

**THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN OF  
DIVORCED PARENTS, IN A SCHOOL, IN THE  
SUBURB OF DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA**

**BY**

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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF EDUCATION  
(PSYCHOLOGY), UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL.**

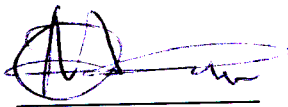
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**2007**

## DECLARATION

I, Orok Akpan, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Masters of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood campus). This dissertation has not been submitted before for examination at any other University.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'O' followed by 'A' and 'K' and a long horizontal flourish.

Signature

17-04-2007

Date

## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the experiences of children of divorced parents in a primary school, located in the suburb of Durban, Kwazulu Natal. The participants in this study were senior primary school children from divorce backgrounds. This study is located in the qualitative paradigm with case study method employed. Data gathering methods used include Individual interviews and observations to investigate children experiences and the relationship of these experiences to their scholastic performance, social relationship and emotional well-being.

The results revealed that children experiences of parental divorce vary from one individual child to another, with some children reacting negatively, and some not so negatively while others were indifferent.

In general participants reported experiences of sadness, loneliness, abandonment, self-blame, shock and anger. The participants acknowledged the connections between their experiences of divorce by their parents and their academic performance, social relationship and their general well-being. Participants reported experiencing difficulty with their academic work as the divorce of their parents made them confused and frustrated thus affecting their concentration. The loss of a parent through divorce also created economic difficulty, lack of support, role model and motivation for good academic performance.

Participants did not report serious adverse effect of their parents divorce on their social relationship as divorce is common and many of their friends in the school and their neighborhood are also from divorce backgrounds.



## **DEDICATION**

**DEDICATED TO THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT MEN IN MY LIFE,  
MY HUSBAND AND SON, USEN AND UTIBE.**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Firstly, my sincere gratitude goes to God almighty for his help over the years.

My appreciation also goes to my supervisor, Prof. O. Bojuwoye for his invaluable assistance and encouragements. I am also most grateful to the staff and learners of the participating schools for their support and cooperation throughout the period of data collection.

I am extremely grateful to my husband for his encouragement and support and for believing in me, I love you. Special thanks to my son, for allowing me finish this work, may God continue to bless you.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Background to the study**

This study is an exploration of the experiences of children of divorced parents. Divorce, according to many psychologists, social workers, educators and researchers, has been associated with painful or traumatic experiences not only to adults but even worse to children (Mulholland, Watt, Philpott, and Sarlin, 1991; Pillay, 1999; Tanner, 2002; Van Zyl, 1997; Wiechers, 2003). Divorce according to Mckenry and Price (1994), is widely viewed as a serious problem confronting many families in the world today. The word divorce conjures up images of divided families, vulnerable children, separated couple, failed marriages, forgotten commitments, long and expensive legal battles, resentment, hostility, bitterness, and economic hardship, yet it is very common in today's world.

The divorce rate in South Africa has been found to be much higher than that of the United States (Louw'1993). According to central statistics, South Africa had 148,148.00 marriages registered in 1995, and there were 31592 divorces that same year (Pillay, 1999).

According to Naran (2006) one in three marriages ended in divorce in South Africa. Divorce can be said to be generally no longer uncommon as it permeates every corner of the society. For instance, in 1998, the rate of divorce in the United States of America was 4.8% approximately half the



magnitude of the marriage rate which was 9.7% (Mulholland, Watt, Philpott, and Sarlin, 1991).

Not only has divorce risen to an alarming proportion, there are also signs that the divorce rate is still increasing (Fagan & Rector, 2000). With the increase rate of divorce cases, it is of great importance that we highlight the effect of divorce on people, especially how children experience divorce because of their underdeveloped cognitive and emotional skills, which can make them particularly vulnerable.

According to Mulholland, et al (1991) questions have often been asked on how parental divorces affect the children involved. It has been hotly argued through many years of research, although answers to how children experience parental divorce are still inconclusive. A number of such arguments or avenues of investigations appear in the literature, and the main focus has been how children experience the divorce of their parents.

