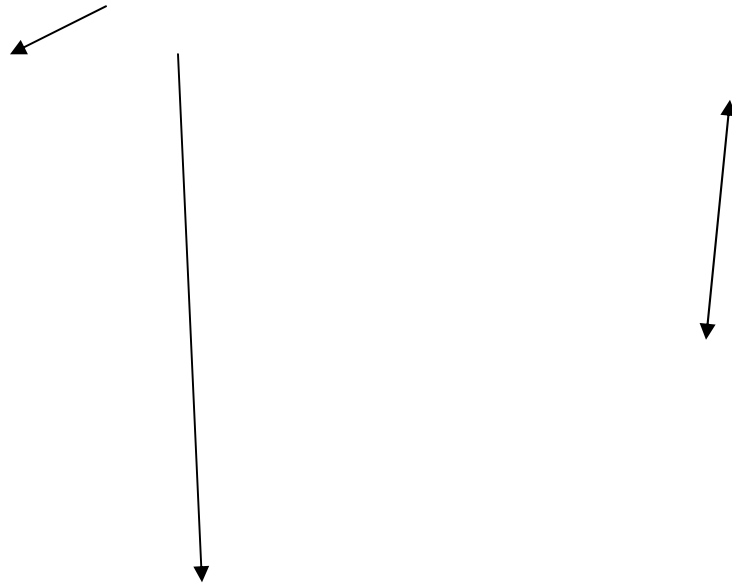


Figure 9: Causal flow diagram of intergenerational conflict (*gadzinyina*) between stepparents and stepchildren as a result of strained family relationships by a group of middle(35- 45 years)aged men and women in Gutu.

The results indicate that stepfamilies and subsequent generations continuously experience *gadzinyina*/ hatred between co-wives. *Gadzinyina* indicates the wives' struggles for possession of scarce resources. The scarce resource, in this case is the husband. The stepmother is inclined to prevent sexual relapse in which the husband will fall back in love with the ex-wife. On the other hand, the divorced biological mother feels that the stepmother stole the favour of the husband away from her. *Gadzinyina* is a form of jealous that precipitates into

episodes of fighting involving the children of the two mothers. The children form coalitions with their mother in fights against the other woman and her children and vice versa. This spills into the next generation. Each group tries to dominate the other in a number of issues in all the spheres of life. Each group also tries to differentiate itself from the other in a number of important and unimportant ways.

According to the respondents from Gutu, *gadzinyina* (intergenerational conflict) in stepfamilies is caused among others by infidelity. The infidelity stems from a biological parent who continues to date and see their ex-spouse and have sexual relationships (sexual relapse). This infidelity was considered more common among men than women due to high levels of machismo in men than in their female counterparts. Strained stepfamily relations between stepparents and spouses, stepparents and stepchildren, the ex-spouse and the stepparent, the stepparent and the ex-spouse also lead to *gadzinyina*.

The absorption of the stepparent and the biological parent in work (workaholics) coupled with economic hardships reportedly led to *gadzinyina* as the stepchildren, stepparent and biological parent feel some inequity (distributive and procedural injustice) in the way resources are shared and distributed within the stepfamily. The lack of compatibility between spouses (stepparent and biological parent) was also found to lead the other spouse or partner to feel insecure in the relationship. This also results in divorce. The divorcee and his or her children will fight the other spouse long after the marriage has ended. This

progresses for generations. Insufficient communication between the biological parent in a stepfamily and their children has been reported to fuel intergenerational conflict (*gadzinyina*). The respondents also revealed *gadzinyina* (intergenerational conflict) is also a precursor of a number of psychosocial problems. These include abandonment of children. The abandoned children end up in drug addiction, gangs, alcoholism, laziness and property grabbing (*Makoronyera awa anongoziva kutora zvinhu nechisimba kana kuti mukundo. Izvi zvinokonzera kuti vana ava vanzi vanamudyazvavamwe*).

Another problem that was indicated to crop up from *gadzinyina* is religious pluralism and religious antagonism. In religious pluralism, the members of the families engage in multiple belief systems. Examples are worshipping in churches with different ideologies and doctrines. Invariably, the respondents cited different Christian practices among churches as people's responses to family antagonism and the need to be different from the other family members. A possibility of religious pluralism is belief in multiple African traditional religions (ATR). These encompass worshipping the spirits of the ancestors (*midzimu /amadlozi*), *mashavi* (*amatshomane*), and possessions of goblins (*zvkwambo*). In addition, the stepfamily members and descendants were reportedly to be divided when they want to consult traditional healers (*n'angas*), diviners and prophets (*vaprofita*). This indicates that the stepfamily is an institution in which the relationships between the members are punctuated by conflict of interest and lack of unity of purpose. The above scenario zeros in on religious antagonism. In this case each side acknowledges that they cannot

contest the other group alone. They would rather employ some supernatural powers. This indicates that the groups have an external locus of control. They do not have an internal locus of control. Religious pluralism and antagonism were also thought to result in lack of family solidarity and to also be caused by lack of family solidarity.

Lack of family solidarity can lead to lack of communication between parents and children as well. The respondents also indicated that intergenerational conflict (*gadzinyina*) could lead to prostitution and single mothers. On the other hand, engaging in religious pluralism indicates attempts by members of the stepfamily to cope with problems that bedevil them. In this case, the system finds its own psychosocial equilibrium. The stepfamily is thus, a subsystem whose sources of problems and solutions to those problems lie in the family and community.

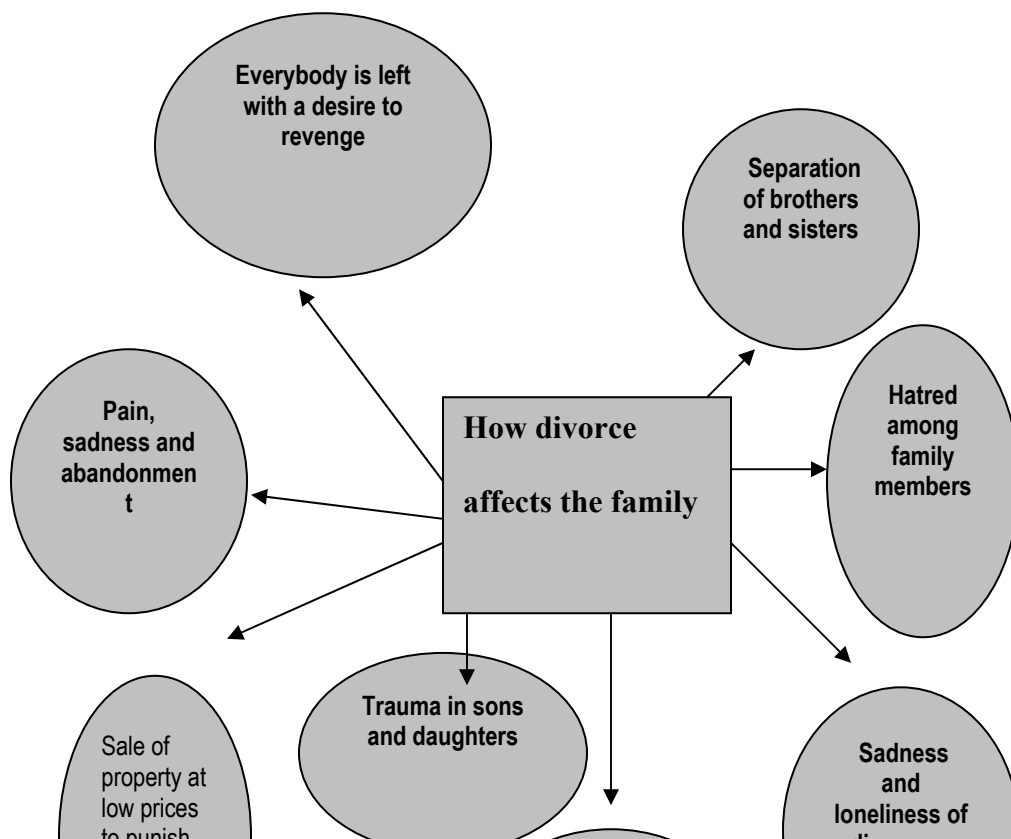


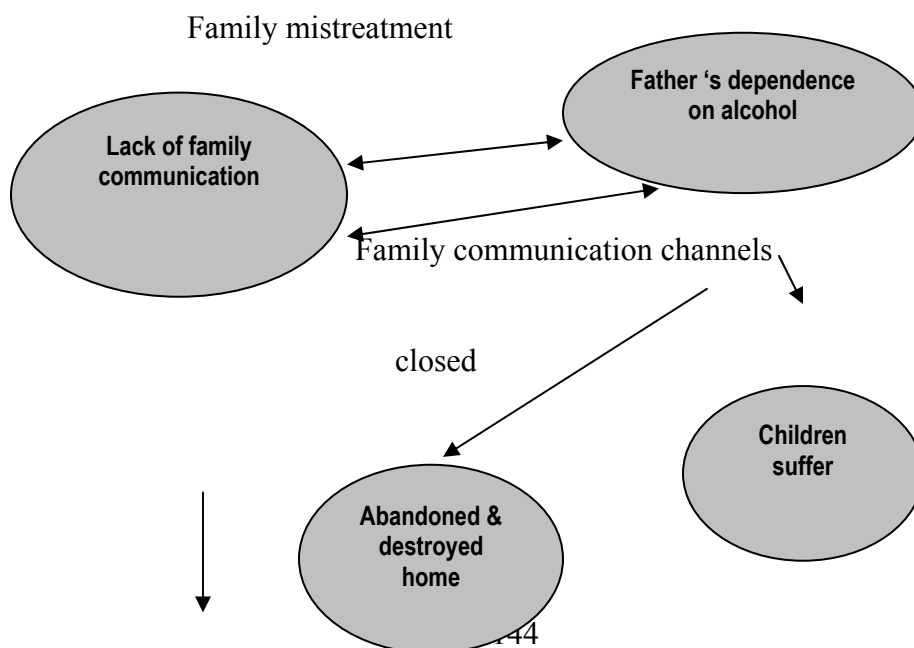
Figure 10: Causal impact diagram of how redivorcing affects the “first” family and subsequent families: implications for stepfamily dynamics by a mixed group of men and women aged 20-60 years in Highfield in Harare.

Figure 10.0 above, illustrates how divorce was perceived to affect the “first family”(mhuri yokutanga), and subsequent families (mhuri dzechipiri kana kuti mhuri dzinotevera). Divorcing and redivorcing was viewed to result in trauma in sons and daughters, sadness and loneliness of divorcees, and hatred among family members. The divorce was also considered to lead to feelings of pain, sadness and abandonment among stepchildren, separation of brothers and sisters as well as the sale of property at low prices to punish the other spouse and the children. The need to sale property at low prices was also associated with the feeling and desire to revenge, which is also prevalent in everybody involved. The following excerpts from FGDs held in Highfield help to illustrate these points

“The children are forced to grow apart and in different environments.”

“The children will be sad, lonely (vana vanoshurikirwa).”

“You usually find out that one of the divorcees, attempts to sell all the property at unrealistically low prices. The husbands are the chief culprits, they know that they loose nothing, they can always buy new wares. Unfortunately for most women they dependent on their husbands for their livelihoods. Midziyo/mbatya/nhumbi dzinongotengeswa nemari shomanene.”



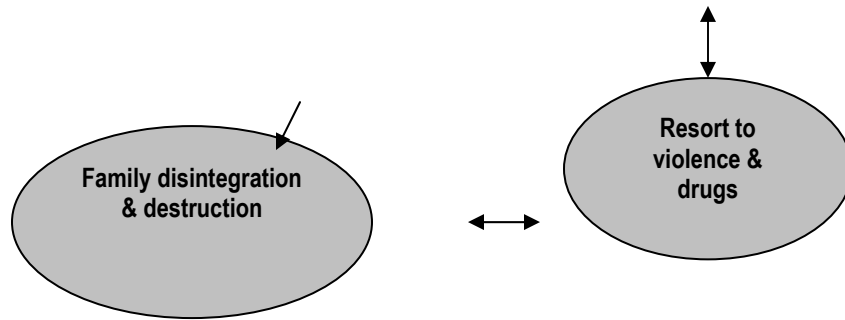
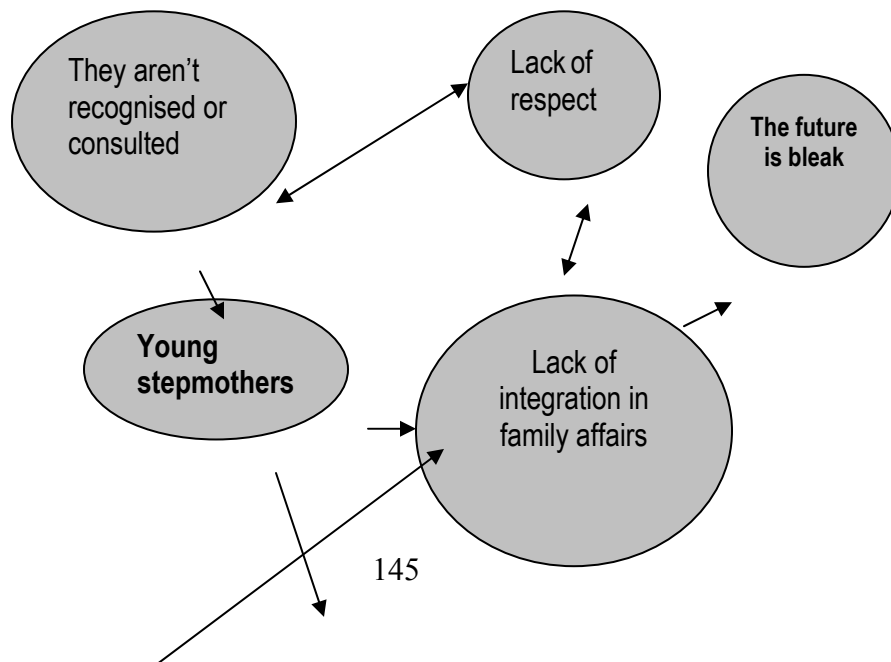


Figure.11. Causal impact diagram of causes and effects of lack of communication in the stepfamily by teenagers in Harare aged 14-18 years.

In figure 11 above, communication was found to be an integral component of stepfamily interaction. In the respondents' opinion, the stepfather' dependence on alcohol brings about suffering in the children (biological & stepchildren). Related problems identified include family disintegraton, outbreak of violence and a high prevalence of children who depend on drugs.



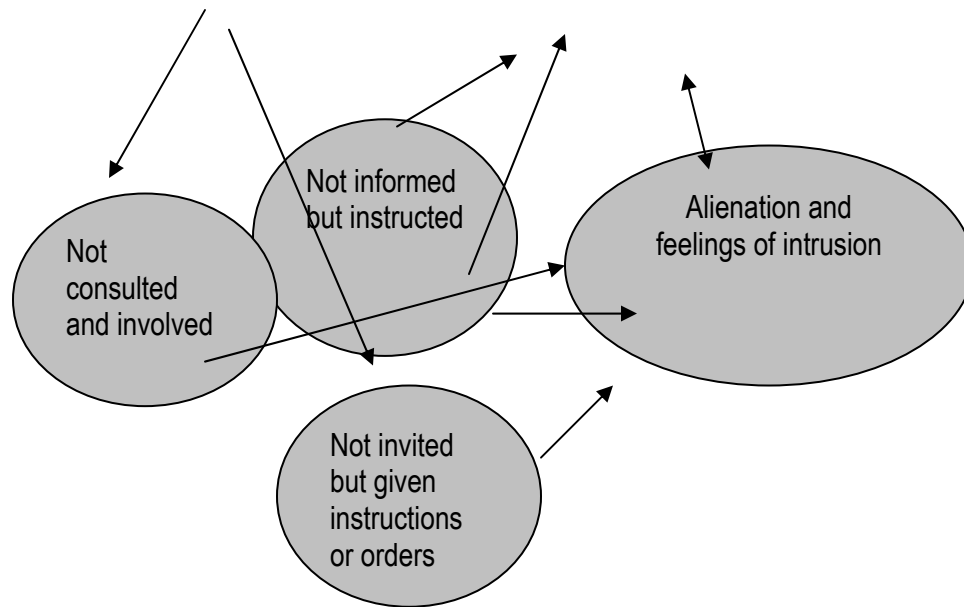


Figure.12. Perceptions of stepmothers’ exclusion by the stepfamily/ family of procreation/elderly women in Gutu according to women aged 16-30years.

Figure 12 above is an illustration of the community perceptions of stepmothers’ exclusion by the stepfamily, family of procreation and by elderly women in Gutu. The young women indicated that young stepmothers are mostly excluded in familial issues. According to the results, the young stepmothers are not recognised and consulted. The young stepmothers are also not informed of family proceedings but they are instructed and given orders. Thus, the young stepmothers were also perceived to lack the capacity to make decisions.

“Vanongoudzwa zvokuita pasina mibvunzo kana mukana wokupawo mazano avo/ they are told what to do without questioning or given a chance for suggesting alternatives.”

The future of the young stepmothers is viewed as bleak. Lack of integration was also perceived as producing feelings of alienation, intrusion and lack of respect for the stepmothers. When the stepmothers are not informed, not involved and not invited they also feel that they are being alienated and intruded. The results may also mirror the general demise surrounding mother-inlaw- daughter-inlaw relationships that are marked by protracted episodes of hostility.

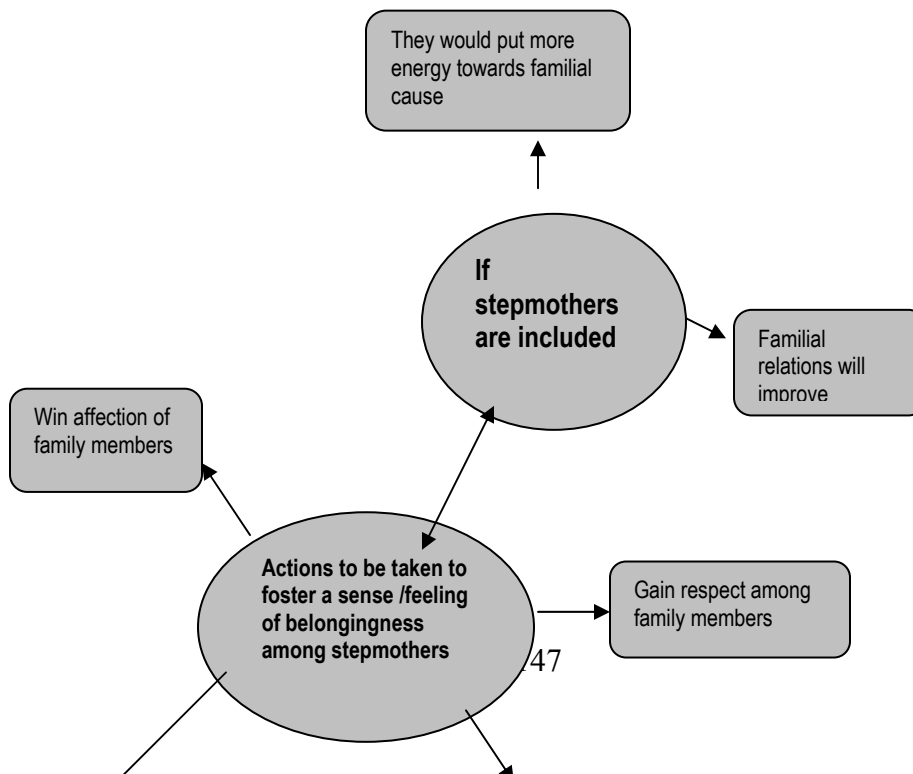


Figure 13: Perceptions of possible positive effects of the inclusion of young stepmothers in family affairs and the psychosocial skills, actions and initiatives stepmothers should take to be included according to young mothers aged 16-30 years in Gutu.

Figure 13 above, illustrates community perceptions towards the possible benefits of including stepmothers in family affairs. The results are two-fold in that the respondents suggested actions to be taken by stepmothers as well as the potential benefits that are likely to be realised if stepmothers are included. Therefore feeling of alienation prevalent in some stepmothers will be positively dealt with through an inclusive approach to stepfamily living.

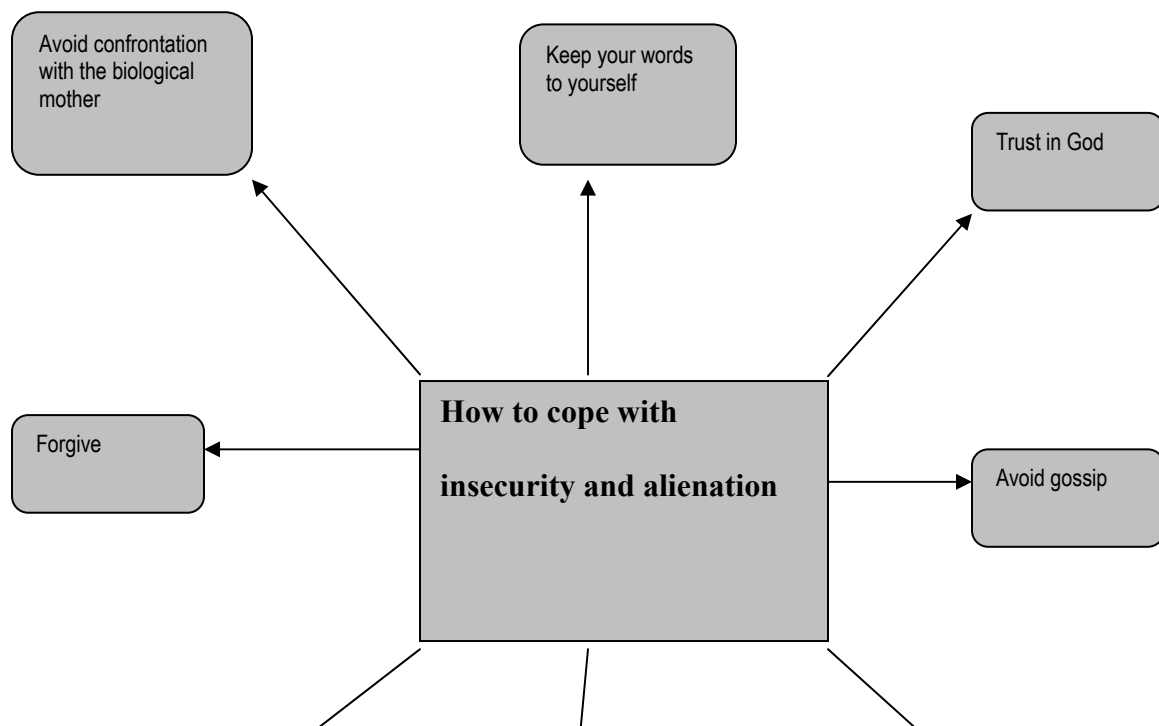


Figure.14. How stepmothers should cope with insecurity and alienation by young mothers aged 16-30 years in Harare.

The figure 14 above, illustrates the community perceptions with respect to how stepmothers should cope with the feelings of insecurity and alienation common among young stepmothers. The community's suggestion can be used to effectively deal with this identity and the roles associated with being a stepmother.

4.5. 0 SHONA PROVERBS, IDIOMS AND METAPHORS OF STEPPARENTING

Some of the respondents perceived stepparents and stepparenting in metaphorical terms. Below is a list of some of the idioms, metaphors and analogues used by respondents and the community to describe stepparents, stepparenting and remarriage. The metaphors are categorised as follows:

4.5.1 Stepparenting as a burden and risk

4.5.1.1 Kutakura chitanda /chikuni chinamasvosve. Carrying a stick infested with biting ants.

The above metaphor is an example of the likelihood of respondents' "signal of regretting". This gives them a "feeling of embarrassment and devaluation" of the new remarriage and stepparenting. We can see that the act of carrying a stick infested with biting ants "subjects the load bearer to some danger." The biting experience carries with it issues of the intensity, location, duration of the pain and the remedies to be taken to alleviate the pain. By further conceptualising the pain one can hypothesise that the intensity of the pain can be severe or mild and that it can be located anywhere in the body. The bite and the subsequent pain pose a threat to the life of the individual bitten by the ants. The individual may die, get poisoned, injured, disabled or disfigured etc. These are also fears that are associated with being bitten by the ants, one knowingly and intentionally carried. The pain may also continue. It can also cause someone to have sleepless nights and restless days. However the pain may be intense at the beginning and later decrease, showing also that the individual may also cope with the pain. Ways of coping may include taking medication, waiting for the wound to heal and helplessness.

4.5.1.2 Kukweva sanzu namashizha aro. Pulling a branch and its leaves.

The woman is considered as the branch and the children as the twigs and leaves. This indicates accepting/acknowledging/approving/normalising/accommodating/

assimilating/valuing the stepfamily. The use of this proverb reveals to me that the respondents are grappling with a burden that of “pulling a branch.”

Initially the branch has been “removed from a live tree”. The branch in “no longer alive and intact”. It is “now detached”. The respondents also appear to “foresee some future benefit inherent in the pulled branch”. There are “two competing values”, a burden of pulling the branch and a foreseeable future benefit inherent in the branch and its constituents (branch and its leaves i.e. *sanzu namashizha aro*). The branch may be used for firewood and any uses deemed so by the puller. The resultants are that the community “accepts, acknowledges, approves, normalises, accommodates, assimilates and values the stepfamily, stepparenting and stepparent”. This “legitimises the stepparent and the remarriage”.

4.5.1.3 Ukarera imbwa nomukaka mangwana inofuma yokuruma. If you rear a dog with some milk tomorrow it will bite you.

The stepchildren are symbolised as dogs, the care given to them as milk, the ill treatment the stepchildren give to the stepmother/father as the biting received. You rear the dog with milk a nutritious food so that it grows healthy. When you rear a dog you expect the dog to offer you security against thieves. You also expect the dog to catch wild animals like hares, bucks etc, which you use as meat. When the dog bites its owner, it will most likely be rabid. The only way to treat this situation is to report to the authorities at the veterinary services, who will come and kill the dog. When the dog has been killed the owner will have experienced a double loss. He will have lost a dog and possible protection. The

owner who will have been bitten is also likely to develop rabbis, a fatal disease. Besides contracting rabbis, the owner will be wounded. The wounded individual may bleed profusely and die from excessive bleeding. The dog may even kill the owner. When the dog attacks, the owner may mistaken the attack by the dog for play.