According to Wiechers (2003), divorce has a lasting effect on children and contrary to popular belief, the impact of divorce increases over an extended period following the parental separation or divorce. The most observed problems in children of divorced parents are lowered academic achievements, restless behavior, concentration problems, increase day-dreaming and aggression, anxiety, depression, interpersonal problems and a negative self-concept.

Further, in comparison to children from intact families, children of divorced parents have shown poorer academic achievement. Young adolescents in divorce families earned lower grade-point averages and lower scholastic aptitude scores in reading and maths than their counterparts in intact families (Watt, Moorehead-Slaughter, Japzon & Keller, 1990).

On the contrary, Wade and Tavis (1993) argue that there is no single answer to the question of how children experience the divorce of their parents; the experiences depend on individual perception of the divorce. The experiences for one individual may depend on a number of factors such as, what the family was like before the divorce, the child's temperament, age, needs; the financial security and psychological well-being of custodial parent; the amount of conflict between the parents; the family support system, etc.

In support of Wade and Tavis' (1993) contention, Van Zyl (1997) emphasized that it is very important to note that conducting a reliable study on the effects of divorce on children is very difficult for various reasons. Chief among which is that it is not often possible to be accurate that a particular effect on a child is the result of divorce rather than some other factors such as the loss of security of the familiar home upon relocation with the custodial parent, loss of friends, neighborhood and school, and apparently, the economical situation of custodial parent. Hence, the assumption that children of divorced parents are underachievers in the sphere of education and employment could be sought in the impoverishment of family following divorce of parents.

Divorce may be said to be painful or traumatic. However, divorce may not necessarily make a child a victim. As research findings on the effect of divorce on children indicate various types of experiences and effects depending on individual factors, with some children coping adequately well and or recovering from the divorce of their parents (Zieman & Baker-Randall, 2000).

Providing simple bottomline answers of how children experience the divorce of their parents is not as easy or informative an exercise as was once believed, for the effects of divorce are both contingent and variable depending on family circumstances (Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001).

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

Different researchers have different views on divorce and how it affects children. On the whole there are no common experiences among children of divorced parents. In this regard, one needs to understand this phenomenon from the perspective of individual child's experiences. As this will help us to understand the uniqueness of children's experiences of their parents' divorce, and not generalizing how divorce affect children from divorce backgrounds.

The motivation to explore this phenomenon stems from the fact that the experiences of divorce have often been generalized as painful and traumatic to children involved. In this current research therefore the intention is to explore how children experience divorce of parents, and how these experiences affect their scholastic performance as well as their social and

emotional well-being by drawing from existing research on how children experience the divorce of their parents. The participants for this study were eight (8) children of divorced parents from a primary school in the suburb of Durban. The ages of these children range from 10 & 12 years.

### **1.3. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to explore how children of primary school age experienced the divorce of their parents. Answers to the question of how children experience the divorce of their parents, or how parental divorce affects the children involved, have been seriously debated through many decades of research. In this regard, this study intends to go in-depth into investigating individual children experiences of the divorce of their parents and to find out whether there is any relationship between the experiences and the academic performance, social and emotional well being, of the children. Some questions were posed to guide this study and these are:

### **1.4 CRITICAL QUESTIONS:**

- What are the experiences of children of divorced parents?
- What is the relationship between the individual children's experiences of divorce and their scholastic performance, social relationship and emotional well-being?

### **1.5. Significance of the study**

The importance of this research is that its findings can provide information to help psychologists, and parents understand children of divorce especially with

regard to how their experiences affect their overall development, in particular their academic, social and emotional development.

Findings from the study could provide useful information to assist in decision-making with parents who are contemplating divorce and what support to provide their children should they finally decide to divorce one another.

Findings from this study can also provide information that can help professionals such as educators, social workers and psychologists to become apprised with the experiences of children of divorced parents, so that they would know the kind of help to provide.