4.5.1.4 Imhonda munwe chaiyo. Unoti ndiri kupfura nesando nyamba wotozvitswanya munwe. It is finger hitting /contusing. You think that you are forging using a hammer only to dsicover that you are hurting your finger.

You think that you are smelting some metal, hitting the metal with a hammer yet you are hitting and hurting your finger. This analogous metaphor illustrates that the respondent is internalising pain/agonising/vending off/discovering the veil/ adjusting to discomfort/ rendering feelings of discomfort. The respondents feel that the experience of remarrying is a mechanical operation, during which the smith uses a hammer to forge some steel/metal with the intention of producing a tool or piece of artefact. In the process of forging this steel/metal the smith accidentally hurts himself or herself with a hammer. The smith may damage their fingernails, fingers, and palm. The bones of the fingers may also break resulting in a fracture. The fracture may be double or simple. They may bleed profusely or slightly depending on the severity of the impact that the hammer had. The smith may also develop an internal wound (*mbumbushira*). This causes severe pain, which eventually subsides when the blood finally clots. After sometime the

wound will heal, and a new skin will develop over the wounded area as new cells and tissue will grow. The stepfamily living, stepparenting and the relationship formed after remarriage and transitional episodes that follow are synonymous with a healing wound. There are chances that the wound may be disturbed at a critical healing moment (*kudzimbirwa/kudzimbwa*). A fresh wound will start and this is a painful experience. The rewounded individual will have sleepless nights and restless days again. Rewounding prevents the individual from doing their normal daily activities (rewounding).

4.5.2 Stepparenting as a transitional process

4.5.2.1 Zvakafanana nenyoka ichangozunura. Inenge yabva ganda jaru yava neganda idzva. It is like a snake that has just “undergone metamorphosis.”

The old skin will have peeled off. The remarriage is likened to a recently moulted snakeskin. The old skin is the repertoire of behaviour depicted in the previous marriage/relationship. It appears to me that the respondents are “comparing the new remarriage to the previous marriage “by using a “proverbial metaphor”. At the same time they are accepting the new institution (stepfamily) and the players (stepparents). The respondents seem to have “studied/ analysed the new entrants” and weigh their characteristics and behaviour on some social scale/ balance. The resultant evaluation is that the stepparent and the relationship is better than the one that preceded it. The snake moult may be fear provoking. The fear may be for a short time or may be prolonged leading to some psychopathological disorder or phobia. The fear may disappear with treatment. I may also resist treatment and become

chronic. The fear that the people have may be based on personal previous experience, observations of people who have been bitten by the snake or may be through stories. Some of the fears may be genuine or exaggerated.

4.5.2.2 Zvakaita semombe yadya rwangachena. Inotodhozwa, nokupiwa mushonga kuti uuraye zvinanara zvacho. Its like a(n) cow/ox that has swallowed a parasite. You dose to kill the parasites.

The emphasis here is that a stepfamily is likened to a beast. The beast is cured by being given some herbs or *muti* to kill the parasites. The dimensions of diagnosing/ prescribing/ treating/ anticipating positive change are prominent thought processes prevalent in the respondents. The beast may take some time to respond favourably to the dosage. A positive possibility is also that the beast may quickly respond to the dosage, thereby eliminating the parasite forthwith. Marrying a divorcee or someone widowed is likened to a healthy beast, which swallows a parasite in the guise of feeding. The respondents seem also to suggest that stepparents or married spouses are passive and are subjected to environmental cues with less. This is too deterministic and reductionistic an approach.

4.5.3 Stepparenting incompatibility

4.5.3.1 Mukadzi wechipiri chigamba chesatani chaiswa panguo yakabvaruka icho chiri chitsva/chipenyu / Mukadzi wechipiri chigamba. The second wife is like a jean patch sewn on an old and torn cloth.

The respondents viewed remarriage as synonymous to “an attempt to mend” a torn dress/ trousers with “two incompatible materials”, a jean patch sewn onto a torn cloth. The respondents also arrived at some conclusion after comparing/contrasting. This results in the “feeling of contemplating, denial, or rejection” of the newly attached material because it has “caused more harm than good”. The tailor (wife/husband) is thought of as “having made a blatant and fatal mistake.” The statement indicates that the respondents are devaluing, disregarding and downgrading the stepmother (second wife). This illustrates that stepmothers are devalued, downgraded, disregarded personalities. The stepmother/ second wife is perceived as manufactured and durable. The marriage is a material whose durability ends when the dress/ shirt is torn and needs mending. The mending (remarriage) is an attempt to preserve what is already available. This is done primarily to avoid the costs that are associated with buying a new shirt/dress. The new dress/shirt is expensive. By the same analogue, marrying a girl is considered expensive hence the divorcee or widow/widower is chosen as a substitute the ex spouse.

4.5.3.2 Kana mwana uyu akarara nenzara kana kuswera asina kugeza pano pfuta moto. If the stepchild spends a day or a night without food, or with taking a bath, there will be some burning fire.

The interaction that follows the two events, none feeding and bathing of the stepchild is likened to a fire that will burn. The fire, are the words, actions, gestures and nonverbal communications from the spouse, relatives, in-laws,

and community etc). The words will be directed to the stepparent, and the biological parent who is part of the stepfamily in question. The fire will burn anything and everything. This fire can destroy property, injure people, and kill animals and people. The fire can be dangerous to the individual who started it, or other people. The words and actions may convey dissatisfaction with the way the stepparent treats the stepchild.

4.5.3.3 *Mukadzi wechipri ane rafu semubhedha wemapuranga. The second wife (stepmother) is as rough as a plank/ wooden bed.*

The stepparent or stepmother is symbolised a plank bed. The bed has no comfort. The bed is expected to offer comfort to the users. Instead, the users experience some pain sensation during and after sleeping on this type of bed. The stepchildren, biological father, and relatives are considered as users. The users have no option but to continue to use the bed. They compromise and continue to use the bed than to sleep on the floor. A possible option will be to abandon the bed all together.

4.5.3.4 *Mukadzi wacho anotsenga mvura. The wife chews water.*

This idiom was generally used to describe someone who disregards others, is selfish (self-centred). In Shona they say *anodada* to indicate that the individual is self-centred and disregards others. Water is not a physical material. One can only chew a bone, or anything material that is physical and can be physically felt. To chew water is to do the impossible. When you chew

something, usually there are some leftovers. In this case to chew water and have some leftovers from the chewed water is to have accomplished a none event.

4.5.4 Stepparenting as a worthwhile alternative

45.4.1 Gengezha mukombe hazvienzani neanonwira mudemhe. This proverb translates into “*It is better to use a partially broken gourd than to use a completely broken gourd (pieces) to fetch water and try to drink there from*”.

A commonly used and similar proverb is half a loaf is better than no bread at all. The stepparent is considered as a partially broken gourd. The respondents are worried about the functionality of the gourd (stepparent or divorcee) more than the physical state at least to some extent (being in pieces). Other previous users may have broken this gourd (stepparent) and the second user(s) now considers it as new. The gourd may have a broken handle or mouthpiece. This renders that gourd useable by some one who may be desperate and have no other options or sources for the gourd. The user may be so thirst, tired, busy, and has no time to look for alternative intact gourds. The gourd may have been broken purposely and intentionally, accidentally and unwillingly. The gourd is taken as having been acted upon. The gourd was a passive recipient of the force or impact that led to it breaking down. The stepparent is considered in this analogue not to have taken an active role in the circumstances leading to widowhood or divorce. Some people usually say *chitsaru chomumwe chitsva chomumwe*. What is old an instrument/ old clothes to someone is new to someone. This means that whilst the previous

user (ex-spouse) views the stepparent as a dumped artefact and a useless artefact, the new partner is very happy to have acquired something new. That is a new acquisition. This is what I may call “old newness”. The relationship is renewed; the stepfamily is renewed and rejuvenated.

4.5.5 Stepparents are incapable unconditional love

The stepparents were perceived as people who are incapable of loving stepchildren in the same way they will love their own biological children. The analogues, proverbs, metaphors and idioms listed below help to illustrate this notion.

“ Maranga ida ako omumwe anosemesa” or “Chisi chako rembedza usakungira hata svinga rehuni romumwe serako. Do not put much effort some one else’s bundle of firewood.”

The proverbs were used to signal that the stepparents should not bother themselves with the upbringing of stepchildren, as if the stepchildren were their own biological children. Such utterances are likely to perpetuate stepparenting myths.

4.5.6 Stepparenting myths and stereotypes

This metaphor below was used to convey the need for reciprocity and social justice. This entails doing unto others what you would like others to do for you. However, this proverbic metaphor is used by people who perpetuate stepparenting myths and stereotypes.

4.5.6.1 “Hazvidi tsiga padumbu rembeva pako woti zvarwadza / do not enjoy putting a burning log on a mouse’s stomach, and cry when its put on yours.”

In the proverb that follows, the stepmother is seen as a second wife. A second wife is like a jean patch put on an already tattered garment when the jean patch is still new. The old garment will be torn beyond recognition. There will be no remedy.

“Mukadzi wechipiri chigamba chesatani chaisva panguo yakabvaruka icho chiri chitsva.

4.5.7 Stepparenting as an enduring interpersonal relationship

Stepparenting was also reported to be an enduring relationship full of challenges that the players have to grapple with. The stepparents, stepchildren and members of the community all need to be tolerant at times.

“ Chaunodyara ndicho chaunodyara. Ukada unodiwawo. You reap what you sew. If you love you will be loved too.”

Showing love to the stepchildren or stepparent is likened to sowing. In this instance, good human relations are perceived as a growth process. There is the preparation of the ground, the seed and the final produce. There is also a time dimension needed for the sewn seeds to germinate, grow and mature. However, the germinated seeds need to be looked after. Thus the relationship between stepparents and stepchildren needs reciprocity and nurturing.

“Kuraira hakudi kuitwa zvejakuchichi. There are certain people who should give advice or reprimands and not everybody/everyone”

“ Kupinda muushe kurwadzisa nyama yako/To enter into chieftainship/kinghip results from enduring some pain.”

The frustrations associated with stepparenting are likened to the pain to be endured by those intending to be chiefs or kings. Such individuals should risk their lives and in turn endure.

“Haungapiwi mombe usina kuripa mari yakakwana/Kuwana chimwe hurashikirwa nechimwe/ you will not be given a beast unless you give the owner the full purchase price or some money .To find or get one thing you have to lose or forfeit another.”

“Wada umambo wada hondo. He who likes chieftainship/kingships chooses fighting wars.”

This analogous metaphor was used by the respondents to indicate the need to be vigilant, brave and courageous. Therefore if stepparents are to win the battle of stigmatisation associated with this identity and associated roles they need to brave the hostility inherent in these family variants.

“Mimba haizvarwi nguva yayo isati yasvika, zvikaitika panenge pazvarwa gavamwedzi. Pregnancy is not delivered before reaching the full gestation period. If delivered before time a premature baby is born.” An alternative proverb was *“Mimba haizvarwi musi wayabata. Huye mimba haidi kukurumidzirwa. Kazhinji unonzwa vanhu vachiti yapfuudza mazuva ayo, kwete kusagona kuverenga pamwe chete nokuikurumudzira. Pregnancy is not delivered the day it’s conceived.”*

The results also revealed that there is need for tolerance and learning to wait for the correct time is an art. This analogue teaches people perseverance and patience when dealing with stepparents, stepchildren and stepparenting issues. Thus, stepparenting was envisioned as a growth process. The metaphor of pregnancy a growth process with certain developmental milestones to be reached is used in this example to illustrate that time is needed for the stepfamily members to adjust and become psychologically mature and resilient.

“ Hapana huro inomedzera imwe. There is no throat that will swallow for another or Each one should strive for own survival.”

Eating and taking care of oneself among stepchildren was likened to swallowing.

This was another human body -biological process metaphor used to indicate the need for stepchildren to strive for their own survival in a stepfamily set up.

“ Watasva bere warida/kutakura ngwena huida. If someone rides on a hyena s/he likes the hyena. An alternative is kutakura ngwena huida/ No one carries a crocodile unless they like it. He who rides a hyena enjoys the ride/ No one lifts and carries around a crocodile unless they have use with it.”

This proverb was used to explain and justify one's marital choice, which people should not question. In particular it is used to help friends, relatives and the community to accept stepparents and their spouses. The stepparent or stepchildren from a previous relationship or marriage are referred to as crocodiles or hyenas. The spouse who marries a widow, widower or divorcee is

the individual carrying a crocodile or riding on a hyena. These two animals are according to Shona traditional beliefs, are associated with evil and witchcraft. An individual who therefore rides a on hyena or carries a crocodile on their shoulders is deemed a witch or wizard. In contrast, the metaphors also illuminate the utility of the dreaded animals to the owner or bearer. Hence, disregarding community expectations and feelings.

“Zvokukanganisa kana kunatsa zvakafanana nokudya nzungu, kana pakaita imwe chete yakaora, kunyangwe dzanga dzichinaka sei unotopfira dzose pasi nokuti dzinenge dzose dzovava hauzomedzi. Accepting wrongdoings is likened to eating rotten groundnuts that are bitter. You do not swallow but spit everything and start eating fresh ones ensuring that you do not eat those that are rotten in the process.”

This analogue was used to show that thinking or decision-making or relating to others is synonymous to eating and chewing groundnuts. When unacceptable ideas and thoughts linger into one’s mind, they are discarded and fresh ideas developed and tested until the correct solution is found. This scenario is similar to a situation during which people report that digesting or chewing/ *kuzeyya/kudzeya* is a mechanical process aimed at breaking down the groundnuts, thereby rendering them soluble. This term *kudzeya/kuzeya* derives its meaning from peristalsis and retro peristalsis. The problem to be solved is incubating.

“Rivo rechembere ramba waravira unoramba nechinokuponisa. Refuse an old woman’s relish after tasting.”

This proverb was used by the respondents to explain how some stepparents refuse to be advised on stepparenting issues, pretending to know everything. The proverb was said to be used to advise stepparents to accept advice. Thus, there is need to prove all things beyond any reasonable doubt.

“Chidende chinorema ndechine mbeu /A heavy gourd is one with seeds.”

This proverb was used to describe a woman’s potential to conceive. The seeds are the ova. Failure to conceive is usually blamed on the woman, who in turn was likened to a gourd without seeds (*infertility*). This however, further agitated the infertile individual for action and hostility. The individual develops some reactance aimed at protecting one’s self esteem. In addition, the results highlight the high probability of forced, unplanned, unwanted and unintended pregnancy, which was reported if the husband was perceived to be infertile. Such a scenario may also illuminate on the violation of women’s reproductive health rights.

“Mutsi weshana mutevedzi mudimbidziri anorasha vheka /A mice digger follows the hole. One who sidesteps loses the hole and fails to catch the mice.”

This proverb was used by the respondents to indicate the need to follow the correct procedure, channel of communication and protocol. It can also be used to indicate the need to do things the way they are supposed to be done.

4.5.8 Disparity between the stepparent's current behaviour and societal expectations.

In the respondents' opinion stepfathers and stepmother initially lie that they will look after the children properly only to change their behaviour and become hostile to the stepchildren and the spouse. This proverb is normally used to describe the behaviour of those who will be courting. The suitor unexpectedly changes their behaviour to the contrary.

“Rinonyenga rino hwarara rino simudza musoro rawana. One who courts does not show true colours until he has married (false pretence.)”

Another metaphor was used to describe and explain the unpredictability of events, situations and people, particularly stepparents. A harmless and useful person (*tsambarafuta*) changed into a wasp thereby posing danger to the people. This metaphor shows how stepmothers, stepchildren and stepfathers can be deceptive in the way they interact. This may be attributed to impression management.

“Takafa huona zvimwe tsambarafuta yakashanduka igo, ikaruma munhu akafa. We saw something puzzling; an edible fatty ant turned into a wasp, and stung someone to death.”

4.5.9 Proverbs, which give time as a dimension for judging stepparenting experiences

“Kamoto kamberevere kanopisa matanda mberi. A slowly burning fire burns or will burn some logs after some distance.”

This environmental-physical phenomena interaction metaphor signifies the sleeper effect. This shows that certain issues that appear useless become important in the long run. This proverbic metaphor was used to indicate how failing to discipline stepchildren may impact on the relationship, between the stepchildren and the stepparent. The failure to teach and socialise the stepchildren may culminate in delinquency as shown in the preceding section of this chapter.

Nzou haitemwi nyanga iri mhenyu. (You can not remove tusks from a live elephant, you need to kill it first.

Traditional leaders used this proverb to show that a conclusion cannot be easily reached unless the facts have been examined adequately. This is another proverb used to indicate the importance of the sequencing of events basing on time dimensions. The structural-processural interaction approach is central to this type of analysis. This entails that any changes in structure of the stepfamily will greatly affect the family process. However, changes in structure are achieved through subsequent subprocesses.

“Vanhu havazizvi mwana mudiki haapiwi maputi nokuti haana mazino. Anopiwa maputi munhu mukuru nokuti anenge ava nemazino. People are ignorant, a neonate is not given baked maize (maputi) because she/he does not have some teeth. Baked maize is given to adults who have the teeth with which to chew.”

In the above example, a newly married stepparent was likened to a neonate who does not have some teeth. Giving advice at an early stage precipitates problems in the stepparent's life. The child (stepparent) should gradually grow until she/he has grown some teeth with which to chew hard foodstuffs. There is a time dimension in dealing with stepparents. Stepparenting is seen as a growth process signified by certain developmental miles stones, which should be reached before certain behaviours can be expectedly observed in stepparents.

“Mbavha ngebati, yausati ndaashamwari/ A thief is one you will have caught red handed not a suspect. A suspect is a friend.” This proverb was used to dispel any thoughts of suspected infidelity among partners. According to the respondents one needs to establish the correct facts rather than just accuse a spouse of infidelity. The use of this proverb also illustrates how respondents use evidence-based approaches in solving problems of suspected infidelity and spousal cheating.

4.5.10 Stepparenting reward and punishment is based on reciprocity

Stepparenting was seen as a rewarding and punishing encounter during which all the parts interact.

“Kandiro kanopfumba kunobva kamwe, kandiro enda kandiro dzoka/ chindiro chinopfumba kunobva chimwe- a plate where one comes from/ plate come plate go/one good turn deserves another.

The central point according to this proverb is reciprocity. A key informant echoed this analogue. It denotes that good relationships between stepchildren and stepparents need some time to be established. This anthropomorphic metaphor, which uses human body parts for thoughts, and processes, is used to teach people to be tolerant. This utility proverbic metaphor was used to denote reciprocity between stepparents and stepchildren in their behaviour and relationships

Mudzingiriri wehuku anopiwa tsvaratsato /one who chases a fowl is given the fowls' legs as a token of appreciation.

The stepmother/father is viewed as a fowl chaser. Looking after the stepchildren is synonymous to chasing a fowl to be slaughtered. The chaser is not always entitled to the bulk of the good meat, but instead is given the chicken legs. The stepparent should therefore be given something as a token of appreciation for stepchild rearing. This metaphor was used by the respondents to reveal the need to thank a stepmother for rearing the stepchildren. The respondents indicated that the compensation is usually a cow of rearing/ *Mombe yechiredzwa*. It is usually given in the form of a heifer and not a cow. Giving a cow that bore once, twice or thrice is perceived as lack of appreciation for taking responsibility for the upbringing of the stepchildren. If a stepmother is given a cow instead of a heifer, she feels some inequity. This according to Shona traditional beliefs, results in *ngozi / the avenging spirit* haunting the family in the event that the stepmother dies unsatisfied.

4.5.11 Stepparenting as a learning experience

Being a stepparent was seen as a learning experience.

Kugara nhaka huona dzavamwe/ Inheritance is learnt from others.

This metaphor was reportedly used to show that there is need for stepparents to observe how fellow stepparents have grappled with stepparenting. This is an indication of the importance of social learning theory in life.

“Rivo rechembere ramba waravira, unoramba nechinokuponisa. Refuse an old woman’s relish after tasting.”

This proverb was used by the respondents to explain how some stepparents refuse to be advised on stepparenting issues, pretending to know everything. Thus, there is need to prove all things beyond any reasonable doubt. This is another example of how people later learn after they have made fatal mistakes.

“Zvokukanganisa kana kunatsa zvakafanana nokudya nzungu, kana pakaita imwe chete yakaora, kunyangwe dzanga dzichinaka sei unotopfira dzose pasi, nokuti dzinenge dzose dzovava hauzomedzi. Making mistakes or accepting wrongdoings is likened to eating rotten groundnuts that taste bitterly. You do not swallow but spit everything and start eating fresh ones ensuring that you do not eat those that are rotten in the process.”

This analogue was used to show how tolerance and accepting someone’s behaviour is reached. The thought processes engaged in are synonymous with chewing. When unacceptable ideas and thoughts linger into one’s mind, they are

discarded and fresh ideas developed and tested until the correct solution is found. This scenario is similar to a situation during which people report the importance of digesting or chewing/ *kuzeya/kudzeya*. This term *kudzeya/kuzeya* derives its meaning from peristalsis and retro peristalsis. The problem to be solved is incubating. This illustrates the need for people to engage in proactive thinking and problem solving strategies.

4.6.1 Stepparents as illegitimate parents and illegitimate spouses

The issue of the illegitimacy of a stepmarriage and stepfamily were discovered to hover around the stepparent figure, which the society failed to legitimise. The terms listed in Table 2 and Table 3 below help to bring out this notion.

Table 1: A comparison of stereotypic terms used to describe stepmothers.

Stereotypic terms used to describe stepmothers		Research site	
		Harare	Gutu
1	<i>Mainini/ mai vadiki</i>	√	√
2	Stepmother	√	
3	<i>Mukadzi wababa</i> (father's wife)	√	√
4	<i>Mukadzi wechipiri</i> (second wife)	√	√
5	<i>Hure rababa</i> (father's wore/hallot)	√	

6	<i>Musikana wababa</i> (father's girl friend)	√	√
7	<i>Mukadzi wake</i> (his wife)		√
8	<i>Mai</i> (mother)	√	√
9	<i>Gero ramudhara</i> (oldman's girl friend)		√
10	"Small house"	√	
11	<i>Garinya rababa</i> (father's prostitute)	√	
12	<i>Musikana wababa</i> (father's girl)	√	
13	<i>Mvana</i>		√
14	<i>Nzvarakamwe</i> (a woman who bore once)		√
15	<i>Tsvingudzi</i>		√
16	<i>Chirikadzi ina vana vayo</i> (a widow with own children)	√	√
17	<i>Mhanje</i> (baren /infertile woman)	√	√

The results shown in Table 1 above shed some light on the types of stereotypes about stepparents held by the community in Harare and Gutu. On average both communities negatively viewed stepmothers. Some of the terms used are quite damaging and derogatory. The majority of the terms used to describe stepmothers actually perpetuate stereotypes about stepmothers. A further look at the terms clearly suggests the respondents' and the community's view of the stepparents as people whose life is engulfed in failure. The respondents cannot separate previous intimate relationship from current marital relationships. The results are shrouded by the respondents' thought that unmarried divorcees and widows should not remarry. Some stepmothers have also been referred to as *mhanje* (one who fails/ed to conceive).

Table 2: A comparison of stereotypic terms used to describe stepfathers.

Stereotypic terms used to describe stepfathers		Research site	
		Harare	Gutu

1	<i>Babamudiki/babamunini</i>	√	√
2	Stepfather	√	
3	<i>Murume wamai</i> (mother's husband)	√	√
4	<i>Mukadzi wechipiri</i> (second wife)	√	√
5	<i>Chikomba chamai</i> (mother's suitor)	√	
6	<i>Gomba</i> (suitor)	√	√
7	<i>Mukomana wamai</i> (mother's boy friend)		√
8	<i>Baba</i> (father)	√	√
9	<i>Men yamai</i> (mothers' man)	√	√
10	<i>Murume wake</i> (her husband)	√	√
11	<i>Munhu wake</i> (his person)	√	√
12	<i>Tsimborume</i>	√	
13	<i>Gaya ramai</i>	√	√
14	<i>Ngomwa</i> (barren /infertile man)	√	√

The results reported in Table 2 above, similarly point to the negative lens with which society views stepfathers and stepparenting. The central theme in the majority of the terms listed above is stigmatisation and illegitimisation of stepparenting based on the identity of a stepparent. The same negative terms used to describe stepmothers in Table 1 above, were also shown to be male a province as well. These stereotypic terms were applied to some men who are perceived not to be able to father children and were also prevalent in descriptions of stepfathers. These are the men referred to as *ngomwa* (one who does not father or an infertile man).

4.6.2 Thematic Phrases Used To Describe Stepparents And Stepparenting Relationships

The researcher also made some efforts to rank the respondents' understanding of stepparents and stepparenting using thematic phrases from the responses of the respondents. These words were selected from the responses pertaining to how

stepparents are perceived. The words and phrases selected below at least show some balance among positive and negative aspects of stepparenting.

4.6.2.1. Human being theme

Vanhuwo (they are humans)

Vanhu kwavo (they are good/normal people)

Vanhu vanoraramawo (they are people who exist/live)

Vanhu vasina kukwana (they are abnormal people).

Hunhu (being human)

4.6.2.2 Human relations theme

Ngavagarisane zvakanaka (they should stay peacefully/ they should have good human relationships)

Vabereki ngavabatsirane (reciprocity/dependence)

Havataurirani/ngavataurirane (reciprocal dialogue) they don't talk/they should discuss).

Ngapave nemawirirano (there must be good relations/ mutual understanding).

4.6.2.3 Contextual theme

Zvinobva nokuti zvinhu zvakamira sei (situational context).

Zvinenge zvamboita sei/ chii chinenge chamboitika/ what will have happened/it depends on what will have happened (context in which behaviour took/takes place).

Zvinogona kushanduka (things can change).

Zvinhu zvinogaro chinja (ever changing context).

4.6.2.4 Specific psychological themes

Vanhu vane pfungwa (they are people with brains).

Vanhu vanofunga (they are people who think).

Ngavafungewo (they should also think).

Vanonzwa sei? (How do they feel?)

Ngavanzwisise (they should understand).

Vanofungawo zvinhu zvakanaka (they think about good things).

Vanodawo zvinhu zvakanaka (they also need good things).

4.6.2.5 Stepparenting as a relationship with and co-existence with illegitimate children

Despite having been born of their biological father and mother, the stepchildren present in a stepfamily are considered as illegitimate, unwanted and a burden to the stepparents. This seems to be the central theme prevalent in the terms used by the respondents to describe stepchildren as shown below.

Table 3: A comparison of the terms used to describe stepchildren

Stereotypic terms used to describe stepchildren		Research site	
		Harare	Gutu
1	<i>Mubvandıripo</i>	√	√
2	Stepchild	√	√
3	<i>Gora</i> (wild cat)		√
4	<i>Musiiwa</i> (child/one left behind)	√	√
5	<i>Nherera</i> (orphan)	√	
6	<i>Chinongwa</i> (something picked up)		√
7	<i>Mwana womukadzi</i> (a wife's child)	√	√
8	<i>Mwana womurume</i> (a husband's child)	√	√
9	<i>Mwana womudondo</i> (child of the forest/bush)	√	√
10	<i>Mwana wokunze</i> (child from outside)	√	√
11	<i>Mwana womumwe mukadzi</i> (another woman's child)	√	
12	<i>Mwana womumwe murume</i> (another man's child)		√
13	<i>Mwana womukadzi mukuru</i> (a bigger/first wife's child)	√	√
14	<i>Vana vomurume wokutanga</i> (children of the first husband)	√	√
15	<i>Vana vomukadzi wokutanga</i> (children of the first wife)	√	√
16	<i>Ropa romutorwa</i> (an alien's blood)	√	√
17	<i>Mutorwa</i> (alien)	√	√

A further analysis of the results in Table 3 presents questions of uncertainty about the origin of the child who is the stepchild. The views of the respondents illustrate that stepchildren do not only come from previous marriages but can be children from previous relationships, during which a formal marriage may never have materialised. Thus, the community and the stepparents also question the legitimacy of such children. This has a bearing on inheritance issues, particularly where the child is supposed to inherit from one of the parents particularly the father. This is a cause for concern and a potential challenge for the legal fraternity and customary law in settling such ensuing disputes.

4.7. 0. COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILIAL CHILD ABDUCTION

The respondents also indicated that a common problem prevalent in families of divorce including stepfamilies is child abduction.

Stepparents, key informants and the general public increasingly reported familial child abduction. A thematic analysis of the responses was done. The results that follow show the perceived dimensions of child abduction associated with divorce and stepfamily living.

4.7.1 Who Abducted The Child?

The perceived child abductors are listed below.

- Biological father.
- Biological mother.
- Paternal grandfather.
- Paternal grandmother.
- Maternal grandmother.
- Maternal grandfather.
- Aunt (*vatete/maiguru/mainini* [maternal]).
- Uncle(*babamukuru/babamunini/sekuru*[mother's brother]).
- Other relatives.

4.7.2 In Whose Custody Was The Child Prior To Abduction?

Child custody was reported to be either the responsibility of the biological father, biological mother or a joint venture.

- Biological father.
- Biological mother.
- Joint custody.

4.7.3 Who Stayed With The Child Before Abduction?

The respondents revealed that the person staying with the child might not be the individual with custodial rights. This was reported to be a cause for concern and reasons why some biological parents will abduct their children.

- Biological father alone (unmarried).
- Biological mother alone (unmarried).
- Biological father and stepmother.
- Biological mother and stepfather.
- Maternal grandmother and grandfather.
- Maternal grandmother alone.
- Paternal grandfather.
- Aunt (*vatete/maiguru/mainini*[maternal]).
- Uncle (*babamukuru/babamunini/sekuru*[mother's brother]).
- Other relatives.
- Community well-wishers.

4.7.4 Mechanisms Of Child Abduction.

Parents who abducted their own children used a variety of methods. The methods ranged from violent avenues to cunning ways of luring the child out of the present custodial home.

- Offered gifts (sweets/clothes/food etc).
- Forcibly taken away (whisked away in a vehicle/ manhandled).
- Violently (fight between abductor and caretaker resulting in caretaker submitting and letting the child go).
- Verbal threat to child/ caretaker *“Mwana akatyisidzirwa/ muchengeti womwana akatyisidzira nanyakutora.”*
- Showing weapon to child/ caretaker.
- Concealed, *“Mwana akavigwa.”*
- Abductor ran away with child. / *“Mwana akatizwa naye.”*
- Failing to return the child after a visit. / *Nyakutora nechisimba haana kuzodzosa mwana sezvakambenge zvatenderanwa.”*

4.7.5 Psycholegal Causes Of Child Abduction

Psychological and legal reasons were given for the cause of child abduction by parents and relatives following a divorce and subsequent remarriage of one of the spouses. Some of the reasons are shown below.

- Control and frustrate the other spouse.
- Interfere with the other spouse’s new marriage.

- Force ex-spouse to alter custody arrangements.
- Permanently change custodial arrangements.
- Entice wife to reduce child support/ maintenance.
- Child's welfare compromised.
- Reported cases of child labour, abuse and dropout of school (by relatives/ community).
- Gain support of children in ones' fight against ex-spouse and his or her new spouse.
- Gain economic mileage that will warrant appropriation of bride price for daughters.

4.7.6 Location And Time Of Abduction Of Child

Child abduction was reported to have two simultaneously occurring dimensions of time and location of the child at the time of abduction.

- At school during break time/ lunch time/ on way home after school.
- On way to school in the morning/ afternoon/noon.
- As child entered current residence in the absence of caretaker.
- Whilst fetching firewood/ water.
- Whilst herding cattle.
- Whilst watering garden.
- Whilst child was on his/her way from the local shops/ grinding mill.
- In the home during the evening/during the day in the presence of the caretaker.

- Whilst child was playing with other children.
- Child prevented from going back to the custodial agreed residence, remains at abductor's home.

4.7.7 Duration Of Abduction

Another dimension of child abduction that was reported involved the duration of the abduction. Three dimensions were teased out of the results. These include short term / duration abduction, medium duration and long term or permanent abduction.

4.7.7.1 Short term/ duration

The short-term duration of abduction ranged from a couple of hours, to a week.

- Less than five hours.
- More than 5 hours but less than 12 hours.
- 1 day.
- 2days.
- 1 week.

4.7.7.2 Medium duration

Medium term duration of abduction ranged from one month up to 6 months.

- 1 month.
- 2 months.
- 6 months.

4.7.7.3 Long duration

Long term duration of abduction ranged from 1 year up to five years and permanent abduction in which the child was never returned.

- 1 year to 5 years.
- Never returned.

4.7.8 Relocation Of The Child Following Abduction

The child abducting parent or relative was reported to change the child's location in an attempt to prevent the other parent from finding the child. The following were perceived relocation destinations.

- Rural home of ex-spouse.
- Urban home of ex-spouse.
- Some rural place other than home of abductor (village/ community) through collaborative efforts with relatives/friends etc.
- Some urban place other than residence of abductor (within same town/ different town).

4.7.9 Coping With Child Abduction

The parent or relative in whose custody the child was, was also reported to take some actions intended to nullify the recent change in custodial arrangements. The actions reported include the following:

- Reported to the police.
- Reported to the courts.

- Reported to *munyai* (go-between/ family mediator).
- Reported to the welfare department.
- Reported to child protection society.
- Did nothing considered it as good riddance/ blessing in disguise/ felt reduced custodial care/reduced financial burden/increased disposable income.
- Followed abductor.
- Fought with abductor.
- Took the child back.

4.8.0 PERCEIVED STEPPARENTING STRESSFUL EVENTS

This section presents the themes and subthemes relating to perceived stepparenting stressful situations. There are eleven themes reported under this category. The themes were derived through theoretical sampling of the research data. This was subject to the researcher's interpretive understanding of the picture emerging from the collected data. Be that as it may, interpretive shortcomings occurred. Despite these seemingly methodological drawbacks, the

researcher still contends that some useful insights were gained, truly reflecting the stepparents' perspectives and experiences.

4.8.1.0 Psychosocial Factors Which Determine How One Should/Will Introduce Their Stepsons/Daughters To Others.

One area, which was reported as giving stepparents some nightmares, was deciding how to introduce stepchildren to others. Below is a list of some of the reactions of the stepparents to this issue.

4.8.1.1 Reciprocal addresses between stepparent and stepchildren

According to a female Harare stepparent, she would introduce stepchildren basing on how they address her as well. This therefore, illustrates that stepparent –stepchild interaction is based on norm reciprocity.

“Recently I was questioned by a close friend why I addressed my stepkids as steps instead of addressing them as just son or daughter. I was puzzled, at the same time wondered. What is wrong with addressing them that way since they too addressed me as their stepmom and I got no problem with that? I have a biological daughter of 9 months and my stepson and stepdaughter have good relationship with her.”

4.8.1.2 When asked (When close friends and relatives ask/strangers asked)

How one will introduce their stepchildren also depends on who will have asked. The respondents indicated two dimensions about who asks. These are of

'stranger' versus 'acquaintance' enquiries. The first one pertains to whether 'strangers' intend to ask as shown below. The second dimension centres on the reality of actually being asked to introduce stepchildren. From the two versions of responses it shows that the type of thinking and emotions the respondents engage in are different. In the first instance there appears to be less threat unlike in the second instance in which the respondent appears agitated for some action. This is also event when the respondent further elaborates by saying, "...*I can't be bothered going into it.*"

"I would generally address my stepchildren just as my daughter or son only if stranger were to ask me who they are."

"I introduce them as my stepkids to my "people". When strangers ask are they all mine I say yes because I can't be bothered going into it."

Besides being asked by strangers the respondents may also be asked by relatives and close friends. The respondents revealed that there is no element of concealment when introducing stepchildren to significant others. This may be based on the view that they already know the respondent and trying to conceal will create heightened and unnecessary anxiety for the stepparent.

" However, if they are my close friends or relatives I would introduce them as steps because I think that's how I like my close friends and relatives to know that my stepchildren are part of me. I wonder why I should introduce them as my

own when I know no matter what they are not. In fact my stepson had my name as stepmother in his mobile phone.”

One respondent indicated that the significant others are already part of her life as shown below.

“I introduce them as my stepkids to my "people".

4.8.1.3 Wouldn't want to confuse the stepchildren, they already have their own mother and father, I regard myself as another adult figure meant to help them grow.

A female stepparent from Waterfalls in Harare acknowledged that claiming that the stepchild is one's biological child misrepresents the truth and would cause confusion in the stepchildren.

“In fact this issue was discussed with my dear husband and my stepson of 13 years old heard about it. I mean I wouldn't want to confuse my stepchildren, they already have a mother of their own and me, I regard myself as another adult figure who is there to help them grow into adulthood with love, guidance and care from me.”

4.8.1.4 Ambivalence, puzzlement and indecisiveness when strangers are around

Another Gutu stepmother also showed ambivalence and was even doubtful of how they should introduce the stepchildren. This respondent wanted the

interviewer to confirm and verify their position. This indicates some normative social influence and that introducing stepchildren to others is an individual, and psychosocial event in as much as stepparenting. By the same statement the respondent is also looking for social support in this crucial aspect of stepparenting. The respondent's statement shows their hesitations and fear. The respondent revealed perceived fear of judgement from the interviewer and the community at large. The respondent's statement also showed their inclination towards managing their identity.

“Well, I need some advise.... am I wrong to say introduce them this way, as my steps to my close relations, and just son and daughter to strangers because I do not want to go into details of the like that they are children from my dear husband's previous marriage to strangers.”

4.8.1.5 People with their own insecurities about stepparenting

Two stepparents also indicated that some people are insecure and uncomfortable being members of stepfamilies and would like to tarnish the images of stepparents.

“Wow no! I don't think you are wrong at all... aren't people odd? I wonder why they say this? Is this because they themselves are uncomfortable with the idea of a 'step' family?”

“They want you to be the evil stepmother due to their own insecurities.”

4.8.1.6 Physical resemblances among stepchildren and stepparent's own children from the current marriage with biological parent.

Another stepmother from Mushaviri indicated that one factor that will lead them to introduce the stepchildren as their own biological children was the resemblance between the stepchildren and the stepmother's own biological children. This in the respondent's opinion left very little if any room for the inquirers to doubt them.

"I get asked the same thing - and I'm sure many of stepparents do too. I have five kids that all look alike, and I'm often asked when we are out together 'wow are these all yours? And I say yes"

4.8.1.7 Depending on my mood and prospects of future encounter with inquirer or individual to whom stepchildren have been introduced

Mood swings were reportedly a significant factor in determining whether or not the stepparent would be bothered to introduce and explain if the stepchildren were their own biological children or not. In addition to the mood, a Highfield the stepmother, also indicated that she would only answer if she is busy and knew the inquirer had very little time for further questions. Another factor was the likelihood of meeting the inquirer.

“Depending on my mood, and if I am likely to run into those particular individuals again, I provide an answer!! Well... sometimes we have fun with it (if I am in a hurry the kids know I will answer anywhere! and we think its hilarious). Other times, I say 'well yes and no, these are my husband's children' (seems to be a lot more socially acceptable but God that is their problem. Ndezvake izvo handinei nazvo!!) and sometimes, I will proudly state 'these are my stepchildren, and this one's from a previous marriage and he's ours! Well.... you should see people's faces.”

4.8.1.8 People’s reaction and facial expressions

A stepmother from Mukaro in Gutu also indicated that the safest way to do it would also be to look at people’s faces to note any non-verbal cues that may signal otherwise.

“I will proudly state 'these are my stepchildren - and this one is from a previous marriage - and he is ours!' Well.... you should see people’s faces.”

Another stepmother from Waterfalls in Harare respondents also revealed that they could freely disclose their stepparenting status despite the perpetuating myths among the community members.

“I now proudly announce the fact that I am a stepmother and the reaction of people is truly amazing. It is incredible to note the reactions on people’s faces: the myth perpetuates itself thousands and thousands of years later. The bottom line is that that’s their problem.”

4.8.1.9 The need to reveal the truth and to surprise people

A female respondent from Harare indicated her personality type as being central to how she will respond to any inquires pertaining to the introduction of stepchildren to strangers.

“I can’t help it. I’m Aquarian. I like to shock!”

4.8.1.10 Stereotypes about stepmothers and stepfathers

Some male stepparents from Mupanadawana Growth Point cited stepparenting myths and stereotypes as the main reasons they will address their stepchildren accordingly.

“Step is not a dirty word. It's people's perception of it. Despite our issues (and we have plenty of them in our family too) people love being around us and watching what we have created as a family in our own right. That to me is worth more than anything.”

4.8.1.11 By their first names

Another female respondent felt that there is need to address the stepchildren by their first names.

“Do what you feel best, I introduce them by their names first and then if I am mixed up as their mother I say I’m their stepmother.”

4.8.1.12 The need to avoid perpetration of stereotypes

A female stepparent from Gutu reiterated that introducing stepchildren as your own perpetrates stereotypes and myths about stepparenting.

“The problem I feel personally is that as a stepmother you have so many stereotypes attached to it, that by introducing them as your children it perpetrates the myth that stepmothers want to take over the biological mother's role.”

4.8.1.13 Dispositions of the people who inquire

Another factor found contributing to the way people introduce stepchildren are the motivations of those who inquire.

“I feel a lot of people want you to mess up and are quick to jump on your back, they want you to be the evil stepmother due to their own insecurities and their lack of understanding about the stepmother role.”

4.8.1.14 Fear of people who are judgemental of stepparents and need to educate people to be less judgemental of stepparents

The stepparents also indicated that they are aware of how people perceive them.

The stepparents were also futuristic in their conceptions pertaining to introducing stepchildren. The respondents viewed their behaviour as setting some precedence. A Waterfalls stepmother asserted that,

“I have reclaimed the stepmother title. I am not afraid to use it anymore. That’s what I am, none of this bonus mum crap. I am their stepmother and hopefully over time as people came to know me and the part I play in the children’s life they will be less judgemental about it and less judgemental of other stepparents.”

4.8.1.15 Do what you feel best, there is no formula, remain in your comfort zone.

One respondent felt that introducing stepchildren was a learning experience. The respondent also felt that introducing stepchildren does not have laid down procedures as well and it is up to the individual to decide how they will introduce their stepchildren. The stepparent needs to consider what brings personal comfort.

“One thing I have learnt in this whole business is you are dammed if you do and dammed if you don’t, do what makes you feel comfortable.”

4.8.1.16 Situational specific introductions

The results also indicate that the stepparents will introduce stepchildren depending on the location and event, which they are attending together with the stepchildren.

“ If we are at a party etc, I just introduce all the kids with no explanation at all.”

“At a supermarket once, when I started talking about my stepchildren’s, mother one of them was surprised that they weren’t all mine.”

“One day their biological mother followed us when we had gone on a shopping trip. She said she had been watching me all day with "all my children" and was amazed at how well we all got along. She never thought for a minute they weren't mine. I took that as a complement.”

“Basically just introduce them as is appropriate in the situation you are in. Don’t let anyone else try to tell you what is right or wrong.”

4.8.1.17 As friends

Two from Highfield respondents indicated that they prefer introducing the stepchildren as friends.

“We just call the kids our "friends".....this is my friend "B". Some people are so nosey they don't deserve to know and gossip.” Or “Sometimes I just introduce my stepkids as "my little friends.”

4.8.2.0 Coping With, Psychosocial Dimensions Of Perceived Spousal Cheating

Sexual and intimacy issues were also a thorny issue in the lives of the stepparents. Closely connected with this were high levels of stepparents’

concern with suspicion, jealousy and the need to catch their spouses/partners red-handed in cheating episodes.

The respondents reported eleven sub themes of spousal behaviour that they perceived as indicators of cheating by their spouses. These are : a) *Change in intimacy routine*, b) *a sudden change in routine*, c) *Partner is more attentive than usual*, d) *Partner constantly picks fights with you*, e) *The partner/ mate becomes frequently sarcastic or critical of you*, f) *Partner uses ending the relationship as an ultimatum*, g) *Partner is consistently negative*, h) *Spouse becomes emotional or depressed*, i) *Spouse becomes more private*, j) *Partner/ mate's personal style changes*, and k) *Spouse no longer acts like part of your life*. Detailed examples of the respondents's statements are given below:

4.8.2.1 Change in intimacy routine.

The suspecting spouse complains of repeated false love pretence versus decreased intimate contacts.

The spouse starts wondering if his or her partner might be having an affair. They are torn between two worlds, whether it is jealousy, their imagination or if he or she is just paying less attention to them because there are other problems in the relationship? If your partner won't discuss issues with you, particularly if there is a lack of sexual intimacy, then they feel that they might have a cheater on their hands.

"My partner kept saying how much he loved me, but avoided touching me physically for months!"

4.8.2.2 A sudden change in routine.

Among the reported symptoms of a cheating spouse include the views that he or she is staying out a lot later than usual, not showing up for dinner or unable to account for his or her whereabouts. The respondents also revealed that the spouse reacts with rage and accuse you of being the Spanish Inquisition if you ask him or her to account for missing time. The respondents also felt that changes of routine can indicate infidelity as put across by a female respondent from Mushaviri in Gutu.

"He used to call me whenever he was going to work late, but now I have no idea whether or not he will be home at all! When I ask for an explanation, he loses his temper."

4.8.2.3 Partner is more attentive than usual.

Most stepparents thought that if you are suddenly showered with gifts and compliments for no reason, then your spouse might be trying to make up for guilty feelings. A classic example came from a female stepparent from Highfield as shown below.

"He tells me he is rewarding me with presents just for existing, but I would rather be happy if he were home more often."

4.8.2.4 Partner constantly picks fights with you.

In this case, the cheating spouse is looking for a reason to blame you for his or her need to leave. The emotional logic behind this is that picking a fight gives the cheating spouse an excuse to fly out of the house and possibly into the arms of the third party. That way the cheating partner can deny guilty feelings and blame you instead. If you are not to blame, a cheater will always create a reason to justify what he or she is doing to you. A Waterfalls male stepparent had this to say,

"I know a fight is coming because she tries to rub salt on old wounds by reminding me of a time I was in the wrong. I get so frustrated I end up yelling and she slams out of the house."

4.8.2.5 The partner/ mate becomes frequently sarcastic or critical of you.

The respondent reported that this statement is part of an agenda that, once again, gives the cheating spouse an excuse to leave or a justification for the affair. The guilty partner might also be overly sensitive to criticism from you, as there may be a ring of truth that triggers guilty feelings that they would rather not face.

"He is always calling me stupid, and when I cry, he tells me I am pathetic and leaves."

4.8.2.6 Partner uses ending the relationship as an ultimatum.

The respondents also retorted that their partners threatened them with ending the relationship every time they had a fight. A cheating spouse feels safe giving these ultimatums, because there is another person; as backup should the two decide to split up. The partner may be comparing the spouse with the alternative sources of reinforcement he or she gets elsewhere.

"It is always her way or the highway. If I don't agree to every little thing, then she threatens to leave me."

4.8.2.7 Partner is consistently negative.

Several stepparents from both Gutu and Harare concurred and indicated that another sign of cheating is the spouse's consistently negative attitude towards the relationship and comments that make you feel as if you have an expiry date inked on your forehead. This might include saying such things as illustrated by a FGD respondent from Mupandawana Groth Point and a Highfield stepfather,

"I would like to travel next year," (with no mention of a "we") or, "You know I will always love you, even when this ends."

"I don't like the way my wife keeps telling me that we will always be friends even after this ends. This makes me think, why is she envisioning a future without me?"

4.8.2.8 Spouse becomes emotional or depressed.

Stepparents viewed their spouses as using emotions to hide their cheating. It could be that he or she is brooding about what he or she has done and cannot handle the guilt. Sudden explosive displays of affection or anger can also be a bad sign, as the partner might be transferring emotional reactions from the outlaw relationship onto their spouse simply because you see each other more often. In other words, the stepparent may be the recipient of a mood that is not due to any of their actions at all, but because the third party provoked a fight!

"All I have to do is ask a simple, polite question and he starts yelling at me to get off his back!"

4.8.2.9 Spouse becomes more private.

The stepparents also highlighted that cheaters psychologically distance themselves in such subtle ways as locking the bathroom door when he or she has always left it open, doing their own laundry or keeping locked drawers. The respondents envisioned that if he or she seems extra fussy about personal boundaries or seems to be trying to set new rules about privacy, this is also a warning sign.

"She has always undressed in front of me, but now she wraps herself up in her robe like she is afraid I will catch her in the nude."

4.8.2.10 Partner/ mate's personal style changes.

According to the stepparents and some counsellors if your partner's taste in clothing, movies or music suddenly changes, then he or she may be trying to please a new lover.

"For years, the two of us watched the Horror movies, TV and the local soap show together and now he is pontificating that and saying he was not that into it, just humoring me. We used listen to the same type of music and even going on shopping trips together, but its now a thing of the past, its history. All this was smooth sailing when he was dating me, now he plans to dump me in this home and leave me alone."

4.8.2.11 Spouse no longer acts like part of your life.

The respondents thought that perhaps the biggest indication that you might be dealing with a cheater is if they stop acting as if they are a part of your life. They may lose complete interest in family, friends or following through on mutual financial goals or plans for the future. The respondents reiterated that the spouse might fear accompanying their wife/husband in anticipation of meeting their new dates.

"Your mate also might be reluctant to go out of town or on vacation, as the time away might cause a crisis in his or her other relationship."

" You need to find out the truth because you are wasting all of your financial, physical and material energies into building a future with someone who may not be planning to build a future with you."

I really want to have kids and buy a house soon, but every time I bring up our future she shrugs it off and changes the subject."

4.8.3.0 Using The Ex-Spouse's Name To Address/Call The Current Spouse

The results of the present study also indicate that a thorny issue among stepparents was grappling with their spouses' utterance of the ex-spouse's name.

A total of fourteen subthemes emerged from the respondents' narratives on this topical issue. These include predictive anxiety among others.

4.8.3.1 Predictive anxiety

One way in which the respondent reacted to slips of the tongue was by showing some predictive anxiety. In this case the respondent anticipated a continued relationship between the spouse and the ex-spouse. Another way in which the respondents revealed their anxiety was by way of catastrophising the spouse's slips of the tongue.

This was evident in the narrative of one Gutu female respondent.

"Now I don't want him talking to her ever again"

In Harare the respondents showed some hyper vigilance aimed at preventing any contacts between the slipping spouse and the ex spouse

“ If anyone will arrange seeing the kids, it will be me over the phone. I don’t want him to talk to her again.” (Waterfalls stepmother)

“...that would send me into thinking about deeper things like does he still have feelings for her.” (Gutu Stepmother)

However, contrary to the indications of hyper vigilance by two Harare respondents, one respondent felt that one needs to have tangible evidence indicating that the slip is an indication of a continuing relationship between their spouse and an ex spouse.

“Let it go, unless you have something more solid to go that he still has feelings for her.” (Stepmother from Partown, Waterfalls and another from Mastones in Old Highfield)

4.8. 3.2 Nature, prevalence and consequences of slips of the tongue

An analysis was also made of the nature, prevalence and consequences of slipping.

According to a Harare female respondent, her spouse frequently and constant slipped. This later culminated in the revival of the previous relationship.