The findings could provide information for policy makers, which could assist in the formulation and implementation of policies that would cater for the needs of children of divorce parents, so that the latter can be helped to develop as useful citizens of their communities and or societies.

#### **1.6. Summary of the methodology**

This research is a qualitative study of how children experience the divorce of their parents. In order to have a better understanding of how children experience the divorce of parents, the researcher decided to choose a method that sought to make in-depth exploration of the experiences of children of divorce parents. Qualitative research allows the researcher to study the issue of the experiences of children of divorced parents in-depth, as

the researcher identifies and attempts to understand the various aspects of the experiences of the children associated with the divorce of their parents.

This study focused on exploring the views of children of divorce parents from a primary school in the suburb of Durban on how they experienced the divorce of their parents. A one-on-one interview was conducted with the participants and also observation was carried out during the process of the interview, to gather data required to answer the research questions.

The method of data analysis that was adopted for this study was the grounded analysis approach, and the data was transcribed using descriptive analysis given the qualitative nature of the study. Numbers and figures were not used, but rather the analysis was through an interpretive thematic analysis of the data.

### **1.7. Format of the dissertation**

Chapter one provides a background to the study. It noted the prevalence of divorce locally and internationally, and the importance of highlighting experiences of divorce on children. The researcher noted the need for caution in generalizing the experiences of children of divorce. It provided the statement of the problem, critical questions, purpose of the study, significance of the study, and a brief discussion of the methodology.

Chapter two provides a discussion of the conceptual and theoretical framework underpinning this study. It provides a review of literature relating to the concept of divorce and how it affects the children involved.

Chapter three deals with the methodology of the study. It discusses the qualitative design of research enquiry and its effectiveness. It provides a description of the school and the children in the sample. It outlines interviews as the research tool and includes a list of semi-structure interview questions. The issue of trustworthiness of the research instruments was also discussed.

Chapter four focuses on the results of the study. It provides analyses of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. The findings are presented in themes to answer the critical questions.

Finally, chapter five presents a discussion of the findings. It also provides the limitation of this study, and gives suggestion for possible future research and conclusion of the study.

### **1.8. Conclusion**

Mulholland, et al (1991) suggest that we must not continue to make sweeping generalization about the effect of divorce on children, disregarding their individuality and the wide variety of circumstances and patterns of development that follows. Van Zyl (1997) states that studies on the effects of divorce on children have been criticized, among other things, for adopting too clinical an orientation, restricted sampling, a concentration on subjects with

psychological problems, concentration on white, middle-class and lack of control groups. After a review of a number of study findings Van Zyl (1997) is of the opinion that divorce has some effects on some children while it does not on others.

In this regard, it is important to understand the views of individual child experiencing the divorce of parents, bearing in mind the uniqueness of their individual experiences, without necessarily believing that, every child from divorce background has the same experiences of parental divorce.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Introduction:**

The previous chapter provided an overview of divorce; its prevalence and the need for this study. This chapter presents the review on the literature on divorce and effects on the children of divorced parents.

Literature review is about finding, reading, understanding and arriving at conclusion about what other researchers have said about a topic and what theories have been developed on the topic. This chapter thus focuses on the review of available literature on the concept of divorce and how it affects the children involved. The conceptual and theoretical perspectives on divorce are also discussed.

Divorce is a phenomenon that has already been researched many times nationally and internationally using different methods, different concepts, and context. Although the phenomenon "divorce" and its' effects on children have been widely researched in many countries, the contexts of these studies are different, as are the findings (Mulholland, et al 1991; Pillay, 1999; Tanner, 2002; Van Zyl, 1997; Wiechers, 2003). Since the context of this current study is also different from previous studies, different findings can also be expected.

## 2.2. PREVELANCE

*“Thirty years ago, divorce was rare and shameful. Today, divorce is as common as the flu and often strikes as unpredictably, to couples married only a year as well as to couples married for decades, affecting 1million children a year”.*

(Wade & Tavis, 1990).