“My last partner used names always, and slipped up several times; but not just before he left me.”

Another concern among the respondents as indicated by a female respondent from Gutu is the frequency of slips.

“.. is it the one and only time this has happened.”

Another respondent indicated that the slip was during an argument. This may suggest that the argument reminded the slipper of the type of arguments he used to have with the ex spouse. It may also suggest that the way the spouse was arguing resembled that of the ex spouse.

“My husband called me by his ex’s name once but it was during a heated argument.”

4.8. 3.3 Reciprocated and equated slips

Two instance of reciprocated use of ex spouses’ names were reported, one from Harare and another from Gutu respectively.

“ I have called my girl by my ex-wife’s name and she has called me by her ex-husband’s name.”

“My husband accidentally called me by his ex’s name before and I have done the same calling him by my ex’s name”

4.8.3.4 Perceived factors and situations prompting slips of the tongue by the stepparent’s partner

This section tries to outline some of the factors that may necessitate the slips.

Intimate versus non-intimate times. A female respondent from Harare reported that her spouse slipped during an intimate moment. This may indicate that the repertoire of behaviours engaged in at this instance may have reminded the slippers of the memorable times with the ex spouse.

“I guess the issue is that he slipped during a funny and romantic time”

“My husband called me by his ex’s name once but it was during a heated argument.”

Another Harare respondent used a mechanical process metaphor to indicate the need to assess one’s feeling of security in the present marital relationship. For the respondent a relationship is secure or insecure and this has a bearing on whether or not to continue with the relationship or to quit.

“I think you weigh how secure you feel in this relationship”

Previous issues that were being communicated/discussed can be viewed as unfinished businesses, where some people may make motivated forgetting versus intentional slipping. The issues that were being discussed may trigger the slip. Carryover effects and emotional importance attached to previous matters may also be important precursors of the recent slipping episode.

“Sometimes our heads fill up with stuff that it is hard to get rid of and you think about prior conversations and it has slipped.”

“Think about what you were discussing before this happened; did you discuss her or the kids that night.”

4.8.3.5 Contestations between spouse and ex-spouse

“Has something happened that has been weighing on his head about her?”

According to Harare (two male and a female) respondents, mental relaxation, failure to pay particular attention to detail and carelessness may also lead to slips of the tongue. The respondents used the metaphor of being caught up to indicate that there is a trap. This reveals that finding oneself slipping is a mechanical process. The process has two dimensions involving an avoidable intention or preventability of the slip (*my own stupidity being my worst mistake*) versus an unavoidable trap (*being caught up*). Whether one can prevent slipping is also indicative of the possible impression management tactics inherent in spousal interactions, particularly involving a third intimate part.

“When we get caught up in silly moments, it is easy to have a lapse, and I have caught myself in almost similar situations before, my own stupidity being my worst mistake”

“ He may call you by her name when you were in bed because that is the time generally when people are most mentally relaxed.”

4.8.3.6 Attempts to prevent slips

One respondent revealed that avoiding slips is a skill acquired over a long period of time and involves active learning versus passive learning. A developmental perspective signaling growth and maturity was also inherent in this respondent's narrative. The technique of learning to avoid a slip was used as a means to an end.

“Over the years I have developed the ‘hey dally’ attitude to protect myself from this happening”

For another respondent slip avoidance is peculiar to intimate times and not any other times. Therefore prevention of slips will be an actively engaged in activity during intimacy only. Stepparenting relationships are therefore managed encounters.

“During intimate moments I use only darling and dally as names for my partner, as this stops me from wagging someone’s name.”

Slipping of the tongue was also reported to be a discussed and disguised way of addressing partners. The act of slipping and calling names is seen as a coping strategy or tactic. This may indicate that the spouse who calls names or slips uses this tactic to achieve some goal. The goal may among others include showing resemblance between the individual being addressed and the person, object or behaviour used as a nickname. The respondent also felt that the

slipping spouse had an obsession. This indicates that slipping is considered as a psychopathological problem needing therapeutic intervention.

“My husband uses the same tactics, no we have not discussed this, but it is obvious that is what he does. He seldom calls me by name,.. er he has nickname obsession.”

4.8.3.7 Slips as a normal way of life

According to one respondent from Harare, slipping of the tongue (name) is not something strange. The respondent is normalising the “offender’s” slipping actions

“My husband sometimes calls his son by his dog’s name or vice versa just because both of them get told off for similar stuff.”

Another respondent from Gutu also had the same sentiments pertaining to slips as a normal way of life. For this respondent slips are engaged in by anyone else.

“My mother still runs through every name of her eight sisters when she is talking to me, before she gets to name me.”

Another respondent from Gutu acknowledged that they changed and confused names resulting in slips of the name

“I call my partner by his son’s name and vice versa and my stepson gets called by the daughter’s name.”

4.8.3.8 Stepparent’s reactions to slips of the tongue by the spouse

Puzzlement was reported to have characterised a Harare stepparent’s reaction towards the news of the slip of the name. Another respondent from Harare indicate that he reacted with fury. The respondent indicated their expectations. They expected an explanation accompanying an apology.

“I stopped dead in my tracks and I looked at him”

“I was internally fuming, but didn’t talk about it, he felt bad and started apologising and explaining.”

In Gutu, a respondent reported that the slip was done by a respected relative (uncle). The respondent indicated how they (respondent and spouse) reacted. The couple avoided embarrassing the relative who had “unconsciously” slipped.

“Every time it happened we just glanced sideways at each other and don’t have the guts to remind my uncle that he got it wrong, he would die of embarrassment!”

Jealousy also characterised the behaviour and emotional reactions of the respondent to the slips. There was an emotional cut off.

“I could not even hear his apology...all that kept echoing in my head was her name.”

“I didn’t want him to touch me”

The respondent also revealed that they had punished their spouse by keeping them outside for some time but latter own called them in following the slip of the ex spouse’s name. The respondent also revealed a temporary emotional cut off during which there was no communication for a short period of time.

“ He sat in the garden, with his head down in tears for about one hour, before I asked him to come inside.”

Another respondent reported that she was upset but the consumption of alcohol helped her to manage face. This is an indication of impression management. This indicates that if the individual was not under the influence of alcohol she could have acted differently.

“I was absolutely devastated, I burst into tears and the wine definitely help.”

4.8.3.9 Joint efforts to prevent future slips and subsequent emotional turmoil

Prevention of slips of the tongue was reported to be a joint venture. This shows the regularity versus irregularity of this coping strategy. This may have been engaged in to prevent subsequent straining of the relationship.

“We made a solemn promise to solve our arguments before we go to bed and we have always lived up to it”

Whilst some couples actively tried to address the problem of the mention of the ex spouse’s name among themselves, the story is different when the slip is done by a respected adult relative. In this situation the couple was passive. This led to continuous subjection to the slip.

“Every time it happened we just glanced at each other and don’t have the heart to remind dear uncle that he got it wrong. He would die of embarrassment.”

Another reported coping strategy was finding a common ground and reaching a consensus. This respondent reveals that problem solving is a joint venture and a process. The process starts with the identification of the problem, assessment of feelings, evaluation of the joint impact, the search for possible solutions to the problem, choice of the best solution and implementation of a coping strategy. The coping strategy is not a one-time event but a continuous process, upon which the couple will depend in future. This also indicates anticipatory tendencies, which may render the couple vulnerable, agitated, and malfunctioning as a spousal and family system.

“ Once we identified what it is that hurts us, we can assess our feelings better, evaluate the effect that it had on us, implement a strategy that will help us if it happens again and get on with life.”

4.8.3.10 The slipping individual's reaction to calling spouse by ex's name

An attempt was also made to assess from the respondents' narratives, any attempts by the offending spouse to redress the situation.

A Harare female respondent indicated that her spouse had taken the necessary steps to apologise.

"I would think that he has moved on, and he has apologised."

Another respondent from Harare revealed that their spouse was baffled

"He stopped right there as he caught himself saying it."

Another respondent from Harare reported that her spouse apologised continuously. Apologising then, has two dimensions, apologising once versus continually apologising. This may also be based on the recipient of the apology's reactions. This is whether it is accepted at first or later. It is the present researcher's view that the frequency and intensity of an apology depends on personal evaluations of the wrong done. This has a bearing on how often the wrong was done.

"He kept repeating that he was sorry over and over again."

In Gutu, the offending spouse was reported to have cried. This indicates that following the mentioning of an ex spouse's name the offender or the offended

individual may be emotional about the issue resulting in crying. This may indicate the use of crying as a defense mechanism and a manipulative technique used by spouses to get the other spouse to forgive and abandoned the intended course of action.

“He went outside and sat in the garden with his head down in tears for about one hour before I asked him to come inside.”

Another respondent revealed that her spouse showed self-frustration and humiliation.

“He was all apologies and mad at himself.”

4.8.3.11 Offended spouse’s actions of self-comparison (social comparison) with the ex-spouse whose name was mentioned

The offended spouse also made some social comparison between themselves and the ex spouse whose name was mentioned. These according to the researcher, are coping strategies used to deal with the uncertainties about this event (calling spouse by ex spouse’s name).

The respondents revealed that they struggle with comparing themselves with the ex spouse whose name was mentioned.

According to one female Harare respondent, she actively attempted to appear and behave differently from the ex spouse. This suggests that the respondent

clearly knows the ex spouse physically and behaviourally. These are examples of social comparison with the ex spouse.

“You see... I strive to be the exact opposite of her” (referring to ex-wife).

Another Harare respondent conceded that she makes some concerted effort to distinguish herself from the ex spouse.

“Strive to be yourself, irrespective if that makes you look like her or not”

A female respondent from Gutu also concurred that there is need to be different from the ex spouse. She made the following statement.

“Besides I am so unlike her, it is not funny”

Another respondent from Gutu, also revealed that attempting to differentiate herself from the ex spouse has been beneficial. It is the researcher’s view that this might have helped the respondent under the “eyes” of the community and the family of procreation’s judgements and evaluations.

“ But I strive to be myself and this helps”

4.8.3.12 Slips as an indication of repressed memories

The results also indicated that mentioning the name of an ex spouse could be an indication of some unfinished business on the part of the slipping spouse. Conversations with friends and the funny associated with drinking alcohol were reported to be platforms where previous relationships are discussed. This may

trigger certain memories in the spouse, only to be relived as the spouse slips at home in front of the current spouse.

“Could it be that the situation (drinking and messing around with others nearby) just took him straight to the fun and excitement of an earlier life (life before you) when he was young.”

For one Harare female respondent, calling her by the ex spouse’s name signaled some unfinished intimacy business between her previous spouse and the ex spouse. The frequency with which the spouse was reported to have slipped is a strong indication of what was going on in the spouse’s mind. The spouse was deeply involved in retrogressive thinking, culminating in the revival of the previous relationship. This may have indicated that the respondent was mourning the previous relationship and was grieving.

“My last partner used names always and slipped up several times, but not just before he left and yes he went back to her.”

The following statement showed another dimension of unfinished marital business. Individuals who remarry and form stepfamilies use metaphors of luggage and place (*wherever we go*) to signify the complexity of adjusting to previous marital relationship problems. Another metaphor of divorce as a disease or ailment to which some one must heal was also used in conjunction with a time dimension to persuade the listeners to accept calling of the current

spouse with the ex spouse's name. This may indicate the search for sympathy on the part of the speaker.

"I think we have to accept that luggage comes with us wherever we go, and time does heal these issues."

Another female respondent from Gutu used the words *adult enough* as a way of persuading her audience to justify why a husband may slip.

"You have to be adult enough to accept that he needs to talk to her on the phone about the children, they are his children. If you must, get a speaker phone and listen in, but that is showing him that you don't trust him and without solid evidence then you have nothing to base your accusations on"

According to another female respondent from Harare, communication between divorced spouses is inevitable especially if there are children from the previous marriage. This is another example of persuasion in which the respondent advises those who marry divorcees to accept the need for extended communication between the former spouses.

"He needs to communicate with his ex. Don't be insecure that you think stopping them talking on the phone about the kids will make a difference if they really wanted to see each other. This does not also matter whether he slips or not."

Another female respondent from Gutu concurred that slipping is an indication of the unfinished business from the previous marriage or relationship. However, for this respondent, the dimensions of persuasion and time are also prevalent in her view of grappling with the spouse who calls you by the ex spouse's name. To her, coping with this issue is achievable after a long time staying together than if the relationship or marriage is still young. In this instance, this author also coined a metaphor of a marriage as being young versus an old one. This is a metaphor of marriage as a growth process in which maturity is achievable over sometime.

“Hopefully it will get easier the longer the two of you are together. I think it will ease. Its knowing that the person you love most in your life had another life before you that make jealousy rear up occasionally.”

4.8.3.13 Validating the reaction taken by the offended partner (stepparent).

This section presents the respondents' behaviour, feelings and thoughts in relation to how they would have reacted if their spouses had slipped and called them by the ex spouse's name. The responses indicate that the respondents would also have fumed or acted in a similar manner. The dimension of social comparison with the offended spouses was central to the sentiments of a female Harare respondent.

“I think I would have reacted in a similar way, I would have cried.”

A male respondent from Gutu revealed that denial prevalent in men when it comes to disclosure on intimate topics.

I don't think that this is realistic, although I will certainly do the same."

Another male respondent from Gutu acknowledged and concurred. For this respondent getting irritated is a normal process engaged in by all people. However, for this respondent becoming fussy about such issues as hearing the name of your rival (ex spouse) initiates a coping strategy on the part of the offended spouse. In addition, the respondent revealed that there are different ways of responding to sensitive issues in marital relationships among stepparents.

"I guess when we all react about issues, we all have different ways we cope with these issues."

A female respondent from Highfield in Harare used the metaphor of being poured a bucket of cold water to show how painful and stressing the issue of being called by the ex spouse's name is. The respondent further alluded to how she would have coped by using another metaphor of standing in a warm shower to symbolise her coping mechanism. The use of this environmental- human body metaphor communicates how unpredictable, harsh and stressful the ex spouse's name is to the current spouse who is a stepparent.

“I know that would have been a bucket of cold water for me, but I would just go and stand under a warm shower and tell myself that he is with me and not with her.”

A Harare male respondent also validated the need to be furious if one’s spouse slipped and called you by the ex spouse’s name instead of your own name. For this respondent uncertainty surrounds life. The feeling of pain transcends itself in this respondent’s narrative. A central pain-inducing factor is the length of the previous marriage. The respondent feels robbed. This may be precipitated among other things by the number of children and gender of children from the previous marriage and the number of children and gender of children from the present marriage. A social comparison of the self with the ex spouse, based on paternity success or failure may be evident.

“There are no guarantees in life. I look at my girl’s ex and think that they were together for 12 years. It pains if she were to call me by his name.”

“The wine and situation coupled together would have produced these same emotions of sadness and a bit of anger.”

4.8.3.14 Taking a cool stance

This section presents the respondents’ perceptions of the need to avoid situations, which will further strain the relationship following a slip of the tongue. For these respondents relationship homeostasis is a necessary and integral part of the spousal system following such painstaking experiences.

The inevitability of slips and possible shortcoming of impression management techniques were also evident from the narrative of a male Harare respondent. The respondent also used persuasion to get the audience to adopt a lenient stance towards those who slip. Denial and adoption of an external locus of control also characterised the respondent's views towards spouses who slip. The respondent also showed that slips are possible during sad and happy moments. These illustrate the dimensions signaling times and places associated with slips.

“One of the biggest things we can do for ourselves, is to learn to accept that there was life before, and it will always rear its head when we do not want it to, even in happy moments.”

A female respondent from Gutu felt that amicable dialogue between the offended spouse and the offending spouse is pivotal to a harmonious relationship following a slip. The respondent also used the metaphor of being pierced to communicate the pain associated with being addressed by the ex spouse's name. This environmental –human body relationship metaphor is used to communicate and solicit for sympathy and empathy from the audience.

“Say what you need to say to him, explain your feelings, begin the conversation with ‘I feel’ and let him know you feel pierced.”

A male respondent from Gutu also used an environmental metaphor to advise people to desist from and persuade people from blowing the issue of grappling with the spouse's slip out of proportion.

“ But to make a huge issue out of it, is just making a mountain out of a molehill, and better to leave little speed humps than Great Mountain passes.”

Another female respondent from Gutu retorted that the same spouse might have addressed the ex spouse by the current spouse’s name during some conversations while the other respondent showed lessened anxiety. This may imply that the slipping husband is a habitual slipper. The respondents also used persuasion to allay any fears when she said *“he is with you not her”*. This is social comparison based of possessiveness.

“He is with you not her. How do you know he hasn’t sometimes called her by your name in conversations?”

“If it was me I would be leaving her totally out of my thoughts and deeply thinking about the relationship we have with my husband and the nice times we have had.”

Another female respondent from Harare reported that time is needed before reacting to the spouse’ use of the ex spouse’s name to address you. According to this respondent retaliation and competition are central to resolving the conflict emanating from such unwanted communication.

“Give your self a couple of days to sulk (its your right) and then make a joke out of it, by saying Eh.. Peter, Oscar, Tawanda. What’s your name? I bet you he feels awful too. Let it go.”

Another instance of persuasion, aimed at comforting oneself, was evident in the statement of a female Harare respondent. The respondent also used the metaphor from a lethal mechanical devices perspective. Slipping was thus considered as an injurious activity. The slipping husband was viewed as having misfired or missed the target or accidentally let a harmful artefact on an innocent individual, leading to the innocent person being hurt or injured.

“He loves you not her. It was just a slip, he misfired.”

A female Harare respondent reported an example of self-examination leading to comfort.

“Just keep reminding yourself that he is with you and not her and remember that you too had another life before him.”

Perceived self-efficacy in coping with this mistaken identity was also reported by a female Gutu respondent.

“I will get over it I guess.”

A male Harare respondent also conceded that slipping was a norm and a reality. This shows the respondent’s acceptance of the practice (slipping) among stepparents.

“This is reality and is the norm then second time around.”

4.8.4.0 Grappling With The Psychosocial Issues Revolving Around Trying To Conceive.

It is naturally expected that procreation should follow any marriage. The ability to bear children is normally used to explain why marriages may be sustained. This section gives narrative accounts of how attempts to conceive have psychosocially affected the stepparents and the residential biological parent following a remarriage. A total of nine subthemes were explored under this theme.

4.8.4.1 Stepchildren's excitement and disappointment about the arrival of young brother/daughter.

The stepparents reported how attempts to reveal intentions to bear children were taken by the stepchildren. According to the respondents the stepchildren showed variations of excitements and disappointment at the announcement that the baby was likely to be born.

“My husband and I were married in 1999, he had two daughters from a previous marriage who were 4 ½ yeras and 10 years at that time. We were definitely going to have kids of our own, but decided to wait a bit. The idea was that the girls and I needed time to get to know one another and build a solid relationship. We didn't want to bring "dad and Bee's" baby into this family...we wanted it to be a family event. We got the pregnancy in 2002 with an early 2003 arrival date. We told the girls when I was about 4 months along...they were so excited and couldn't wait to tell the world. We included them in every step of the way, even brought them to the ultrasound appointment where we found out the sex (girl).” #3

“I worried that the biological mother (BM) wouldn't be as excited as they were, but as it turns out, she was. The day our little one was born the girls got out of school early to meet their new sister. It was love at first sight and the fighting over her began. BM came to the hospital too. The older girls adore their little sister, but there was and still is some problems with the middle child losing her baby status, .it's a work in progress.” #2

Whilst stepdaughters were reported to have welcomed the idea, the opposite reaction was reported for the stepsons.

“There is a very good chance that they will be coming to live with us full time within the next year or so. I think the older stepson (O SS) aged 11 years might feel a bit neglected if we have a baby and they're not allowed to live with their BM anymore, but the little one would love it. Either way they'll adjust. Their father and I both are very excited about adding to the family. They're very excited about the idea of having all new cousins; aunts and uncles once were married so I think they'll be happy about a baby.” #2

“I want to have a baby of my own too. We made a joke once about having another baby and youngest stepson (YSS) looked like he wanted to kill us. He, the baby, was clearly not interested in sharing any attention, but on the other hand, he's got some issues. It made us think that yes, we were going to try, and no, we were not going to involve the stepkids in any decisions about that. I mean, did anyone's bio-parents ever ask him or her how they felt about another baby before conceiving one?” #2

“I have to agree that you will be strained and exhausted and that never improves our resiliency with children, I think. But I don't know. What I do know

is that if your fiancé is assuming everything will be fine once a baby comes, he's probably being overly optimistic. That usually worsens any existing irritations, not soothes them.” # 3

“Personally, I think what might help most is for you to figure out what, exactly, the boys are doing that drives you nuts (I know - "everything!!"). Try to make a list, and then assign a priority to each item. Write about what it is that really makes you craziest, and why. Then, after that, try to imagine a weekend with them that would be good: picture it in your mind. Write down all the things about it that were different than usual, and what exactly made it good or what was the best part? After that, start talking to your fiancé about some behavioral modifications while they are visiting.” #2

“For instance, the chaos that my stepkids lived in was something they have tried to instill in our home since they arrived (we have custody). I love a clean home and peace and quiet. My stepkids are the antithesis of that, especially YSS who is a chaos hound and an attention seeker of the first magnitude. I realised that it was this attempt, on his part, to recreate the chaos and attention-getting he used in his mom's home that drove me crazy (TVs on loud in every room, screaming instead of talking, breaking stuff to get attention, trying to act like a baby and doing baby talk,- all at age 11 years at the time). Once I narrowed it down, dear husband (DH) and I explained that it was not okay, most people didn't like it, and that he needed to learn to turn that off now or face some consequences. And then we started sending him to his room, isolating him, giving him time out, etc, for doing those behaviors. OSS figured it out and got with the program, and YSS stopped doing most of those behaviors most of the time as well, although it took him a long time.” #2

“For me, just knowing that my husband was going to be there to stop those behaviors was enough. Knowing those problems were identified and he was on the case made me feel so much better, especially when he followed through.” #2

“There might be a reason the kids are driving you crazy. And it might not be because 'they are just kids'. It might be because they are misbehaving in less obvious ways than you can identify immediately.” #2

4.8.4.2 Impatience with stepchildren as a result of having own biological children

According to some Gutu stepparents having one's own biological children unfavourably affects stepparent stepchild relationship quality, with stepchildren being discriminated and disliked by their stepparent.

“Having a child of my own did not give me any more patience with my stepdaughters (SDs), it actually made it harder for me with them rather than easier... I knew this would be my only biological child and I wanted to do everything for her and of course they also wanted to help out with the baby more than anything. I had to tell them on several occasions that they too would be moms one day and would get to do all of these things with their own children, harsh yes, but I wasn't going to miss out on anything. I am very protective of my child and find it hard not to butt in and "save" her from arguments and such. Some of it is sibling stuff, but some of it is the large age difference and the baby vs. middle child thing too. I continue to work on my patience with the girls daily, which I'm sure would have come up with or without the arrival of a baby, .one is a teenager and the other is a preteen...”

In contrast to the impatience reported a Gutu biological parent conceded that their partner's ex spouse was good to the stepchildren.

"The girls' BM is a wonderful mother who treats my daughter as her own, in fact she spends the night with her sisters at their BM's house all the time -this weekend included."

Three Harare male stepparents reported deeper feelings of hatred towards stepsons.

"I am less patient with my SS than I was before my son was born and more resentful of him. I struggle with it all the time. I feel bad about it. I have been to some therapy and I work hard to stay positive and do the best I can for all concerned. Coming here and contributing and being honest and reading about other people's experiences really helps."

"I sometimes feel ripped off that I have to share my home and family and life with someone I did not choose and do not love while my wife gets to have all of the people she loves around her and no-one extra. I think she would understand me better if she imagined what her life would be like if one of my SS's friends from the street moved in and she had to raise that friend like a son of her own for 90% of the time. Liking a kid and wanting to be in the same family as them and having to treat them equally to your own son are two completely different matters."

"I've said this before - there is nothing wrong with my SS, he's a good kid and deserves a good life and a loving home - but on some level I wish he just didn't exist or lived full-time with his Dad. I know it isn't fair to feel that way, but pretending I don't feel that way isn't going to help me build a better life for

myself, my wife, son or SS. Neither is dwelling on it of course. I try not to nor venting here helps me leave my feelings here and be a better husband, father and stepfather.”

4.8.4.3 Confused by loss of pregnancy

The loss of a previous pregnancy by members of a stepfamily was reported to bring about grief. As the grief took its toll on the stepparent and biological parent, the couple found announcing a new pregnancy not only confusing to the stepchildren, but to the couple too.

“I can't really comment on this since I'm a biological mother and don't have any stepkids.” #1 (respondent from Gutu Growth Point)

Despite attempts to conceal a prospective pregnancy; stepchildren were reported to have discovered the hidden secrets.

“My ex's wife has lost two pregnancies in the past year. Each time my dear son (5 years old) has found out about stepmother being pregnant- I know they told him about the first pregnancy, and the second one he must have overheard something or figured it out on his own.” #4 (Harare & Gutu)

“It's been very confusing to him.” (Mushaviri stepmother)

“One minute he's going to be a big brother & the next he isn't.” (One stepmother from Mukaro in Gutu).

Some key informants and members of the community and stepparents concurred that the loss of a previous pregnancy through abortion or any other means was equally disturbing to the stepchildren.

“I really wish that they would find a way to keep this to themselves until she's at least into her second trimester.” (Family therapist from Harare CBD)

“Yes, I understand you can't really hide morning sickness.”(Nurse from Highfield)

“ But he is only at their house two weekends a month, you would think they could find a way not to talk about it for those two 48 hour time periods until she is further along and has less of a risk of miscarriage.”(respondent from general populace in Waterfalls).

A grandparent from Gutu indicated how grappling with loss of a previous pregnancy affected the stepson and the grandparent. The grandparent was left with no option but to painfully explain the bereavement.

“Because son lives with me, I'm the one who ends up explaining to dear son that he's not going to be a big brother, and answering the questions, not them. It would be much less confusing for him if they didn't tell him so early on, I think.#1

4.8.4.4 Delayed announcement of pregnancy

Despite attempts to announce to the stepchildren the loss of a pregnancy, some stepparents and biological parents reported coping with the stepchild's bereavement by delaying the announcement of a new pregnancy.

"It is one thing to wait to announce a pregnancy or the process of trying to get pregnant. I agree with that...." (2 respondents from Highfield)

"However, I just wanted to say that I think you are very wise in not saying anything to the kids about it yet." #4

Some respondents from both Harare and Gutu underscored the need to look at individual stepfamily differences when dealing with problems bedeviling these types of families.

"But I feel it is okay too simply (casually) bring up the subject in a stepfamily "What if someday maybe we had a child". But that's just my opinion. Every child and stepfamily is different. It worked for us to talk with daughter ahead of time. Takaona kuti mwana anodawo nguva yokudzeya nyaya iyi. (She often needs time to chew on a concept). We were clear in our "what if" that it may never happen." # 3

Some stepparents from Gutu reported the success of delaying the announcement.

"Isu zvakatifambira zvakakanaka hatina kuwana dambudziko pakuzvitakura kwandakaita. It's worked out fine here. The first time I was pregnant we waited

till I was almost 5 months along to say anything. Of course the boys were 8 and 4 at the time. They thought it was so cool when their little brother came along.”

#2

Announcing a pregnancy to the stepchildren was found to be an important transitional prerequisite. It was found to be instrumental in helping the stepparent to engage in role shift and role reversal.

“I do think it gave me more insight into the parent-child relationship and do think I had a bit more patience with them, once I had my own. I was also able to put myself in BM’s position.” # 4

“We haven’t had too many problems. I think it has been a pretty positive thing all the way around. We were cautiously optimistic in the beginning and took it slow and made the whole pregnancy a very positive thing for the boys. It has worked out well here and you can see the bond between them and it melts my heart.” # 3

4.8.4.5 Influence of biological parents on how stepchildren feel towards birth of stepbrother/sister

The biological parent was reported to badly influence the stepchildren’s reactions to the arrival of a stepsister or stepbrother. This influence was attributed for the general unrest between stepchildren and stepparents, prevalent in stepfamilies. This was evident in the narratives of some Harare stepparents.

“It sounds to me like some of this is bio-mom's fault. In fact, a lot of this is probably her fault. I am also betting that Dad feels terribly guilty for choosing her as the kids' mother, can't wait until he can replace her with you as their mother, and is easy on the kids because they already have it hard with BM. Don't blame yourself here, you have stumbled into a horrible history and you're not crazy to think something is wrong, something is really wrong. The kids are not being taken care of most of the time at home, and they have some real damage to overcome.” #3

4.8.4.6 Stepchildren disapprove through psychosomatic reactions.

The announcement of pregnancy by the stepmother and the biological parent was reportedly met not only with hostility, but also through feigned illness and related psychosomatic reactions among stepchildren. This was reported in both Harare and Gutu.

“I think you would be very smart to do some research on what happens to neglected children, because this harms kids greatly and sets them up for bad relationships in the future, especially co-dependent ones. Also, please know that children who live in fear often wet the bed for many years. If you check out police web sites about how to look for signs of child abuse and sexual abuse, bed-wetting is always on the list.” #4

Not only were the stepchildren reported to react psychosomatically, but also remedies were proffered by two family therapists in Harare. The proposed family therapy should take cognisance of the stepchildren's age.

“The good news is that the kids are still young enough for you to make a difference, but time is flying and to age 13 or 14 years is about all you usually get. Family therapy when the kids do eventually come to live with you is something I would really recommend. You're already in for a lot of big changes if the kids come, and therapy will help the hardest of it go by more smoothly and more quickly. Maybe even fast enough for you to feel like your marriage is not at risk. I know that sounds dire, but I am speaking from experience. I was naive when DH & I took the kids in, and I am not known for being naive generally.”

#2

Redivorcing was also reported to be prevalent among Harare stepfamilies who failed to address stepfamily disharmony, typical of which are the psychosomatic reactions of the stepchildren to the announced pregnancy.

“Many custodial stepmothers end up divorcing because of it. There are good reasons for that. I nearly went insane from living with YSS. He was badly neglected and has caused no end of trouble, even though it's not entirely his fault. So please, do some research on kids in their situation, and on the hardships usually encountered by women who are suddenly custodial stepmothers.” #4

4.8.4.7 Never mentioned it

Some Gutu respondents reiterated that the stepchildren should never be told of a prospective pregnancy.

“We haven’t mentioned anything to the kids about it yet. We don’t plan on it either. Their mom had gotten pregnant a year or so ago and then lost the baby so I think that confused them. I’d rather just wait until we know that we are pregnant and far enough along. I think they’ll both be happy about it. They’re at good ages and we both think they’ll be very excited.” #3

“They were thrilled about the wedding and very involved, so I think (providing we get pregnant) they will be just as excited.” #1

4.8.4.8 Avoid ambivalence about disciplining stepchildren who disapprove the birth of a stepbrother/sister

Some Harare respondents were of the opinion that stepchildren who disapprove of the stepmother’s pregnancy should be punished. On the other hand some respondents also felt that disciplining the stepchildren was not a noble idea.

“Don’t feel bad about enforcing the rules in your home. I find my wife, as much as I love her (and that’s a lot) doesn’t enforce the rules or seem to care as much about them as I do - she lets all sorts of stuff go. I don’t understand it, because I don’t make my SS do or behave any differently from how I would expect my own son to be. I think some of that is simply different parenting styles, some of it is

my resentment of my SS making me less tolerant, and some of it is guilt that my wife may feel for splitting up with my SS's Dad (i.e taking him away from his bio-Dad), even though it was clearly the correct thing to do for all concerned."

#2

"Expressing my feelings here has helped me come to accept them. I am not a bad person, but if I never saw my SS again I wouldn't miss him. But my lot in life is to share my home with him, my choices are to share my life with my wife and son and SS, or to divorce and lose my marriage and live with my son only part of the time. I love my wife and son so much, so I must accept my SS." #2

"Its easier to accept my SS's presence when I work hard at having a good positive relationship with him and when I have control over my life and home and my wife has been great at letting me establish ground rules for our home."

(Stepfather from Mukaro)

"I am a stickler for bedtime because I look forward to that time away from my SS so much. If my SS wasn't there, I don't think I'd care what time my son went to bed!" (Stepfather from Waterfalls)

"I find I have trouble relaxing when my SS is around because I want to show my son so much affection and give him so much attention, but my SS "gets in the way" - he wants that attention too and I have almost no emotional desire to give it to him. I don't want to sit and play with blocks or toys with my SS, but I could do it all day with my son. So I end up holding back a bit from my son because

when my SS is there he wants to be involved and it spoils it for me. It sounds cruel, but that's how I feel, I am always restraining and modifying my behavior when he's around. I know my SS needs attention and time, so I do make time to do things with him, but on some level I feel that he is stealing energy from me that rightfully belongs to my son.(Stepfather from Jerusalem in Highfield).

“ These feelings are very strong and deep and below the surface so I spend a lot of energy figuring out and trying to do what's fair for both my SS and son - but sometimes I am just exhausted from the effort and pissed off that I have to do it - why can't his Dad be his Dad??? Why do I have to do his goddamn job???”

(Stepfather from Engineering in Highfield)

4.8.4.9 Stepparents' And Biological Parents' Attitudes Towards Death Issues

Of concern to some Harare and Gutu stepparents and the biological parents was grappling with bereavement following the death of the children. A considerable number quizzed the causes of the death of their children. Other stepparents reported the family's lack of concern for their losses. For those whose children died, especially miscarriages and stillborns, the stepparents reported their mother-in-laws as being insensitive to the grief that befell them. The women also complained of aborted grief in which they were not allowed to cry lest the misfortune befalls them again. Their situations were exacerbated by the Shona tradition and practice not to show a bereaved woman her stillborn baby and not to allow her to go to the graveyard for fear that the bad omen will recur. Typical

responses are given below. A stepmother interviewed at Chipumu Business Centre in Mukaro area gave the following account.

“Stepmothers should be given the chance to talk to someone about the reason of the death of their children so that they may know what went wrong.”

Another woman from Mushaviri had this to say:

“My child was buried without my knowledge. I don’t know if the baby was properly laid with the correct hand downwards. I may fail to have children in future and this situation may persist.”

“ It would have been better if someone had told me what the problem was that caused the death of my child.”

“I had thought that this woman had brought relief to my life by bearing a baby boy .now that he has been taken away, all my hopes have been shattered.”

“I had thought that my new husband will help me, now that he is ill, I don’t know how his relatives will react. They will say that I bewitched their son.”(
Stepmother from Parktown in Waterfalls.)

“ I told them that their daughter is not feeling well but up until now they have not pitched up. All they want is to make life difficult for me in the event that she dies.”(Stepfather from Tangadzani village in Mukaro)

4.9.0 PSYCHOLEGAL ISSUES

A number of psychological and legal issues pertaining to stepparenting were reported. Five broad themes were reported. These are inheritance, interactions between stepparent and biological parent, offering psychosocial support to a spouse embroiled in custody or other legal disputes with an ex spouse, and relocation.

4.9.1.1 Conflict Emanating From Widow Inheritance Or *Kugarwa Nhaka*

Three negative incidences were reported by Gutu stepmothers concerning the conflict surrounding *maoko* property. The respondents cited the presence of *maoko* property as potential sources of conflict between the stepparent and the

biological parent (new spouse). *Maoko* property is what the woman acquires “by her own hands” as a result of a specialised skill such as midwifery or proceeds of her field, on which she may work after having fulfilled her obligations on the husband’s field. *Mombe youmai* (mother’s cow) and (her offspring) are customarily paid to the mother as part of lobola (bride wealth) at the time of her daughter’s marriage. The following narrative signals the respondent’s attempts to identifying the commencement of conflict.

“Conflict also arises when the women bring property acquired during the first marriage. This is usually maoko property and mombe youmai.” # 3

4.9.1.2 Dispossession of property.

Some female respondents from Gutu (key informants and members of the community) also revealed the anger they experienced due to the dispossession of property accumulated from the previous marriage. A female stepparent reiterated how she was affected. She reported her ordeal from the family of procreation who uttered the following words as justification for dispossession.

“She is a stranger...(mutorwa) not one of our family, not of our totem...and therefore had no right of inheriting her deceased husband’s property.” #5

A key informant from Harare reported disturbing effects of how being dispossessed of the matrimonial home could be.

“ It is an unpleasant thing to be a widow because the husband’s relatives had taken away all the property from their matrimonial home and ended up evicting her from the matrimonial home, claiming that “Imba yehama yedu”(it is our son’s or relative’s house).

A male Harare respondent from the general populace from Highfield community voiced the following sentiments.

“Since a woman does not become part of a husband’s family she has little ground for exercising rights in the domestic affairs of her husband’s family. The woman can not be trusted to take full charge of the deceased ‘s estate that is why they grab it from her.”

4.9.1.3 Learned helplessness and ambivalence

A female Harare stepparent from Uplands in Waterfalls reported how learned helplessness and ambivalence gripped her during the dispossession of the property.

“I just watched whilst my deceased husband’s relatives packed away all the property and never said a word. I did not protest semuroora (respectful daughter in-law). I showed respect and let them do as they please.” This is a Shona custom/belief that the relationship between a married woman or widow and her in-laws is that of respect mixed with fear.

4.9.2. Offering Social Support To A Spouse During His Court Case Problems With An Exspouse

4.9.2.1 Shelving personal happiness

A number of female stepparents from both Harare and Gutu reported shelving personal happiness and sympathising with their spouse during their court cases with ex spouses. No differences in shelving personal happiness were reported by the respondents from Gutu and Harare. The respondents indicated that there is a time dimension in the sympathy and offer of social support.

“Sometimes I tend to put aside my ‘girlfriend issues’ like ‘I’m not happy with our argument last week and I can’t forget about the reason for the argument (typical boyfriend/girlfriend stuff when getting used to my friends and his etc etc)’.”# 5

“However, something happened with the ex spouse which upset him and I put aside my ‘girlfriend’ issues so that I could listen to the problem and comfort him...this is not the first time....” (2 stepmothers from Mushaviri)

“I sometimes feel that I shouldn’t be bothering him with my less important ‘relationship issues’ when he has such adult problems like the court case etc to have to worry about....” (4 stepmothers from Mupandawana Growth Point)

“I am generally an ‘issues-free’ person and most times resolve my problems within myself but how much more often can I expect this to happen?”

(Stepmother from Mainway Meadows in Waterfalls)

“Should I be burdening him with (what may seem petty) girlfriend / boyfriend issues in the midst of his custody struggle?” (Stepmother from Gazaland in Highfield)

4.9.2.3 Emotionally and financially sucking

Some Harare stepmothers reported that offering social support is emotionally and financially involving supporting a spouse during legal contests with ex spouses. A stepmother from Mastones in Old Highfield responded that;

“Well what you speak of is all pretty 'normal' X. These issues (custody etc) are all consuming because there is so much at stake, emotionally and financially. While it is possible for the stepparent to be objective for a while, eventually this becomes too difficult and both of you are immersed in the battle. I think so, from my own experiences, and hearing of others.” (A stepmothers from Derbyshire in Waterfalls)

4.9.2.4 Awareness of critical and eventful timing.

Some Harare stepmothers found out that one has to realise the correct time for whinging when the spouse is experiencing legal contests. A respondent said that:

“Distractions at this time are critical, to help you both get perspective and realise that there are other things going on in the world, but for it to be all-consuming is a fairly standard state of affairs. There's a lot riding on the

outcome. Keep the distractions coming, but it might be a case of picking your timing about raising your issues... I know my husband isn't receptive before meals."

4.9.2.5 Feeling of jealousy

Some Harare stepmothers reported experiencing jealous as a result of the spouse meeting the ex spouse during legal contests.

"About the jelousy thing, it's hard when you meet someone perfect and you feel all loveys dovey and he shares somethings with this bd that usually would of shared with you. It isn't jealousy as such more just getting used to sharing your boyfriend with others when you properly haven't before. It took me a while to get used to."

The following proverb was used by a stepmother from Lusaka in Highfield to dispel any thoughts of suspected infidelity among partners.

"Mbavha ngebati, yausati ndaashamwari/ A thief is one you will have caught red handed not a suspect. A suspect is a friend."

In contrast, a considerable number of Gutu and Harare respondents felt that there was no need for feeling jealous.

"I think that you should be able to raise your issues. Relationships are a give and take, with both supporting each other." (4 men from an FGD done at Zindoga Business Centre in Waterfalls).

"I would not go in with guns blazing about so many issues but just something like hey i know things are tough right now but can we disuss this now. He may well welcome it and it may help you to build a better understanding of each other." (A woman from Grobie Park in Waterfalls).

"As for the jealousy, it is common too. But I've never experienced this. I think it's because I already had a child of my own, so I understand the 'loves' and where they stop and start. But hey! At the end of the day it is all about communication. Let him know you want to see the photos too! It mightn't have occurred to him..." (A man in an FGD done at Irvine in Waterfalls)

4.9 .2.6 Mutual understanding erodes relationship tension

The need for reciprocated emotional investment on the part of the other spouse was highlighted by the respondents. Stepparents from both rural and urban research sites voiced these sentiments to support the above claim.

"Also remember that life doesn't, and shouldn't, stop just because there is ongoing court action. Hey! If we did that our life would have stopped about six years ago!"(Stepmother from Canaan in Highfield).

"Live life. Be understanding. Be involved in enjoying his daughter's company. Remind him that you are there for him and above all, try to be as happy as you can. It won't last forever. Keep dialogue going with him too, once that stops, then things erode very quickly." (Police woman from Machipisa in Highfield)

4.9.2.7 Mixed fear, hesitation and happiness

Supporting a spouse who is embroiled in legal disputes was reportedly marked by fear, hesitation and happiness. One Gutu stepmother (Mukaro) and two Harare stepmothers (Mastones and Mainway Meadows) had this to say:

"Another new development, I sometimes feel very very guilty for thinking these thoughts but very glad to mention them here.... I've even looked over my shoulder before saying this because I have been fearing the the community and the ex spouse."# 3

4.9.2.8 Persuasion

Persuasion also marked some respondents' views on offering support to spouses. Religiosity appears to be at the centre of the respondent's view. The respondent externalises the cause of the problem and adopts an external locus of control for the problems she and her spouse grapple with.

"What I think is, no matter how you separated, guys agree to disagree; you cannot be together for Satan's sake. But you should consider the kids first."

4.9.2.9 Avoid the exspouse filing for divorce maintenance

The feeling of responsibility was communicated by both Harare and Gutu respondents who also cited the dire need to support the spouse in effecting child support agreements.

“Kwete kuda kuti murume aiite zvekumhan’arirwa for maintenance.” (4 women from Mupandawana).

“So as father why should he be forced to pay child support, discuss with him to look after his children if he does not have custody.” (One Waterfalls and one Highfield woman).

4.9.3.0 Violence

Family violence was reported to be a problem in stepfamilies throughout the two rural (Mukaro and Mushaviri) and urban communities (Highfield and Waterfalls). In many cases however, stepmothers reported their husbands’ physical violence toward them. The violence was characterised by hitting, physical injury and financial deprivation. The stepmothers reported that their husbands perceived violence as the man’s right to discipline their wives for wrongdoing. The interviewed women reported having been hit by their husbands. The respondents were asked for their perceptions of the reasons for their husbands’ abusive contact.

“He slapped me because he did not want me to associate with my sister in-laws (vana maiguru).” (Female respondent stepmother from Mukaro).

“We had returned from a shopping trip and he beat me because I had suggested that we postpone buying toys for my stepchildren and instead by napkins for my little daughter.” (A Waterfalls stepmother).

“He beats me whenever he so wishes and claims that ndiri mvana (a woman who bore children elsewhere) and I should let him go and see girls of his age.” (Gutu-Mupandawana Growth Point).

“ The other day he came home earlier than he used to, the children did not pitch up early with the beasts from the grazing area and he accused me of not teaching the children the correct things”(Harare).

“It was around twelve o’ clock mid day when Tapiwa and Chipo my stepchildren had been playing when he arrived, he summoned me in the bedroom and accused me of not bathing the children and of clothing them in rags (mamvemve) and told me that I wanted his relatives to think that he did not take care of the children.”(Harare).

4.9.4.0 Advising Clients Who Are Coping With Relocation

Following divorce or separation and even the death of one spouse, people tend to relocate. This relocation may have long lasting and detrimental effects on the parties concerned.

4.9.4.1 Relocation as a hurried event

The respondents also felt that relocation following break up is usually hurriedly done. The parties concerned tend to become emotional and hardly consult widely. Respondents from Harare predominantly aired the views on relocation.

“First, take a deep breath and give yourself a moment for the ‘who do you think you are to move the kids across the country without mentioning it to us’ reaction.”

“Don't have your emotional boil-up in front of the kids. Wailing about the other parent in front of them, even if it is deserved, only serves to divide their loyalties and make them feel even more conflicted. Your spouse (the stepmother or stepfather) can be a wonderful support - but discuss privately.”

4.9.4.2 Divorce is an adult-to-adult problem - keep it with the grown-ups.

Divorce and marriage break ups should be considered from an adult perspective and yet being sensitive to the needs of the minors when relocating following divorce or separation.

“It's not the kids' fault that Mummy or Daddy has decided to pack up and move without so much as an email or phone call. Inevitably, this happens at the worst possible moment when you are tempted to be petty or mean, remember the principles of shared parenting, going jugular early may give you emotional satisfaction but may not help the situation.”

A counselor in the present study gave an analogue of a seesaw as representing the relationship between divorced individuals where there are children. This indicates that despite having divorced and separated and living seemingly independent lives, the ex-spouses still need to seriously consider maintaining shared responsibility, shared communication about issues pertaining to the custody and welfare of the children even after relocating.

“Shared parenting is like two kids on a seesaw at the playground. Balance is maintained when both are on the teeter-totter at the same time. But when one decides to jump off, there is chaos. The question is how to get everyone back on the see-saw and restore a sense of balance.” #1.

4.9.4.3 Gather information before talking to the other parent. Look at your custody agreement and shared parenting plan.

A major concern that was raised by some legal practitioners was the need to adequately equip clients with information pertaining to the legal implications of custodial agreements already entered into. The agreement may have been signed or discussed prior to the intended relocation of one of the ex-spouses. This was considered important for the welfare of the children despite the custodial status for either parent.

“Many agreements contain statements that limit geographic mobility and prevent a parent from leaving the area without a legal negotiation about custody changes. You may want to consult with your attorney about your rights as a parent and how best to proceed if you believe the relocation is likely.” # 3

4.9.4.4 Consider how relocation may impact on your child, not just you.

As opinionated by some respondents, relocation following divorce has to be done with the children’s interests at heart rather than just being emotional and making lop-sided decisions benefiting the grudging parent only.

“Relocation often disrupts the fragile balance of the post-divorce ecosystem. Your child has already gone through the trauma of seeing his/her parents split up. Even if you are not the primarily custodial parent, hopefully you have to set up a balanced custody arrangement that lets your child have both parents. Be active in his/her life and communicate without hostility about the child. A relocation and even talk of relocation can disrupt this fragile balance.”

4.9.4.5 Open dialogue to be maintained between the relocating ex spouse and the other parent.

The respondents in the present study also echoed that the relocating ex-spouses need to communicate with the other parent concerning their intention to relocate. They also indicated that the ex-spouses should consider asking lots of questions and find out why the other parent wants to move. The conversations should

preferably centre on a talk about what is in the best interest of your child, as well as the custody ramifications.

“Communication with the other parent may be difficult, but it has to happen. It is the only way this situation will come to a resolution. Is the proposed move due to finances, career advancement, a remarriage, or to be closer to an extended family support system? If the conversation is verbal or over the phone, write down what is said and log the date. Email can be helpful in that it gives you a record of what is said, but its impersonal nature can also contribute to misunderstandings and emotional flare-ups.” #5

The results revealed that for some stepparents and their spouses, the relocation of the ex-spouses did not significantly alter both biological parents’ access to the children. However, for a few unlucky ex-spouses and their children, the relocation negatively impacted on them. The results also indicated that the stepchildren can show their disapproval of the biological parents’ remarriage by relocating. The relocation caused severe emotional cut offs, stress and anxiety. In a bid to cushion themselves against such uncertainties, the family engaged the services of law enforcement agencies in their attempt to ascertain the whereabouts of their children.

“Fortunately for some of my clients, it all worked out, their children remain near and are not going anywhere, other than maybe college in a few years. I have had another set of clients who were not so lucky. Their stepdaughter moved around the world after her mother’s remarriage and the mother severed contact with the father. They hired an

investigator to find her and endured a red-tape nightmare, but they eventually saw her again.”

“Although custody situations often do not escalate to the point where one parent takes the child and flees, parental abduction is an unfortunate and very real occurrence.”

4.9.5.0 Criminalisation By Voice Recording Conversations Between Biological Mother And Stepmother.

Within the protracted antagonism between stepmothers and biological mothers were reported cases of intentions to criminalise one another following verbal telephone conversations. Two Harare stepmothers revealed their puzzlement over the likelihood of the admissibility of voice-recorded conversations with the biological mother.

“Is it possible to voice record conversations with the ex-spouse? Can this be submitted as evidence in court? I like to have a voice recorder in my pocket so that if she say's anything incriminating during handover then I could use it.”

“Not sure on this one, from my very limited understanding, it can only be used if she is aware that she is being taped. Really don't know, sorry.”

Another Waterfalls stepmother reported her attempt at criminalising by recording as many phone calls as possible on her mobile. This scenario depicts the possible impacts of technological advancement in solving legal disputes.

“I also try to record as much phone calls as possible on my mobile as possible.”

A legal practitioner also shed some light on the nature and extent to which voice recordings can be applied in custody issues.

“We record everything, changeovers, phone conversations etc, then upload them to our computer and burn them to disk. You can record anything that you are a party to, but recording phone conversations by using a plug in adaptor is illegal.”

The authenticity of recorded information can only be ascertained if the data are transcribed and presented as an affidavit, as seen by another legal adviser.

“You then must transcribe them into an affidavit, and if asked for proof you can produce the recording.” # 3

Another Harare stepfather indicated that they had actually recorded the conversation and were ready to use the information as evidence.

“We will be using this method in our final trial in December, so I will let you know how it goes down.”

In a similar case, a legal practitioner also revealed how the recorded information was used as evidence in court.

“We record everything and anything. Write it all up in an affidavit and only once have we ever been asked to provide proof,...of which we produced the recorded evidence.”

Another stepmother also stated the time she had taken to record the conversation with a biological mother.

“I recorded 19 minutes the other day, of the BM being absolutely stupid.”

Another dimension of recording the conversions includes the debate on whether or not the device should clearly stick out or whether it should be concealed.

“ We were told once by a lawyer that the recording device has to be in public view (so no hiding it in your pocket) and each time you need to announce the date, time, place and who is present before any conversation is recorded. Otherwise what is recorded may not be admissible in court.”

“We are going to start doing the same from now on, recording all verbal conversations with biological mother.”

Ambiguity was also reported as surrounding the issue of voice recording as shown in the following narrative of a Waterfalls stepmother.

“I am really hazy on how the rules for recording telephone conversations work. There seems to be a lot of conflicting information.”

In the opinions of a Gutu counselor and a Harare family legal practitioner, the best interests of the child may override all other factors in determining among others, the admissibility of the evidence and legality of voice recording at all.

“Although it may be illegal to use, I think that perhaps the “best interests of the child” may override the Telecommunications Act in the family court, as its in the best interest of the child to produce as much evidence as makes your case stronger.” # 3

A Harare legal practitioner reportedly used alternative devices to record evidence for use in court.