Divorce rate has become significantly high in present day society, to the extent that it is regarded as being commonplace. According to Tanner (2002), above 40% of children in the United States of America experience the divorce of their parents before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Fagan and Rector (2000) also highlighted that over 1million American children suffer the divorce of their parents every year.

In Australia, over the past thirty years statistics have revealed that there has been a steady increase in the divorce rate, with current Australian Bureau of Statistics figures indicating that two in every five marriages will end in divorce (Pike, 2000). Furthermore, Pike (2000), indicated that the Australian Institute of Family studies also note that 40% of marriages in Australia are likely to end in divorce. In Britain about one in three marriages end up in divorce (Mitchell, 1986). In South Africa, the situation of divorce rate is more or less the same as that of Britain (Naran, 2006). According to Wiechers (2003), divorce is also one of the most traumatic and complex mental health crises facing children today.

### **2.3. Views on why parents divorce**

Mitchell (1986), after a review of literature, notes that the increase in divorce rate may not be unconnected with the flexible divorce laws, availability of legal aid and financial support from the state, the removal of the stigma surrounding divorce, also the changes in expectations of marriage, have contributed to this increase in divorce.

Before the legal reform of divorce in the 70s, in Britain, divorce used to be stigmatised. It is believed that divorce, since the 70s, has become comparatively commonplace, unselective, and almost normative, with a fundamentally different character than it did when it was far more rare and stigmatised (Braver & Cookston, 2003). Ambrose, Harper and Pemberton (1983), also stated that the reason behind the increase rate in divorce is because of the new divorce laws in Britain, which became operational in 1971. It is claimed that few people divorced in the 50s and 60s.

Mukesh (2003) suggest that the increase in divorce rate can be linked to reasons that are related to arguments and fighting, domestic violence, abuse, drinking, drug abuse, lack of financial support and extramarital affairs.

They are also other factors that might have possibly contributed to the rising divorces rate; these are factors like, the changing work patterns, diminished occupational opportunities, and massive unemployment, have created uncertainties and led to domestic upheaval for families of many diverse types, culture, and social background (Stacey, 1991, cited in Mckenry & Price, 1994).

While Rothery and Enns (2001) argue that marriage can be a bid for independence for some individuals, it can be experienced as a loss of independence for other individuals. Many parents however remain in marriage not because of love or because they are happy about their relationship, but because of the social norm of the status of being married as an achievement (Rothery & Enns, 2001). Twining (2001) advised that it is important to understand that the staying together of parents in an unhappy relationship for the sake of the children, or societal norm, is not the best solution. This could be the reason behind Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001) assertion that most parents consider the option of divorce rather than stay in troubled relationships and family situations. Mckenry and Price (1994:200) earlier also noted that people opt out of unhappy relationships despite the common belief that it is better stay together for the sake of their children. The questions often asked for those who opt to stay in unhappy relationships are:

1. How much would it benefit the children if their parents were to stay together in an unhappy relationship until the children grow up before separating?
2. How much, if at all, would such a strategy of postponement mitigate the effects of divorce on children involved? Answers to these questions have not been forthcoming however, Cawood (2000:46) notes that experts have come to believe that it is better for children that their parents are divorced rather than stay together in a very stressful environment, or where there are ongoing conflict.

#### **2.4. The reactions of children towards the divorce of their parents**

Children's reactions to the divorce of their parents usually depend very much on whether the children have been prepared for what's happening with the family (Lytle, 1994). According to Pillay (1999) children often feel very surprise following their parents' divorce even where there has been series of conflicts at home. A study done in South Africa by Pillay (1999) indicated that children's feelings towards the divorce of their parents vary, some children feel so sad about parental divorce because families that were seen as a unit are now separated and children miss out on not having both their parents. Others feel a sense of relief, as divorce signifies the end of a period of constant animosity between parents. In general, Pillay (1999) notes that majority of children prefer that their parents remained together rather than divorce, in spite of the conflicts in the homes.