“At one stage I used a old answering machine which was hooked up with an extra button to record on demand.”

The recorded information was not only presented to the court but was also presented to the police as reported by a Harare male stepparent.

“We actually took a recording of my fiancé’s ex threatening us to the police, and they didn't say that it was wrong to record phone calls at all. Although they didn’t pursue it because what he said could be interpreted in different ways, it seemed as though they would use a recording if necessary.”

4.9.6.0 Fatigue And Frustration As A Function Of Caring For Stepchildren, Own Children And Spouse.

A Gutu stepmother narrated the stress and exhaustion she experienced whilst caring for a sick stepchild.

“I counted one day the number of times I was awake when our stepchild was ill. And within 10 minutes she had gone to the toilet 15 times. She will cry pick me up, pick me up, put me down, like that you know, it really frustrates.” #1

Stepmothers did not only experience caring fatigue and related stress, but biological fathers also reported having undergone this challenging experience.

“At one time I found myself lifting things, doing all cleaning and cooking. I realised I was doing everything. I had been used to rely on her for doing things, or I could just look as she went on the domestic chores. Now she had gone to attend to her children (stepson and daughter) who were reported ill.” #2

Three stepmothers, one from Gutu and two from Harare stipulated how their stepchildren had been instrumental in alleviating the stress associated with caring for an ill husband. This indicates the perceived social support offered.

“Our stepdaughter used to take a lot of time off, to come and help. Sometimes I get around 11 o'clock at night still doing the dishes when my husband is ill. I envy single mothers, single parents, who did not remarry and only have to cope with the needs of the children as well as their own needs. Its terribly wearing, it's quite wearing.” #3

4.9.7.0 Lack Of Control And Autonomy Over Discipline And Care Of Stepchildren

Another thorny issue reported to have bedeviled the stepparents in Gutu and Harare was disciplining stepchildren.

“ I am not free to do what I want as a mother, I am limited in my range of actions, and the only thing I can do now is try to maintain good morale.” #7

“It’s a problem in our society, stepmothers are never taken seriously. When you are trapped in a system like this one, you realise you are number one culprit. I am not even entitled to adequately take care of the stepchildren, given my status, to feed my family decently, or to see my situation whether familial, social or professional change.” #4

“I see myself as an unacceptable person. I feel guilty because again last night they (stepchildren) did not eat what I had cooked. They demanded something else. I had to give in and give them. If they are your children, you will discipline them. You can even afford to have them sleep with hunger, but not with stepchildren.”

4.9.8. 0 The Need To Hide Lack Of Control And Autonomy Over Stepparenting

A large number of stepparents from both research sites alluded to their perceived lack of control over stepparenting issues, inclusive of the discipline of stepchildren. Of these, 9 were from Gutu and the remaining 11 came from Harare respondents.

“The only people who know my situation are my parents. I don’t want my in-laws and neighbours to know about it. I hide it. I don’t know what others would think

about me. They will think that I ill-treat these children. I try not to seek help from anybody than my sister ad mother.” #20

4.9.9.0 Managing The Feelings Of The Spouse.

Another area potentially intriguing to the stepparents was managing the emotions of their spouses. Harare stepparents proffered five responses while the remaining accounts came from Gutu.

“I was getting to a point where I think He was over-protective in a number of ways. And he would follow me up wherever I go. He would trace all my movements .He was afraid I would fight his X who was living a few houses from ours and had insulted me. I would feel like I need to strangle him, you know. And I said to him “go somewhere else”.#15

“I asked my wife, how she felt. I then said its better for us because we need time to think about it”#4

Managing the emotions of the spouses did not only negatively impacted on the spousal subsystem but also brought positive effects as shown below.

“I think our problems brought us even closer together, I mean we have always been close but I mean that the threat we both got from our ex-spouses stops you tracking your present or past disagreements. You think well this could be serious and prevent us from enjoying our marriage lets leave it. There was a time I felt

despair, I felt there was no one to turn to, no parents, no relatives, you know. I began to understand my spouse.” #12

4.10.0 Coping With The Responses Of The In-Laws(Father In -Laws, Mother In-Laws, Brothers And Sisters In-Law/Aunties, Uncles/ Tezvara, Vamwene,Babamukuru, Vatete, Babamudiki, Maiguru, Mainini Etc)

Not surprisingly, the stepparents found their status and situation quite difficult to cope with. Consequently, the stepparents, had difficulties in coping with their encounters with the in-laws. For stepmothers, the family of procreation remained their worst enemies. One stepmother lamented that,

“The only people who know my situation are my parents. I don’t want my in-laws and neighbours to know about it. I hide it. I don’t know what others would think about me. They will think that I ill-treat these children. I try not to seek help from them.”

“There’s no easy solution to in-law woes, but sometimes not going to an event is all you can do. There are lots of reasons people avoid socialising with their in-laws. Feelings like you are being judged and like you don’t fit in are at the top of most people’s lists.”

Although many married couples have in-law issues, in a stepfamily situation in-law flare-ups can be volatile with heightened tension. Stepmothers often felt like they were tiptoeing around, followed by the ghost of an ex-wife. This is evidenced by the experiences of some stepmothers.

“My husband’s ex-wife attends every party and holiday event held by my husband’s large extended family, watching my every move, ensuring her children give their father (and me) none of the hugs we normally receive, and reinforcing that she will always have known my husband’s relatives far longer than me.”

(Waterfalls stepmother)

“Because I wanted to be liked I tried to adapt. But I never felt comfortable and like I was accepted. The holidays last year were so stressful that I literally threw up the whole way through the yuletide season. And I wasn’t even pregnant.”

(Mukaro stepmother)

“Our Biological Mother (ex) thinks she still has the right to do all this, as she is the kids’ mother, even when dear partner is there, and she thinks that dear partner’s brothers’ wife is her sister in-law. Yet she only talks to her when she needs something (like a baby sitter). Dear partner's sister in- law told me that she wished that biological mother wouldn't call her while they were here (well near them) as she doesn't like her but she is a nice person and can't say no to people (she really can't-sister-in-law i am talking about)....”

Not surprisingly, some stepmothers reported incidences of protracted competition between themselves and the ex spouse. This was aimed at discrediting the stepmother so that she falls out of favour with the in-laws. Staying in the same locality precipitated this scenario in a number of cases.

“To try to carve out my own space, I hosted a Christmas dinner in my home that his ex-wife was not invited to. To underscore the point that she would not be forgotten, she brought her Christmas gifts for the entire family to Thanksgiving.”

“Although my in-laws claim her inclusion is for the sake of the children, it’s apparent that’s not the driving reason behind why she attends every family get-together. It’s not a two-way street. When her family is in town or holds parties for my husband’s children, he’s not invited.”

Some Gutu stepmothers reported that the in-laws saw the previous marriage as some unfinished business.

“The real reason is that to my husband’s family, his previous marriage is not over. One of my sister-in-laws put it quite well when she said only he divorced his ex-wife, they never did. The point was driven home to me repeatedly during my father-in-law’s funeral, when she was introduced to guests as if she was still my husband’s wife, and I was expected to stand in family portraits alongside her and smile.”

Five respondents indicated widening the social support network for dealing with in-laws by involving the husband’s brothers. This was meant to garner for support. Some respondents reportedly had their husbands engaging the ex spouse in an attempt to convince her not to interfere and meddle.

“To resolve the growing tension this was causing in our lives, my husband and I tried to identify a compromise that we can live with – one that preserves our relationships with his kids and allows me to get to know my in-laws a little better and without an ex-wife in tow. My husband and I asked his siblings to support our request to find a “balance” at family events and they agreed to clear invitations for his ex-wife before family events. He also talked to his ex-wife and explained that she might not be invited to some events to which she was not too pleased.”

“At first we thought our plan would work, but reality soon tore it to shreds. Every request by an in-law to invite my husband’s ex-wife to a family activity was prefaced with emotional pleas and manipulations. After never turning down a request, my husband hit his limit, and asked his sister not to invite his ex-wife to a party.”

Frustration, coping with alienation, seeking alternative actions and withdrawing from social encounters involving the in-law was also characteristic of the stepmothers’ attempts to deal with in-laws. The actions helped the respondents to retreat to safety and comfort zones.

“It was a family going-away party for my niece. We figured that if his ex-wife was keen on spending time with her former niece that she’d go out with her for lunch or coffee, that there was plenty of opportunity to say goodbye outside a family event. We thought we were being reasonable. We thought wrong. Then his sister took off her rhetorical gloves. First there were ugly barbs about the demise

of his first marriage. Then the complaint that we were making things difficult and the jibe that I “would be accepted” but am too distant. She topped it off with the revelation that the family would rather have his ex-wife at gatherings than us, and that they would not support our wishes for balance. So we made other plans.”

“And quite frankly, we had little desire to spend time with the in-laws at this point. For us, our priorities are our marriage and our time with the kids. And those things work well for us right now. The in-laws can just stay outlaws for a while. Until my in-laws figure out how to respect the boundaries we are trying to draw, they may see a lot less of us.”

4.10.1 Public’ opinion on whether biological parents should stay touch with in-laws

Some respondents from the general public also felt that the ex spouses should not stay in touch with in-laws.

“Personally I think that they shouldn't unless they are calling for the kids, to talk to them or make plans for the kids to visit them.” # 15

“I also think that the ex shouldn't just think because they have kids with your partner, can walk into your partner’s parents’ or your siblings’ homes.” # 10

A proportionate number of respondents also felt it is the discretion of the family of procreation and the ex spouse to stay in touch with in-laws.

“I think once you have split it is up to the parent to make visits or contact with the family of procreation not the ex and more so when that family doesn't really like the ex and the ex doesn't like them.” # 12

4.11.0 PSYCHO-EPIDEMIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE STEPPARENT BEFORE THE DEATH OF THE PREVIOUS SPOUSE AND BEFORE DIVORCING WITH THE PREVIOUS SPOUSE.

In order to fully understand the psychosocial circumstances of the people in a stepfamily and develop a psycho- epidemiological model of the stepparents and stepfamilies, it is mandatory to look at life prior to the advent of the stressful life events, which led to the current psychosocial situation the stepparent is

grappling with. The advantage is that one gets the full perspective from the stepparent's line of presentation and argument. The current psychosocial problems cannot be understood without first examining some of the psychosocial circumstances of the stepparents prior to divorce from and death of their spouses. The following section deals with a variety of issues of the life styles of the stepparents before the death or divorce of spouses as told by those who remarried. The narratives are from the stepparents who remarried a former widow, widower, and divorcee as they related their experiences to the researcher. These narratives help to indicate that for some of the stepparents, relationship constraints have existed for a long time and the current wave of problems is only an indication of cumulative and ongoing marital problems. In the researcher's opinion, this may help the stepparents to be hyper vigilant and has the negative impact of preventing the stepparents from fully functioning as individuals and as members of a family and community.

4.11.1 Relationship with former spouse prior to the death of the spouse.

Among the interviewed stepparents who later remarried a former widow, widower, and divorcee who had children from a previous marriage, a blended family was formed. A considerable number reported having good and stable marital relationships with their former spouses. The divorcees, widows, and widowers also had mixed reactions why they remarried. For example some

perceived themselves as too young to remain idle and unmarried. Some also feared loneliness. Typical responses are the ones that follow.

“When you have an understanding wife, no one can equal, you do not contemplate remarrying.”

“I loved him and we had a wonderful marriage but I’m only thirty. If I don’t remarry, I will be lonely for the rest of my life.”

However, for some respondents who reported having had poor relationships, they chose to remarry outside the same family and also refused wife/widow inheritance for fear of repeated ill treatment.

“If I had remarried someone else in his family, he was going to be just like him. Zvakangofanana makudo ndimamwe / It was going to be the same. Baboons look alike.”

“Well you know, new brooms sweep cleaner that’s why I decided to marry a virgin, unlike a widow who had her own problems and I have also had my problems. If we had brought these problems together nothing tangible was going to come out.”

“I really wonder what I will have done if I got married again to the second one who is the same. I am afraid I can’t go back into that way of living.”

4.11.2 Relationship with former spouse prior to divorce.

One critical issue central to the reasons why some respondents divorced was the death of a child. In the case of child death, some respondents reported this stressful life event weakening their marital relationships. This was especially true among those who had not had a child at all. The stepparents reported being abused by their former spouses. A Mushaviri stepparent also reported grieving.

“When our first-born died, he (husband) stopped caring for me. He even stopped buying food and started eating out.”

“He told me that I had caused the death of the child. I loved my baby girl but he chased me away anyway.” (Western Triangle widow)

Child death did not only negatively have psychosocial effects on those who had not had a child at all, but also affected the marriages of those who already had surviving children. Accusations of infidelity were reported as chief causes of child death.

“They kept saying I did it. I didn’t I had never slept with any other man except him.”

“After my third born died, her family accused me. They said our family was being tormented by an evil spirit and they took away their daughter.”

Multiple child deaths (*muterera*: - *kamwana kafa, kamwana kafa*) were also central to some divorces and in some cases the wife was mainly to blame. The respondents mourned their marriage, children and loss of belongings.

“After my third and fourth -born died, his family accused. They said I had a deceased relative’s spirit, which prevented me from bearing children unless I accepted the spirit’s trade (witchcraft), which they would not entertain. I was a no good woman and they took me to my parents away without anything.”

“I don’t think he ever loved me the deaths of the babies was just a scapegoat which he used to chase me away.”

Some respondents indicated that dreams and how the dreamer had interpreted the dreams precipitated their exit from their former marriages.

“My husband kept telling me that he dreamt of a man who would come and snatch me away from him. He said that man would threaten him with death if he continued to keep me.”

4.11.3 Decision -making prior to the death of the previous spouse.

In rural communities, decision-making among stepparents was reportedly balanced between males and females. Contrary to public belief, a significant number of female stepparents made substantial and long lasting decisions in the absence of their spouse compared to their male counterparts. The women made important decisions about what crops to grow, general housekeeping, food preparation, overall child rearing practices and surprisingly financial decisions. The respondents reported adequate and equal power sharing in decision-making.

“It was a great marriage. We always discussed everything. No one of us ever made decisions alone.” (Harare widow who recently remarried)

The females were also reported to have made long lasting financial decision with long-term benefits for the family. This is evident in the narrative of a Mushaviri man.

“I was in the DRC and Mozambique and she would do all the planning. When I returned, she had bought a house in Harare and six head of cattle.”

However, some imbalances in decision-making punctuated the stepparents’ life prior to the current marriage. The husbands were reported to have been self-centred and hardly considered the opinions of their spouses.

“He made all the decisions and never consulted me.” (Highfield stepmother)

“We never discussed anything. He just demanded and ordered me to do his heart’s desires.” (Mukaro stepmother)

In another incident a woman constantly consulted her mother, who factored most of the inputs leading to how the woman administered her family. The scenario depicts diffuse boundaries and subsequent enmeshed relationships between the respondent, his wife and his mother in-law. This state of affairs later created tension between the spouses. A man from Mukaro reiterated that:

“When she visited us she would tell my wife how to arrange furniture, and what to cook for me. She would even get into our bedroom.”

“My wife had a habit of phoning her mother who was in Mutare twice a day. This frequently happened when we were staying in Bulawayo up to until she died two years ago.” (Highfield male respondent)

4.11.4 Decision-making prior to divorce with the previous spouse.

In situations where the marriages were reported to have been punctuated by poor relations, women reported having limited decision-making opportunities.

“He was working and he would take all the money with him. We would not cook until he comes back. The children would cry but there was nothing I could do or give them. At one time the baby and I were both crying. I didn’t know what to do, the baby was hungry and I had no milk from my breasts.” (Highfield Mother)

“He had gone to Gweru to work and didn’t come home for a long time. I went to Gweru to see if he was ill and when I got there, he had taken another wife. He beat me up and told me to go back to the rural area. I was hurt. I was also afraid of contracting AIDS so I left him.” (Mushaviri stepmother)

The results indicated that spouses also made decisions revolving around health and illness. This was reported to be often problematic when the husband was not easily available or when his family insisted on a course of action contrary to the wishes and beliefs of the mother of the child. Fear of the unknown characterised and was central to most of the health related decisions that were made.

“I wanted to take my first born to clinic but my husband’s father (father in-law) said I must go to a n’anga. Because this contradicted with my faith, I took the baby to a prophet for faith healing. I did this because I am a Christian and I don’t believe in n’angas. When my husband returned, I was accused of disobeying his parents.” (A woman from Parktown in Waterfalls)

“I had to ask my father in-law to take the child to clinic by bicycle because the clinic was further away.” (A stepmother from Gutu- Mupandawana Growth Point)

“When my wife was bedridden, I send for my in-laws. They did not turn up. This happened thrice even if I had sent them some money for bus fare. When she got better I packed all her clothes and wares and took her to her parents. I was afraid she will die and things will be difficult for me.”

4.11.5 Length of time the couples used to spent together in their marriage before the death of the spouse

An important determinant of marital relationship quality revealed by the present study was the length of time the spouses spent together. For those who remarried following the death of their spouses, lengthy spousal absence created tension and anxiety in the other spouse and subsequently between the spouses.

“He worked in Bindura but I only got there 5 times for the 10 years he worked there. He only came home once a year or so.” (A stepmother from Makumdinge in Mukaro)

“When she was promoted, I had to remain with the children who were doing their primary education in Chivhu for a year before I could also transfer to Gutu. I had also hoped that she will be back in Chikomba District since it was my home area.” (A male teacher from Gutu)

“Before and when he died there wasn’t much difference between me and a widow. We didn’t spend much time together despite staying together.”

For some of the respondents, previous reunions with an absent husband signaled the advent and precipitation of psychosocial problems. A major concern was complaints that the husband only surfaced to impregnate the women before disappearing. However, for the husbands the entry of the women into the world of work also created anxiety and relationship dissatisfaction, as some women either worked in different towns, district, rural areas, or were on night shifts.

“The only time he came home, I will get pregnant. Then he will go and leave me alone. I will do all the chores by myself. He doesn’t come home until the baby is six months old and I get pregnant again.”

“We used to work together and stayed in Marlborough. He then got a young wife (small house) and went to stay in Warren Park. I was only shocked to hear that he was no more; you know how painful it is? We didn’t even get word that he was ill.”

“She would phone tell me that she is not coming, there is a strike and they are short staffed and she therefore would not be coming home. The other day I had

planned that we go for a meal at a local hotel. I had paid for the meals and she just drops a bombshell to tell me that she is not coming.”

Some respondents however reported that life with their spouses was good and quite memorable. The spouse was readily available. The respondents also revealed that there was adequate partner cooperation.

*“We stayed together and we would go for piece work (**maricho**) together. Now that he died I had to marry to find someone who will help me to look after my children even if they are staying with my parents.”*

Some respondents also showed a mixture of long separation periods coupled with sudden news that their spouses had died, psychologically taxed their emotional resources.

“I was shocked to hear that he had died. He had last been home one and a half years ago.”

“I didn’t know she was sick. The police came and told me that she had died at work.”

Not only were the respondents negatively impacted by long absence, shorter periods together also had long lasting effects on the respondents when their spouses died.

“She had just phoned to let me know that she was on her way home from work. The next time I hear that she has been seriously taken ill and has been admitted

in hospital, before being told that the truth upon arrival at Parerinyaytwa hospital.” (Highfield stepfather)

“He had only boarded a kombi on his way to work. We heard that there was a kombi, which was involved in a head on collision with a bus. He was the only one who died.” (A stepmother from Muchechetere village Mukaro)

4.11.6 Length of time the couples used to spend together in their marriage before they divorced.

Despite having long absence, the respondents also reported that their relationships with ex-spouses were marked by financial constraints, imbalances in financial decision-making and imbalances in access to financial resources among others.

“He told everybody that he had sent lots of money home, but all he did was to drink beer with prostitutes. He would come home late in the night and demand that I start cooking. He would also claim that he had paid lobola.” (Widow from Tangdzani village of Mukaro)

“I made a lot of money by knitting jerseys and crocheting. He would demand that I give him the money. I had to hide the money or take it to a friend. I would instead ask him for some money. He would give me but it was not enough. He used to threaten me and at times beat me. I ran away.” (Stepmother from Village 14 of Mushaviri resettlement)

As is indicative of the results below, infidelity, cheating and long absence necessitated the breakup of the previous marriages. Some respondents attempted to cheat their spouses' girlfriends or mistresses and falsified relationships with their spouses, unknown to the girlfriend, mistress or 'small house'.

"He wasn't home for a long time and I was worried he was sick. He had a perennial stomach problem. His father gave me some money for bus fare and I went to Masvingo where he worked. He had another woman there. When I arrived I lied to the woman that I was his sister. The woman welcomed us (wife and baby) and prepared a delicious meal." (A female peer educator and counsellor from Gutu)

Ill-treatment and shamed also characterised the marital life of women whose husbands stayed away from home for longer periods.

"When he came he threw me out of the house and told me to go back to my people. I pleaded but he would not listen. I was ashamed and couldn't believe myself that Gias (not real name) had treated me like that. I contemplated why I had left my boyfriend in favour of this man who was going to illtreat me." (Female respondent from Muzorori Business Centre)

"She never came back after going to U.K. for three years and I had to file for a divorce." (A Highfield male respondent)

4.12.0 STEPFAMILY HAPPY MOMENTS

4.12.1 Anniversaries and stepfamily life transitions

Among the episodes of stepfamily happiness reported include achievements like effecting a divorce and progress in the realm of academic pursuit. A stepmother from Waterfalls related that:

“This weekend has been big for us and we’ve managed, once again, to get through everything while taking another couple of enormous steps in our new life together. The wonderful man in my life has just received signed divorce papers; he’s also just completed the first semester toward his Masters.” (A Waterfalls stepmother)

Celebrating a birthday with members of the stepfamily was reportedly rewarding according to a Harare stepfather.

“I have celebrated my 40th birthday with the people who mean the most to me in the world, my partner, my sons and my dearest friend in the world. What made my day so special? The way the love of my life made such an effort to make me feel special on my birthday; being able to spend time with my boys , they came out to dinner with us and then stayed over for the first time in our new joint home (this made today very special too!); and my dear girl presented me with a scrapbook pictorial of the past 22 years we’ve know each other, what a magnificent work of art and made with such love (reading it brought a flood of tears in the restaurant and again this morning, and probably each and every time I read it).” (A stepmother from Village 8 of Mushaviri Resettlement).

Another reported case of joy was the anticipated coresiding with the spouse and the stepchildren. The respondent also reported fear of life changes.

"The week ahead brings the last of 'my stuff' from my unit and with my lease expiring at the end of the week it will be official we'll have begun our Stepfamily journey. I've found this weekend incredibly rewarding and satisfying being able to have my 3 main men with me as I go to sleep and still hear when I wake. This week will be a challenge, the close of one chapter and the start of a new one. I am the most change-phobic person I know." (A stepmother from Prospect area of Waterfalls).

4.12.2 Involvement in stepchildren's sports, and education

Coparenting was reportedly evident among some stepparents and the biological parents, culminating in positive contributions towards the welfare of stepchildren and biological children alike. A stepfather from Waterfalls reiterated that:

"Young stepson had a late basketball game last week. I didn't want to go out in the cold. The elder stepson said he was going in, then when the time came he said no, who is going to keep her company? It was not such a big thing, but it was nice, we chatted and watched for an hour together. It felt pretty ok." #1

"I think the friendship has always been there, it just keeps getting interrupted. That's great cyclone! It was a really nice gesture. It marked the start of a new

friendship? Some people have asked me 'How have you managed interactions with biological parent and stepparent?' It is amusing when people can just get along." (A stepmother from Highfield).

"We have parent -teacher interview during consultation day for biological daughter and stepdaughter next week. And all three of us will be attending together, myself, Biological Father, Dear Husband, as two parents, and a stepfather, it's nice that at least they can talk together and work for the sake of the kids. It's a pity that many people can not see beyond their own selfishness and fail to think of children more often." (A stepmother from Derbyshire in Waterfalls).

4.12.3 Food as an additive to stepfamily happiness

A number of stepmothers reported that constantly availing food to the stepchildren was a source of joy for the stepchildren and the stepparent too.

"From time to time I will buy the stepkids chocolate bars with a little note from me, telling them to have a great day and I love them. I put one each on the table at night, so when they get up in the morning to eat their breakfast before school they have a little treat to take to school with them. I did this again the day before last, and this morning I get up and on my computer desk is a note for SS11 saying 'To Mum', from SS11. I just thought "wow, it does make it all worth it!"

“This reminds me of my stepson. I put a fun sized bun in his lunch box and dropped him at school, the minute I turned my back he ripped open his lunch box with a smile and ate it, before the bell even went.” (A stepmother from Paradise in Highfield).

Another stepmother from Mupandawana Growth Point reported mixed feelings of joy and embarrassment with her stepchildren.

“My stepdaughter aged 13 years forgot her lunch one day. I took it up to school for her. I added a cute little note telling her that I thought she might want this and that I didn't want her starving to death. She said she was embarrassed about having a note and the other kids said they haven't gotten notes since 6 years old. I find out weeks later that she saved the note and put it in her box of memorabilia. It was a warm moment (rare as well).”

4.12.4 Attending to stepchildren's accommodation concerns

Another female stepparent from Grobie Park in Waterfalls, Harare reported that paying attention to the stepchildren's room by decorating it brought a lot of joy and happiness, a sense of being loved and being valued in the stepchildren.

“I Daresay, Stepchild would have the chocolate on the bus! My new thing for my stepchildren is their rooms. I take great pains to decorate on their terms. My

stepdaughter has taken to the phrase, "I approve". I'm not sure how I feel about that coming from a child, but I'll move on. At least I think I'm still in charge. The jury is apparently still out."

4.13.0 COPING STRATEGIES USED BY STEPPARENTS

Coping for stepparents was observed at two levels: the stepparents's own views and the community and the key informant' perspectives.

Stepparents's views of coping

This section presents the coping strategies used by stepparents in dealing with perceived stepparenting stressful events. Six major categories of coping strategies were found. Some respondent stepparents reported using more than one coping strategy depending on what the problematic situation was. Whether the strategy was behavioural, cognitive or emotion focused, coping was categorised as follows:

4.13.1 Interim coping strategies

This category of coping strategies involved allowing time to pass before the real solution to the problem was instituted.

4.13.2 Adaptive coping strategies

In this category are the strategies, which allowed people to stay with the problem and doing something with and about the problem.

4.13.3 Preventive coping strategies

These made it less likely that the problem will arise.

4.13.4 Contingency coping strategies

This entailed providing stand by-arrangements in case serious problems arise.

4.13.5 Passivity

This entailed making no attempts to remedy the situation. This was synonymous with feelings of helplessness or perceived helplessness. A comparison of the coping strategies used by rural and urban stepparents was done. A Boolean matrix was performed using NVivo version 2.0, to compare coping strategies used by rural and urban stepparents. The Boolean matrix is similar to a cross tabulation in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), in which relationships and interaction effects of two or more variables are computed to help the researcher make comparisons based on these factors.

Table 4: A comparison of the perceived coping strategies used by rural and urban stepparents according to the stepparents.

	Coping strategy used by stepparents						Total
Research site ↓	Interim coping	Adaptive coping	Corrective coping	Preventive coping	Contingency coping	Passivity	
Urban	27	56	1	4	2	3	93
	29.0%	60.2%	1.1%	4.3%	2.2%	3.2%	100.0%
Rural	45	28	3	3	4	4	87
	51.7%	32.2%	3.4%	3.4%	4.6%	4.6%	100.0%
Total	72	84	4	7	6	7	180
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	40.0%	46.7%	2.2%	3.9%	3.3%	3.9%	100.0

Table 4 above indicates that 29% of urban stepparents reported using interim actions to cope with stepparenting whilst 51.7% of those stepparents from a rural setting reported using interim actions. A further analysis also revealed that 60.2

% of urban stepparents reported using adaptive actions to deal with stepparenting compared to 32.2 % of rural stepparents who reported using adaptive actions to counteract the stepparenting stressful situations. Another 1.1 % of the urban stepparents attempted to use corrective coping in comparison with 3.4 % of rural stepparents who reported using corrective coping. Results on preventive coping illustrate that 4.3% of the urban stepparents reported using this type of coping while 3.4 % of the rural stepparents also reported having resorted to this type of coping. Another category of coping reported in the present study was contingency coping. A total of 2.2 % of the urban stepparents reported using contingency measures to deal with stepparenting stressful events comparable with 4.6% of the rural stepparents for the same type of coping strategy. A critical and mind boggling situation was characterised by the stepparents' inability to cope with their stepparenting problems. These stepparents were characterised by passivity. Among this group, 3.2 % of the urban stepparents adopted passivity. On the other hand, 4.6 % of the rural stepparents reported having failed to mitigate themselves against the adverse effects of stepparenting stress.

Community and key informants' views of stepparents' coping

The coping strategies used by stepparents were investigated from two angles. The first involved stepparents' own self-reports followed by the views of the key informants and members of the community (general populace). These respondents identified the causes of the stepfamily conflict and crisis as well as the coping strategies the stepparents used as indicated below. Coping for the

stepparents was reported to hover around two issues. These included attending to the causes of the stepparenting uncertainty and the strategies employed in dealing with the current situation. The researcher also made use of the NVivo version 2.0's Boolean matrix to help come up with the figures shown in Table 5 below.

Causative theme: These are the psycho socioeconomic and political factors that are indicative of or suspected to be catalysts in stepfamily conflict and crisis. These factors are purported to increase or reduce stepfamily conflict and crisis. There are four types viz:

Economic factors: Responsibility (joint and or individual), meeting deadlines timeously, creativity, financial security, and diversity (e.g., staying with stepchildren) and career mobility.

Political factors: involvement in decision-making, a high standard of excellence, status or position, self-expression, leadership opportunities, peace and serenity, loyalty and duty to the family.

Social factors: competence, collaboration on common tasks, harmony or absence of conflict, competition, satisfying relationships and shared funny.

Psychological factors: meaning, autonomy, recognition, personal growth, new and different experiences, stimulation from change and challenge, accomplishment, self-worth, a sense of belonging and good health.

Strategic theme: These include reactions and resolutions and tactics such as integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising. These were perceived to be tactful efforts and effective tranquilisers to the crisis and conflict.

Integrating factors: This involves investigating an issue to find an acceptable solution, exchange accurate information to solve the problem, bringing all concerned together to solve the problem in the best possible way.

Obliging factors: This entails trying to satisfy the expectations of others, accommodate others' wishes, or go along with their suggestions.

Dominating factors: This involves arguing one's case to show merit of own position, firm pursuance of own side of the issue, holding on to one's solution to the problem.

Avoiding factors: This involves keeping conflict to one's self; avoid discussion of differences, keeping one's disagreements to the self and to avoid hard feelings.

Compromising factors: This involves negotiating so that a compromise can be reached, the use of give and take for compromise, and proposing a middle position with which to break deadlocks.

Table 5: Community perceptions of causes of stepparenting conflict and crisis and strategic management of problems.

Theme	Sub theme	Percent	Harare	Gutu	Percent
	<i>Economics</i>	21.2	√	√	32.62
		24.9	√	√	24.87

Causative factors	<i>Political</i>	33.1	√	√	21.42
	<i>Social</i>	20.8	√	√	21.10
	<i>Psychological</i>	100.0			100.0
	Total				
Strategic management factors	<i>Integrating</i>	20.1	√	√	27.46
	<i>Obliging</i>	35	√	√	19.60
	<i>Avoiding</i>	25	√	√	17.81
	<i>Dominating</i>	10.5	√	√	17.80
	<i>Compromising</i>	9.4	√	√	17.33
	Total	100.0			100.0

Table 5 above shows that in Harare, social factors (33.1%) and political factors (24.9%) share the total causative effects for stepfamily problems. In contrast, political factors (24.87%) and economic factors (32.62%) were perceived to significantly cause stepfamily conflict and crisis in Gutu. In both settings, psychological factors were perceived to trail with 20.8% for Harare against 21.1% for Gutu.

Equally, the table illustrates that in Harare, obliging (35%) was perceived to be the stepparents' best tool for dealing with conflict and crisis. On the other hand, the stepparents in Gutu were perceived to use integration (27.46%) for the resolution of stepfamily issues. The perceived second most effective coping strategy for Harare stepparents is avoidance (25%) while that for Gutu stepparents was obliging (19.60%).

4.14.0 Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the analysis of the results. The results indicated that the stepparents and stepparenting are negatively viewed concepts. Prominently emerging themes of stepparenting were those of disintegration, malfunctioning, stigma and criminalisation of stepparenting. These derived from the association of stepparenting with negativity at both the individual and community level. The results also indicated how the respondents used metaphors, proverbs and idioms to show how members of the stepfamily relate. Key coping strategies reported by stepparents were, interim coping strategies, adaptive coping strategies, corrective coping strategies, preventive coping, contingency coping and passivity. On another note, the community and key informants reported that stepparents use the following reactions and resolutions and tactics such as integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising, as tactful efforts and effective tranquilisers to the stepfamily crisis and conflict. The chapter that follows is a discussion of the findings of the present study in line with anecdotal evidence.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the present study in line with the objectives of the study. The chapter also sets out to highlight the limitations of the study.

The chapter ends with the recommendations for future studies (research) and those for clinical applications or family therapy practice.

5.2 Discussion

The findings of the present study show that stepparents have difficulties and psychosocial needs in playing their stepparenting roles. The results also illustrate that being a stepparent is qualitatively different from being a biological parent in that a host of expectations are placed on the stepparent more than would be done on a biological parent. Stepparents are also faced with the dilemma of not being able to do what they deem necessary for the welfare of the stepchildren than they would do with their own biological children. This was the central theme in their lack of autonomy, disparities in decision-making. For example, having stepchildren under one's custody means that a stepparent cannot leave him or her unattended without supervision. On the same note, the stepparents experience ambivalence with regards to whether to punish the child or not, knowing very well that the stepchildren like any other minors need guidance. If she /he beat the stepchild, there is guilt and remorse afterwards.

5.3 Why metaphors, proverbs, idioms and analogues were used to analyse data

Metaphors have been used in a variety of studies. Lawley (2000) popularised metaphors as a way of describing one thing in the form of another for easy comprehension. Thus, metaphors helped the current researcher to bring out the thisness of that and the thatness of this. In other words, metaphors are theories, which assist us in describing, explaining, predicting and controlling behaviour in

families and life in general. The present results therefore revealed a metaphoric theory of stepparenting. Poston-Anderson (1996) contended that metaphors help people to distance themselves from the object they describe. In this study, the respondents adopted the same method in order to be evasive and at times talk (gossip) about a stepparent even in his/her presence without him/her realising.

Proverbs and popular sayings are capsules that contain highly condensed bits of a culture's values and beliefs. They are passed on from generation to generation as a legacy of folk wisdom. People tend to accept them, in an uncritical way, as "truths" learned by their elders. They have great influence on the assumptions, attitudes, motivations and behaviors of the members of a culture precisely because they are absorbed and internalised at a very early age and then are taken for granted. An excellent way to gain insight into a culture is to analyse its unique sayings and proverbs.

5.4 Types of Stepfamilies

As was signposted in the first chapter, one of the objectives of the study was to categorise stepfamilies in terms of the background of the stepparent and the remaining biological parent who made it into the stepfamily or stepmarriage. An analysis of the results reveals that there is no single type of stepfamily in Zimbabwe. In actual fact, there were fifteen stepfamily and remarriage variants and combinations. Of these, three broad categories can be teased out. These are stepfamilies formed following divorce; those formed following the death of a spouse; from cultural practices and children whose parents are both alive and

only resurface. These children were reported to be a symptomatic issue likely to fuel misunderstandings and strain stepfamily relationships. A common term that was loosely used to describe a stepmother is *mainini* or *mai vadiki* (small mother or mother's younger sister). In a number of situations, the stepmother was even older than the ex spouse or deceased women and yet she was still called *mainini*. This also belittles the stepmother and adds to her burden of being negatively evaluated. By the same token stepfathers were also called *babamudiki* or *babamunini* (small father/ father's younger brother). A gross anomaly associated with this type of identity involves being belittled. This has implications for the stepparent –stepchild interactions. Better terminology needs to be taught to stepchildren such as *mai* (mother) or *baba* (father) so that a sense of respect for the stepparent is fostered. A further look at the results also illustrates that for some stepparents and biological parents, psychosocial problems did not just emerge during the current relationship. For some respondents, stepparents whose spouses they divorced, the problems were prevalent in the first intimate relationship. Therefore, such people are more likely to be agitated and most likely to use preventive coping strategies to deal with stepparenting and remarriage uncertainty.

Not all remarriages include children from prior relationships, nor do all stepfamilies incorporate children into a remarriage. This is evidenced by the terms used to describe stepmothers (e.g. *mhanje*/barren) and stepfathers (e.g. *ngomwa*/ barren/sterile). It has to be born in mind that not every stepmother or stepfather is barren or sterile as shown above. These stepparents are initially

viewed as barren. When they finally have children of their own, foul play such as someone having impregnated the wife in which or having a young brother raising a name for him (*munin'ina anaopinda mumba momukoma achimumutsira zita*) is suspected to have taken place. This is more pronounced for men than it is for women. For women a young sister will come and revive the cooking stones (*chimutsa mapfihwa*) publicly, unlike the previous case involving men. The young brother and the older brother should both feign ignorance of what transpired (*vose vanoratidza kusaziva huye munin'ina haafaniri kuwanikidzwa nomukoma ari mumba momukoma*). Approximately, 25% of the 3.7 million cohabiting couples in the United States are households in which at least one adult brings children from prior relationships, thereby creating cohabiting stepfamily households (Bumpass et al., 1991) In fact, cohabiting couples are more likely (48% versus 37%) to enter a new union with children from previous relationships than are remarried couples (Wineberg & McCarthy, 1998). Some first marriages create stepfamilies and stepparent-stepchild relationships (i.e., when never-married mothers marry a man who is not the child's father).

In 1992, 15% of all children in the United States lived with a mother and a stepfather. About one-third of U.S. children will live in a remarried or cohabiting stepfamily household before they reach adulthood (Bumpass et al., 1995; Seltzer, 1994). A look at the terms used to describe stepchildren point to three distinct positions pertaining to how biological parents and stepparents negotiate and view parenting of stepchildren. In fact, children in stepfamilies may have lived in several types of families before they reach adulthood, although fewer than 5% of

all remarried couples incorporate three sets of children (i.e., *mwana wako*/yours, *mwana wangu*/mine, and *vana vedu*/ours). Complex marital and cohabiting histories over the life course result in complex family histories for children (O'Connor, Pickering, Dunn, Golding, & the ALSAC Study Tam, 1999; Wojtkiewicz, 1994) and for adults. For example, about 40% of adult women will likely reside in a remarried or cohabiting stepfamily household as a parent or stepparent at some time (Bumpass et al.), and 40% of all families include stepgrandparents (Szinovac, 1998).

The work of demographers in this decade yielded a more complex understanding of stepfamily structures. The importance of knowing about relationship histories in order to more fully comprehend stepfamily dynamics was underscored, and these more elaborated demographic views influenced how other researchers conceptualized stepfamily structure. Remarriage research has generally focused on marital dynamics, quality, and stability. Samples were often small, and many employed qualitative designs.

Generally the findings show that caring for stepchildren is a burden and a demanding chore calling for constant self-examination against a backdrop of ever existing microscopic (family) and macroscopic (community) binocular vision from the society. For most stepparents the main difficulty they experience is that of impression management.

Although researchers are increasingly turning their attention to the stepfamily, there are many areas of stepfamily that have not been looked at. The gender disparities prevalent in various spheres of life have not also spared the stepfamily and stepmothers in particular. A gender analysis of the results of the current study indicates that more female stepparents participated and were willing to partake than their male counterparts. In line with that, there still appears to be protracted myths in the study of stepfamilies and stepparents in general and stepmothers in particular. This has been exacerbated by the prevalence of myths concerning steprelations. A survey of stories about stepmothers like “Hansel and Gretel”, “Cinderella”, and “Snow White”, indicates that these stories are shrouded with evil actions of stepmothers. In Visher and Visher’s (1979: 6) opinion “fairies do not exist, and witches do not exist but stepmothers exist and therefore certain fairy tales are harmful rather than helpful to large segments of the population.” These and other stories therefore harm stepmothers and stepchildren and put their relationships in disarray. The results of the present study concur with the observations previously done. A look at the perception towards stepfamilies, as “disintegrated entities” is based on the perceived strained relationships between stepmothers and biological mothers. Although *gadzinyina* (hatred between co-wives) is a concept common among Shona women in a polygamous marriage, it was reported to be prevalent among stepfamilies by the respondents in this study. This may also perpetuate myths about women and stepmothers. The women are therefore denoted as the agents of the psychosocial dysfunctioning prevalent in

families in general and stepfamilies in particular as if they exist in a social vacuum.

The qualitative approach adopted for the present study allowed the researcher to explore the respondents' experiences and feelings (Patton, 1990). The findings on how stepparents feel about stepparenting the stepchildren in their homes shows its utility, in that it gave detailed revelations of the stepparents' experiences on stepparenting and caregiving, of which a quantitative approach would not have revealed.

The stepfamily and the marriage associated with this type of set up may be seen as enduring relationships for all the players. The results of this study have revealed the psychosocial factors the stepparent grapples with in an attempt to gain and maintain psychosocial homeostasis. The results also indicated that stepparenting is a stigmatised identity. In their study of marital strengths in marriage "normal marriages", Robinson and Blanoon (1993) came up with a theoretical model. The model shows the interrelationships among enduring marriages. Intimacy, commitment, communication congruency and religious faith emerged as the key characteristics of enduring marriages. Their findings indicate that most marriages inclusive of stepmarriges in general experience incompatibility in the interrelationships of factors stated above.

It is this author's assertion that stepparenting and stepfamily living are equally enduring as is indicative of the results, given the numerous studies on how people

view them (Visher and Visher, 1998; Wald, 1981; Ambert, 1986; Birenbaum 1988).

5.5 Perceptions Towards Stepparenting

The perceptions towards stepparenting are discussed under five subheadings viz: stepfamily relationship quality, stepfamily stability, effects of remarriage on remarried adults, development of stepparent–stepchild relationships and stepparents’ roles.

5.5.1 Stepfamily relationship quality

Findings are mixed regarding differences in marital quality between individuals in first marriages and in remarriages; some find no differences (Booth & Edwards, 1992; Deal et.al., 1992), and others report lower relationship quality for remarried individuals (Brown & Booth, 1996). It has been suggested that different processes may be involved in determining the quality of remarriages and first marriages (Jacobson, 1993; Rogers, 1996b). For example, Kurdek (1991) found that marital satisfaction declined more rapidly over time in stepfather households than in first marriages.

A central finding in this study and also found from previous studies based on behavioral observations and self-reports were that remarried spouses more openly express criticisms, anger, and irritation than do spouses in first marriages (Bray & Kelly, 1998; Hetherington, 1993). Remarried respondents also generally report higher levels of tension and disagreement than their counterparts in first marriages (Hobart, 1991). These disagreements generally centre on issues related

to stepchildren, such as discipline, rules for children, and the distribution of resources to children (Hobart, Pasley, Koch, & Ihinger-Tallman, 1993). Disputes between adults may also result from arguments between stepparents and stepchildren (Clingempeel, Colyar, & Hetherington, 1994). Although the presence of stepchildren is thought to lower marital quality for remarried adults (Brow & Booth, 1996), the effects are not always strong. In fact, Kurdek (1999) found that children born to first marriages lowered marital quality more than stepchildren lowered remarital quality. Nonetheless, marital quality is poorer when both adults have children from prior relationships than when only one adult is a stepparent, presumably because of added complexity and more opportunities for conflict (Hobart, 1991).

5.5.2 Stepfamily stability

Anecdotal evidence indicates that remarriages dissolve at higher rates than first marriages (Bumpass et al, 1990), especially for remarried couples with stepchildren (Booth & Edwards, 1992). The psycho-epidemiological analysis done in this study also sheds some light on the problems inherent in step relationships. A number of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal-level explanations have been proposed for the greater instability of remarriages in the present study. For example, compared with first marriages, remarriages include more people who have personality characteristics (e.g., impulsivity, neuroticism) that predispose them to end relationships more frequently and make them poorer marriage material (Booth & Edwards; Capaldi & Patterson, 1991). Booth and Edwards concluded that remarriages are more fragile because (a) they lack social

support and clear norms to follow, (b) a larger proportion of people who remarry than people in first marriages see divorce as a solution to marital problems, and (c) the smaller pool of partners for remarriages results in unions between people with dissimilar interests and values.

Some researchers pointed to greater conflict in remarriages as a reason for higher redivorce rates (Horbat,1991), but others argued that it is not the amount of conflict that predicts redivorce but the manner in which remarried couples resolve their disagreements (Pasley et al., 1993). Conflict is not inherently negative; some women in the power-sharing couples that Pyke (1994) interviewed reported more conflicts than those in husband-dominant remarriages because the women actively sought power. Zimbabwe, being a patriarchal society offers no exceptions to the rule in terms of power sharing among couples in general and stepcouples in particular. Protracted imbalances in power sharing were reported among spouses, from the observations emanating from the present study. In such marriages, conflict may represent active problem solving, which may decrease the probability of redivorce. There is also a dire need to investigate this phenomenon among Zimbabwean stepparents using quantitative reseach designs.

5.5.3 Effects of remarriage on remarried adults

Although no attempts were made to measure psychological well being of the stepparents in the present study, some inferences can be spelt basing on some insights gained as well as the documented evidence from previous studies. The fact that stepparents reportedly grappled with a number of issues, among which was introducing stepchildren, offering social support to a spouse embroiled in

legal contest with an ex spouse and perceived spousal cheating, some indices of the psychological impacts of stepparenting and remarriage can be drawn. A few researchers investigated health status, depression, happiness, and psychological distress of remarried adults. The findings were mixed, remarriage was associated with higher levels of depression (e.g., Neff & Schuler, 1993), but other researchers reported less distress for remarried than for divorced individuals (e.g., Shapiro, 1996) and that remarriage was not related to well-being (e.g., Richards Hardy, & Wadsworth, 1997). Moreover, it is not clear whether men or women benefit more from remarriage (Marks, 1995); Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1990). These mixed findings suggest that factors other than marital status explain stepparents' well-being. For example, differential selection into remarriage may potentially explain differences between remarried and divorced adults in that people with better mental and physical health are more likely to find new partners than are those with health problems (Booth & Amato, 1991; Murphy, Glaser, Grundy, 1997).

Over a third of the studies published, the most on any topic dealt with the effects on children of living with a remarried or cohabiting stepparent. Many were national studies (e.g., National Study of Families and Households [NSFH]) or large representative samples (e.g., Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children in the U.K.) conducted in North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, Israel, and New Zealand. These dimensions were not explored in the present study and as such warrant future investigation.

Previous research on young and adolescent stepchildren focused primarily on academic achievement (e.g., grades, school completion, achievement test scores), psychological adjustment and well-being, and behavior problems. Typically, stepchildren and children living with one parent were compared on the outcome measures with children living with both parents. Demographic characteristics of children and families were usually included, as were various mediating variables related to such constructs as stepfamily relationships and peer characteristics.

Evidently, portrayed from the present study was a clear picture that stepchildren dropout of school due to stepfamily distress. On the same score, previous studies concluded that stepchildren and children with single parents did not achieve as well on average as children living with both parents in grades earned in school (e.g., Astone & McLnahan, 1991; Bogenscheider 1997), grades completed (e.g., Teachman, Paasch, Carver, 1996), and scores on achievement tests (e.g., Dronkers, 1994; Pong, 1997). However, the largest differences were in dropout rates, school attendance, and whether the student graduated or received a GED (regression coefficients of $-.36$, $-.38$, and $-.33$, respectively, for the differences between children in stepfamilies and first-marriage families) (Astone & McLnahan, 1991). The finding pertaining to dropout rates may be related to the fact that stepchildren tend to leave home to establish independent households at younger ages than do children living with both parents (e.g., Aquilino, 1991b; Kiernan, 1992). For example, stepdaughters were more likely to cohabit (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998) or to marry than were women from first-

marriage families (Aquilino, 1991b) or from other family forms (Thornton, 1991), which may be related to leaving home and school early. This was also reported in figures 7, 8, 9 and 11 in the present research.

Studies comparing children in first-marriage families and stepchildren, on average showed more internalising behavior problems, such as depression (e.g., Zill et al, 1993), and were more at risk for having emotional problems (e.g., Dawson, 1991; Hanson, McLanahan & Thompsn, 1996). Some studies found that boys have more problems than girls (e.g., Coley, 1998; Dunn et al., 1998); others found that girls had more problems than boys (Needle, Su, & Doherty, 1990) or that girls had more adjustment problems than boys only when living with stepfathers (e.g., Lee, Burkam, Zimiles, & Ladewski 1994). Still others found more problems for girls living with stepmothers (e.g., Suh, Schultz, & Johansn, 1996).

Although the findings ranged widely, most researchers reported that stepchildren were similar to children living with single mothers on the preponderance of outcome measures and that stepchildren generally were at greater risk for problems than were children living with both of their parents. However, most researchers also found that the differences between stepchildren and children in first-marriage families were small, with effect sizes from Amato's (1994) meta-analysis ranging from $-.07$ for academic achievement to $-.32$ for problems in either or both conduct or behavior and $-.37$ for psychological adjustment (according to Cohen's (1969) commonly used convention, effect sizes of .20, .50, and .80 are considered small, moderate, and large, respectively). Most

stepchildren do well in school (e.g., Pong, 1997) and do not have emotional or behavioral problems (e.g., Dorius, Heaton, & Steffen, 1993; Lissau & Sorenson, 1994).

5.5.4 Development of stepparent-stepchild relationships

The present study revealed some insights into step relationships. The types of relationships depicted by the present findings signaled sour stepchild-stepparent relationships. Fewer researchers also considered the development of step-relationships, and findings were mixed among those who did. In three in-depth longitudinal studies of stepfathers, relationships with stepchildren generally became more negative over time (Knox, & Zusman, 2001; Wilmoth, & Koso, 2002; Bray & Kelly, 1998; Hetherington, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). However, in another study, some relationships among stepparents and adolescent stepchildren became closer, some grew more distant, and some changed little over a 5-year period (Ganong & Coleman, 1994a). Research is needed to determine why some relationships become closer and others grow more hostile or distant.

Some evidence suggests that stepchildren reject stepparents who engage in discipline and control early in the relationship (Bray & Kelly; Ganong, Coleman, Fine, & Martin, 1999). In contrast, affection more often characterised stepparent-stepchild relationships when stepfathers initially engaged in supportive behaviors with stepchildren than when no such efforts were made (Bray & Kelly, 1998; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). The reported development of gangsters

among stepchildren and delinquency is also an indication of the stepparent-stepchild relationship quality. Moreover, stepparents who intentionally tried to get their stepchildren to like them and who continued their affinity-seeking and affinity -maintaining efforts had warmer, closer bonds with their stepchildren than did those who gradually reduced affinity-seeking efforts. This was also reported in previous studies (Ganong et al., 1999). The most effective relationship-building strategies for stepparents were dyadic activities chosen by the stepchild. Thus stepchildren can be perceived as wielding the executive power, which determines the types of relationships in the stepfamily and who gradually, reduced affinity-seeking efforts (Ganong et al., 1999).

However, stepchildren are not passive observers in the developing stepparent-stepchild relationship (Hetherington, 1993). How they treat stepparents also affects the relationship. For example, Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) found that stepfathers withdrew from stepchildren who ignored their overtures early in the remarriage. The present study found that when stepchildren recognised that their stepparents were trying to do things with them that the stepchildren liked, they generally responded with their own affinity-seeking efforts. For example “*vana ava vanhuwo vanofunga/ these children are people who also think.*” Similarly, O’Connor, Hetherington and Clingempeel (1997) found that the observed responses of adolescents to (step) parents were as strong a predictor of adolescent adjustment as was (step) parent-to-adolescent behavior. Nonetheless, even when positive stepparent-stepchild relationships are

established when the child is a preadolescent, conflict may still arise when the child gets older (Hetherington, 1993). Additionally, adolescent stepchildren tend to see parents as more accepting of them than stepparents. Using vignettes as stimuli, Russell and Searcy (1997) found that adolescents responded to parents in a friendlier way than they did to stepparents in the same situations. This study suggests that adolescent stepchildren are primed to respond to stepparents in ways that create emotional distance and to attribute motives to stepparents that discourage warm feelings toward them.

5.5.5 Stepparents' roles

The results of the present study confirm previous findings. There appears not to be some agreement among stepfamily members on what role the stepparent should play (Fine et al., 1998). Beyond a general consensus that parents are expected to exhibit more warmth toward children and to more carefully monitor their behavior than are stepparents (Fine & Kurdek, 1994), there is little consistency in perceptions of the content of the stepparent role (Fine et al., 1998). For example, proverbs like, *“Hazvidi tsiga padumbu rembeva pako woti zvarwadza / do not enjoy putting a burning log on mouse’s stomach, and cry when its put on yours.”*, *“Vanhu havazizvi mwana mudiki haapiwi maputi nokuti haana mazino. Anopiwa maputi munhu mukuru nokuti anenge ava nemazino. People are ignorant, a neonate is not given baked maize (maputi) because she/he does not have some teeth. Baked maize is given to adults who have the teeth with which to chew.”*, *Kandiro kanopfumba kunobva kamwe, kandiro enda kandiro dzoka/ chindiro chinopfumba kunobva chimwe- a plate where one comes*

from/one good turn deserves another reciprocity and “Takafa huona zvimwe tsambarafuta yakashanduka igo, ikaruma munhu akafa. We saw something puzzling; an addible fatty ant turned into a wasp, and stung someone to death.”

From the results and selected examples given above, stepparents are less certain about their role than are other family members. Some stepfathers deal with the issue of role confusion and stepparent identity by assuming a parent role (Berger, 1995; Erea-Weatherly, 1996), a role that contributes to their family life satisfaction (Marsiglio, 1992), although mothers and stepchildren may have different reactions. Stepmothers are much less likely to assume a parental role eg “*Hapana inochemera mhuru isiri yayo, or hapa nyoka inochenera chisiri hayo* or “*Maranga ida ako omumwe anosemesa*” and “*Chisi chako rebedza usakungira hata svinga rehuni romumwe serako/do not put much effort on some one else’s bundle of firewood, hold it in a dangling position.*”

Instead, most stepmothers, and many stepfathers, especially non-residential ones, see themselves as a friend to their stepchildren (Church, 1999) or in some role between a friend and a parent (Erera-Weatherly, 1996). A number of studies showed that role clarity and role agreement are related to adjustment in stepfamilies (e.g., Fine, Ganong, & Coleman, 1997; Fine et al.). For example, stepfathers' and adolescents' perceptions of stepfather-stepchild relationship quality were predicted best by the degree to which stepfathers and mothers agreed on how adolescents should be raised (Skopin t al., 1993).

5.6 Coping with perceived stepparenting stressful events

The central question that this section devotes itself to is “does coping with stepparenting stress differ significantly based on rurality and urbanity among stepparents?” The results show concerted efforts by stepparents to cope with being a stepparent against a host of competing factors. Central to the results was an element of self-monitoring by the stepparents from both settings. A quick survey of the results shown in Tables 4 and 5 reveal disagreements in the way stepparents report their coping and how the generalised others perceive the stepparents’ coping. On one hand, urban stepparents reported higher levels of adaptive coping than rural stepparents. On the other hand, rural stepparents reported higher levels of integrative coping. A possible reason for this difference may lie in the stepparents’ social support systems. Urban stepparents are thus more likely to be confrontational as they may be aware of their rights better than their rural counterparts. The differences in perceptions of coping may also help to explain issues of social desirability on the part of the stepparents on one hand and perpetuation of stepparenting stereotypes and myths on another note.

Although both groups of respondents reported differences, the bottom line still remains that stepparenting is stressful and may unevenly tax the psychological resources of the incumbent stepparent. This also culminates in identity management. Introducing stepchildren created a lot of problems for the stepparents. In addition, these results show that females reported high self-

monitoring. This led to less self –disclosure among females than reported by their male counterparts.

Furthermore, it may be argued that attempts to maintain one’s self -esteem could have significantly influenced the stepmothers’s self-disclosure. According to some scholars, self –disclosure could suggest “self-promotion” or “self-enhancement” used by stepparents to to improve self-evaluation and self-presentation (Homans, 1988; Bizang & Rule, 1989; Balogun & Ojedokun, 2005). In addition, a possible explanation for this behavior of stepparents stems from social exchange theory, which posits that self-disclosure, is high when there is reciprocity. Thus, in any interpersonal relationship, people want to minimise cost and maximise benefits. Future studies may try to assess the relationship between self-disclosure among stepparents and such variables as gender, age, educational qualification and duration of the stepmarriage. Such a study may collect data using questionnaires, so that hypothesis testing may be done.

5.7 Limitations

The current study just like any other study had several shortcomings. One limitation of the present study that those with a quantitative orientation may highlight is that the sample of stepparents, key informants and members of the general populace is not representative of all the potential respondents, which means that these findings are not generalisable to all stepparents and potential key informants and respondents in Zimbabwe. However, the researcher was

aware of this limitation and chose a trade-off of generalisability for depth and detailed information, which a quantitative approach cannot bring about.

The weakness inherent in the probe question generation procedure used in the current study, involved the questions that were generated according to the objectives of the study. This is a weakness because the researcher then went in with some preconceived ideas that stepparents were negatively viewed and that there are stepparenting stressful events and that the stepparents were actively coping with their identity and the roles associated with such an identity. This is evident in the objectives. However, one can argue that this was only theoretical sensitivity, in which the researcher very well knew of the field he was researching on. The present study however started with data collection and analysis prior to literature review. This was an attempt to avoid the influence of prior theorising and conceptualisations on data collection and analysis.

The researcher collected too much data and from too many respondents. This caused analysis to be lost at times and to overwhelm the researcher. Specifically, this analysis technique of coding by microanalysis of the data, word-by-word and line-by-line, had two drawbacks. Firstly, it was very time consuming. The transcription of each interview contained a mass of data that had to be studied to locate the information relevant to the research topic. Secondly, it led to confusion at times. The problem was solved by referring to the Grounded Theory literature particularly the work of Strauss and Glaser. Main or key points

in the respondents' narrative were later selected for coding. This may have biased the results.

5.8 Recommendations

The recommendations from this study can be two-fold: implications for research and implications for clinical applications or family therapy practice.

5.8.1 Implications for research

There are several directions for future research. First, family therapy practitioners, researchers and scholars can set out to investigate the stepchildren's perceptions of stepparenting. Second, a potential area of investigation is research into the stepchildren' experiences. Third, future studies can also be devoted on stepparents- in-law relationships.

Fourth, the present study was cross-sectional; the causal direction of reported relationships and experiences cannot be inferred from the data. For example, it is possible that stepparents' real behaviour at least partly affects their attitudes overtime and how friends, relatives, and the community perceive them. Longitudinal studies need to be done to assess the direction and magnitude of alternative coping strategies.

Fifth, developmental trends in coping and discarding of ineffective coping strategies warrant future investigation. Sixth, future study can also triangulate quantitative and qualitative data gathering techniques. The present study only

triangulated qualitative data gathering techniques. This could also be a potential source of error and bias.

5.8.2 Implications for clinical applications or family therapy practice.

The clinical significance of the study results are based on the changing family life cycle model, a variant of the systems theory adopted as a theoretical framework for the present study. The basic tenets of the systems theory suggest that activity or behaviour of one member or dyad affects all other members and dyads. In fact, stressful events affecting the stepmothers can rock the whole family considerably. Attempts to achieve stepfamily homeostasis only succeed when all stakeholders understand and support one another. The spousal role and the stepparent role are jointly engaged in. There is need to attend to the multiple and dynamic roles the stepparents grapple with. Legal practitioners need to consider the implications of the relocation of divorcing parents on the child and cautiously adhere to the best interests of the child. Cognisance should also be taken of the rights of the child to inheritance. A lot of children lose out and are often left out when their deceased father's estate is disposed off.

5.9 CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of the present study confirm and extend the findings of earlier studies on stepparenting. The psychosocial effects of living in a stepfamily and those of being a stepparent were found to be prevalent in both rural and urban communities of Zimbabwe. Mixed views of positively evaluating and negatively evaluating stepparents were reported by key informants, the general public and by the stepparents themselves.

These results highlighted that there is no one type of stepfamily. As is shown in studies of stepparenting elsewhere, stepparents are negatively esteemed. On the same note, stereotypes are held not only about stepparents, but also about stepchildren. Among the perceived stepparenting stressful were incidences of self-monitoring. Self-monitoring was used as an adaptive coping strategy to help stepparents live with their identity and the roles associated with such an identity.

There is need therefore for those in family therapy practice to take on the insights from this study. Those from the legal fraternity and those in advocacy can help stepmothers and stepchildren to cope with these situations. The results also clearly show that males have better coping resources than females generally.

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APPENDIX 1 :INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the research: **A comparative study of community perceptions towards stepparenting stepparents' personal experiences and coping strategies used by stepparents in Gutu and Harare.**

Researcher's name: Gwatirera Javangwe

Registration number: R9916887

Researcher's position: Master of Philosophy in Social Sciences student.

Department: Psychology

Institution: University of Zimbabwe

Address: P.O. Box MP 167, Mt Pleasant, Harare.

Contact telephone: 263(4) 303211 ext 1454/1703.

Cell number: 091 960 707.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO RESPONDENT

Dear Respondent.

Thank you for participating in this study. Should at any time during the study, you experience an emergency as a result of the study or require any further information regarding the study, you can contact me at any convenient numbers from the ones provided or the above address.

Individual interviews will be conducted with identified respondents and will be audio taped. Tapes will be treated confidentially and will only be accessible to the supervisors of this research study, and the researcher. If respondents insist on their names being published, only then will the researcher do so.

All respondents are encouraged to answer questions but you do not need to answer particular questions if you do not wish to and can withdraw at any time from the interview.

The researcher will ensure that all materials remain confidential and are stored safely. The final report of the study will be made available to those respondents who wish to read it.

This is to confirm that I

(name).....

Consent to participate in this study. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and that identification in the study will be my own decision.

Signature of Respondent

Signature of Researcher

Date

Thank you for participating in this research.

APPENDIX 2:GWARO RECHIBVUMIRANO

Musoro wenyaya iri patsvakurudzo: Maonerwo anoitwa vanhu vakarora munhu kana kuroorwa nomunhu ane vana vake nechakare huye nzira dzinosevenzeswa nevakarora munhu kana kuroorwa nomunhu ane vana vake nechakare kueza kuzvibatsira pamagarire namararmire nechimiro ichi, kwaGutu nokuHarare.

Zita romudzidzi: Gwatirera Javangwe

Nhamba yake yechikoro: R9916887

Chinzvimbo chake: Mwana Wechikoro kufakaruti yeSocial Studies

Bato rechikoro: Saikorogi (Psychology)

Zita rechikoro: Yunivhesiti yeZimbabwe.

Kero: P.O. Box MP 167, Mt Pleasant, Harare.

Nhamba dzenhare: 263(4) 303211 ext 1454/1703.

Nhamba dzembozhanhare: 091 960 707.

ZVAKAKOSHA KUVABATSIRI MUNHAURWA DZETSVAKURUDZO IYI

Kumutauri.

Ndinotenda nokuzvipira kwako/kwenyu kuti uve/muve mumwe wavatauri navabatsiri patsvakurudzo iyi. Kana kuri kuti masangana nedambudziko kana kuomerwa nokuda kwetsvakurodzo iyi, kana kuti mungada humwe umboo maererano netsvakurudzi yi, munogona kundibata panhamba dzenhare kana pakero iyi pamusoro apo.

Ndichakubvunzai mibvunzo muri moga huye ndinokumbirwa kuti nditape mazwi enhauriranwa yedu mutape recorder iyi kana zvakasununguka kwamuri. Makaseti awa achachengetedzwa pakavanda huye nounngwaru zvoukiti hapana anozoabata kunze kwangu navadzidzisi vangu vanoongorora basa rezvidzidzizvangu izvi. Hamumanikidzwi kundipa zita renyu. Zita rerenyu hariiswi pachena kusrar kwokuti kanaq imi murimi munoda kuti pakunyora kwandicahita ribudiswe.

Ndinokumbira kuti mupindure mibvunzo yandinoda kukubvunzai asi ndinokuzivisa kuti hamumanikidzwi kupindura mibvunzo yamunona kuti haiiti huye kuti hamuna kusununguka kuipindura. Iyi ikodzero yenyu, huyezve makusununguka kurega kupindura zvachose nokuregadza nhauriranwa iyi kunyangwe istai yopera.

Ini ndicahedza kuti avose zvatinenge tataurirana nemidziyo yashandiswa zvichengetedzwe pakavanda.

Kana muchida gwaro rokupedzisira kweongororo iyi makusununguka kundizivisa kuti mugopiwa moriverenga kana tsvakurudzo yopera.

Uku uktsinhidzira kuti ini

(zita).....

Ndinobvuma kuva mumwe wavatauri anchabatsira patsvakurudzo iyi. Ndinozivisa kuti ndinogona huye ndakusununguka kubuda munhauriranwa chero nguva ipi zvayo. Ndinozivazve kuti zita ragnu harishamabadzirwi muzvinyora pasina mvumo inobva kwandiri.

Siginecha yeachava mubatsiri nomutauri

Siginecha yamuzvinatsvakurudzo.....

Zuva rakaitwa chitenderano.....

APPENDIX 3 :REFERRAL FOR COUNSELING SERVICES FORM

Title of the research: **A comparative study of community perceptions towards stepparenting and coping strategies used by stepparents in Gutu and Harare.**

Researcher's name: Gwatirera Javangwe

Registration number: R9916887

Researcher's position: Master of Philosophy in Social Sciences student.

Department: Psychology

Institution: University of Zimbabwe

Address: P.O. Box MP 167, Mt Pleasant, Harare

Contact telephone: 263(4) 303211-ext 1454/1360/1703.

Cell number: 091 960 707.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This form serves to seek for your assistance in the above-mentioned research work to be conducted in your districts of Gutu and Harare in fulfillment of the requirements for a Master in Philosophy in Social Studies.

As part of the requirements of the research, respondents found traumatized by the research and therefore in need of counseling, should be provided with it.

As a researcher, I take this opportunity to ask for your permission to refer such respondents (if any) to your organisation if you offer such services.

If you wish to be published in the final report I will do so, but in the event that you want confidentiality, I again will treat your name in that manner. The final report of the study will be made available to you if you want to read it.

Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

This is to confirm that (organisation)

.....,

undertakes to offer counseling services to the above-mentioned respondents of this study. We understand that our name will only be published following our permission.

Signature of representative.....

Signature of researcher.....

Date.....

Thank you for your cooperation.

APPENDIX 4: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STEPPARENTS

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Could you describe some of our thoughts and feelings towards BEING A stepparent?
3. Could you describe how things are now for you as a stepparent compared to how things were when you first started becoming a stepparent?
4. What part of the experience of taking/not taking part in the care of stepchildren would you describe as challenging?
5. Could you tell me as much in detail how you deal with these challenges you have just described?
6. Could you describe how you think other people around you see or perceive you as a stepparent?
7. Can you describe to me, in your own words, what life is like for a newly married stepparent?

APPENDIX 5: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Knowledge of stepparenting

1. In your opinion what is stepparenting? Describe its forms, prevalence, causes and effects.
2. From your professional experience how would people view stepparenting, its causes, and effects?
3. From your professional experience what are the practices, knowledge, beliefs and attitudes held by people on stepparenting in the community?

Attitudes towards stepparenting

4. What do you think are the problems faced by stepparents as parents and spouses?
5. What do you think are the opportunities encountered by stepparents as parents and spouses?

Organizational initiatives to reduce stepparenting and stepfamily problems

6. Has your organization /(ministry)/ community been involved in any action to help stepparents and stepfamilies?

If yes, what kind of action have you taken so far?

7. To what extent have such initiatives helped in alleviating the plight of stepparents?
8. What opportunities and/or limitations have you come across in the implementation of such programs aimed at helping stepparents and stepfamilies?

Proposed Interventions/coping strategies

9. Suggest what could be done to eradicate problems associated with stepparenting in Zimbabwe.
10. Suggest what could be done to maximize the potential benefits (if any) of being a stepparent in Zimbabwe.

APPENDIX 6: SAMPLE NVIVO ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

Document 'R1', 1 passages, 95 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Document 'R10', 2 passages, 301 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 16, 206 characters.

So I guess to some people you are cheating, even if they know in their heart they are separated permanently....until that divorce paper is through...some people just really haven't had reality sink in yet.

Document 'R11', 2 passages, 412 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 5, 317 characters.

It is cheating if you are in a marriage where you have not had any "intimate" contact with your partner in over 2 years, you don't even sleep in the same bed but you stay together because you think it's the right thing for the children? (partner has told you flat out that they no longer find you sexually attractive)

Document 'R12', 2 passages, 246 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 2, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 6, 151 characters.

It is cheating if you sleep with other men while still hold hope that your husband will change and give you some affection (you are living seperatly)?

Document 'R13', 2 passages, 222 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 5, 127 characters.

It is cheating if you are really no longer in love with your partner but you are too chicken to make the first move and leave?

Document 'R14', 2 passages, 363 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 5, 268 characters.

Is it cheating if you love your spouse and can't imagine your life without them but don't feel fullfilled in an emotional sense. They are great with the kids and a wonderful provider. And all your girlfriends wish they had a husband/wife like that? No, it's just sad.

Document 'R15', 2 passages, 326 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 5, 231 characters.

It is cheating to force your spouse to hate you (by doing nasty things to him\her) because you want to be justified in starting another relationship? Yes. You already have someone in mind and are preparing yourself for him or her.

Document 'R16', 2 passages, 390 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 5, 295 characters.

It is too easy to cheat these days. It has become too acceptable. At times, Yes and no. Cheating has always occurred and in many times and places has been/is more acceptable than it is now. The only thing that might have changed is that it's as acceptable for women to cheat as it always has been for men.

Document 'R17', 2 passages, 394 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 6, 299 characters.

For me it's simple. If you are in a relationship with someone, and you bring someone else into that relationship without your partners permission. The cheating can be as simple as kissing or as heavy as boinking. It can involve no sex, but instead intimacy that should be reserved for your partner.

Document 'R18', 3 passages, 541 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 5, 161 characters.

IMIHOYE - YES I think it is cheating in any situation IF you cannot be honest about things with your partner and just go ahead to any degree with them unawares.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 7, 285 characters.

If - on the other hand - they know where they / you stand and you have an honest dialogue about the state of your relationship - ie separated and NOT getting back together or living in same house for kids only and both do not want to be together then NO I do not think it is cheating.

Document 'R19', 3 passages, 723 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 5, 324 characters.

Cheating is about deceit, disrespect, and disloyalty. It can involve both sexual and emotional infidelity. If you are separated, then it's not cheating, unless you have separated with the express purpose understood by both of you to 'work on your marriage' whilst apart - in that scenario, it would still be cheating to me.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 7, 304 characters.

If you are still living together, then despite whatever reason you give, to be disloyal to your partner emotionally or physically is cheating. It is probably second nature however, to try and justify something you are doing that you know is wrong because it's not always easy to admit to being at fault.

Document 'R2', 1 passages, 95 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Document 'R3', 1 passages, 95 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Document 'R4', 1 passages, 95 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 2, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Document 'R5', 2 passages, 186 characters.

Section 1.1, Paragraph 1, 95 characters.

Qs2What is your definition of cheating and opinions about continued relationship with the exs?

Section 1.1, Paragraph 8, 91 characters.

It is cheating if your partner doesn't openly discourage contact or old habits to the ex ?

APPENDIX 7: INITIAL THEMES

Factors influencing how to introduce stepchildren

- Place
- Dispositions of the people who inquire (gossipers, those who want to make noise out of the issues.
- When strangers are around
- When strangers ask
- Whether they are close friends and relatives
- Situational (at a party, on a shopping trip and basically just introduce them as is appropriate in the situation you are in)
- People's reaction and facial expressions
- By their first name
- As friends
- Reciprocal addresses between stepparent and stepchildren
- Stereotypes (stepmother/stepfather)
- The need to perpetrate stereotypes
- The need to avoid perpetration of stereotypes
- People who want to mess up and quickly jump on your back
- People with their own insecurities about stepparenting
- Do what you feel best (no formula)
- Depends on the time (sometimes, always, never etc)
- Wouldn't want to confuse the stepchildren, they already have their own mother and father, I regard myself as another adult figure meant to help them grow.
- Physical resemblances among stepchildren and stepparent's own children from the current marriage with biological parent.
- Depending on my mood
- Depends on whether the stepparent will run into those particular individuals again (prospects of future encounter with inquirer or individual to whom stepchildren have been introduced)

- The need to reveal the truth and to surprise people (I can't help it. I'm Aquarian. I like to shock!)
Fear of being called a stepmother /father
- Fear of people who are judgemental of stepparents
- The need to educate people to be less judgemental of stepparents/
disclosure is an opportunity to educate others.

Challenges of Step Families

Every one-on-one relationship comes with its own challenges, but those are multiplied when two families are brought together under one roof.

In the step-family, you don't just have a relationship with one individual to consider, but different relationships with two, three or even more individuals from different generations.

Trying to live up to the nuclear family ideal.

- Tendency to believe that stepfamily is a reincarnated nuclear family.
- Difficulty embracing identify of stepfamily due to negative stereotyping and myths of “wicked” stepparents and neglected stepchildren.
- Pseudo mutuality, or the couple’s persona, that everything is OK. Built on a backdrop of failure, couples cover up conflict for fear of causing more problems. The goal becomes to not “rock the boat”.

Isolation

- The stepfamily is born out of loss.
- Stepfamilies fear negative associations with loss and stereotypes.
There is also a lack of openness in society to address these problems.

Baggage from past relationships

- Not only do couples enter this marriage with the unresolved issues from their families of origin, but they have the added burden of issues from the first marriage, the process of divorce, and the period of single parenting.
- Unresolved emotional issues for children and parents around the grief of divorce, loss of the nuclear family “ideal”, and/or guilt over the dissolution affect

the marriage.

- Children carry fantasies about parents reuniting.

The new marriage may feel like a second divorce for the child.

There may also be residual guilt over their perceptions of causing the divorce and their failure to get their parents back together.

Confusion and Disorientation

- Stepfamilies are often strangers who find themselves suddenly living together.

There is no past history, little experience to build trust or a feeling of common identity.

- The diversity of connections within the stepfamily and the numerous primary connections outside the family make for complexity and confusion.

There are few societal models or guidelines for stepfamilies.

Most prominent examples are the “Brady Bunch” or “Cinderella”.

Who’s a “real” member of the family? Children are often shifting in and out of the household. They also often experience divided loyalties.

They fear betraying their biological parent if they love their stepparent.

Parents often fear loving their stepchildren out of guilt that they cannot be closer to their biological children.

Where’s my place? Physical space is often rearranged to accommodate the needs of the remarriage. There is never enough time, money, or bathrooms.

Time and availability of the parent is modified.

Chores and responsibilities are shifted.

Finances. Children in the same family may have very different financial resources.

Changing roles, relationships, and responsibilities.

The child is often displaced as the parent’s surrogate spouse, confidant or decision maker by the new spouse. Especially difficult is the relationship between stepdaughters and stepmothers as to who can best take care of Dad.

The ordinal position of children is often changed. The youngest child may be usurped from that coveted position.

Effective stepparenting may take a variety of forms and most often not as a disciplinarian

Women's traditional roles are changed. Women cannot maintain the role of peacemaker or the keeper of interpersonal relationships within the stepfamily. She also has full parenting responsibility over her own children, including discipline and finances.

Due to the need for biological parents to parent their own children, men's traditional roles broaden to include nurturing aspects of childcare.

The parent-child relationship predates the marriage relationship so the bonding is often stronger. This differs from the nuclear family where the strongest and longest bond is between the marriage couple. "Children in nuclear families gain security when the marital relationship is strong and satisfying.

Children in a stepfamily may feel threatened by a biological parent's alliance with someone who is not emotionally bonded to them.

This insecurity and children's responses to it may undermine the happiness of the family."

Unrealistic Hopes and Expectations

- Second marriages are often entered into with the expectation of making up for all the wrongs of the first marriage.

- Expectations are great for "instant intimacy".

Closeness and trust is expected too soon.

- Parents feel they should be able to love their stepchildren the same as their own children.

- There is an expectation that adequate preparation for remarriage through reading, classes and workshops will prevent feelings of jealousy, anger, rejection, and guilt.

Conflicting Needs of Family Members

- Often, the new couple needs to "honeymoon" while, at the same time, the children need extra attention.

- Couples who marry at different life cycle stages find conflicting priorities add to the stress of the household.

- The increased sexual atmosphere of the couple may be disturbing to adolescents in the household who are struggling with their own emerging sexuality.

Lack of recognition, accommodation, and support from schools, churches, practitioners and the community.

- Ignorance and suspicion of stepfamilies has resulted in a lack of “holding environment” for these families.

- Less availability of resources to learn about effective stepfamily functioning.

No legal basis for connection.

- No matter how deep the affectional bond between the stepparent and the stepchild, there is no legal way to validate the connection.