According to Zieman and Baker-Randall (2000), when parents are unhappy in their marriage and are fighting often, children are shocked. When a parent moves out or when children are told that there will be a divorce they are also shocked. Zieman and Baker-Randall (2000) iterated further that most often to the children the reasons for the divorce are not those that feel like irreconcilable differences. Be it financial conflicts, parents having grown apart, or an affair by a parent don't seem to children to be things that require destabilizing the home by someone leaving.

Gillis (1996) supports the views that for children an unhappy marriage is definitely preferable rather than divorce, these children simply cannot imagine a situation where one of their parents will permanently live home. Gillis (1994) reiterates that children do not appreciate why their parents should not stay married, even in an abusive relationship. This kind of attitude requires a lot of patience and understanding on the part of divorcing parents, in helping their children come to terms with present changing situation.

Divorce provides children with an attitude of dealing with life from a point of view of insufficiency, and fear of the unknown future, losing one of their parents, a feeling of rejection and not having someone who truly cares, these kinds of thoughts scare children to death (Everett, 1985).

Children of divorce are often reported to experience feelings of sadness and anger, younger children may fear that the remaining parent to them may disappear too, and the older children may have the fear of unhappy marriage too themselves. The fear is justifiable because it seems that most people coming from divorce background end up divorcing when they get married themselves (Van Zyl, 1997).

According to Zieman and Baker-Randall (2000), children experiencing divorce of parents often feel abandoned, depressed and worrisome, they often fear the loss of both their parents, especially parents they have less contacts. During this period of divorce, parents are often much occupied with their conflicts and crisis and the children notice less attention and nurturing. The

most common report of children from divorce parents is loneliness and they are also fearful of what instability the future will bring.

According to Jeynes (1999), there is a general consensus within the research community that coming from a divorced home places a child “at risk” in terms of eventually engaging in various undesirable behaviours. Zieman and Baker-Randall (2000) suggested that from the perspective of child development, children usually develop better emotionally and behaviourally in an unhappy marriage than to experience a divorce of parents. Divorce is only preferred when children experience, or observe, bitter verbal, or physical, battles between parents. However, Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001) argue that divorce does not start with the breaking down of marriage, but often involves a lengthy sequence of “predivorce” experiences, the effects of which may be as important for child welfare as the divorce itself.

A study done by Vandewater and Lansford (1998) in the United States of America examined the relative influences of family structure and parental conflict on different aspects of children's well being, (parents who are married and never divorced versus divorced and not remarried) and interparental conflict (high versus low) (Internalising, externalising behaviour, and trouble with peers). In this study Vandewater examined a sample of 10 to 17 year old children and their parents from the National Survey of Families and households. According to their findings, parental conflict has a negative influence on children well-being regardless of the family structure (that is whether parents are staying together or divorced). Vandewater and Lansford

(1998) reiterated that children in families with high levels of parental conflict would show equally low levels of well-being, regardless of family structure. While children living in single parent families due to divorce with low conflict between parents, may be better adjusted than children in high conflict families who have never divorced. Parental discord is the most important cause of childhood depression, however, some children are likely to hide their feelings and carry the bitterness and their disappointment to adulthood, (Everett, 1985).

Jeynes (1999) indicated that it is generally agreed by researchers that the divorce of parents exposes children into engaging in all kinds of undesirable behaviours. Furthermore, Purser (1982) also indicated that children of divorce are associated with increased aggressive and delinquent behaviour; and that the rates of conduct problems in children of divorce is considerably higher than those of children from intact families. Apparently, there is little increase in such antisocial behaviours for children whose parents' separation has been caused by the death of a parent. This basically means that it is the strife, disagreement and hostility in homes that produce the effects rather than the divorce by itself. Divorce for all the risks it brings is still often preferable to continuing in a marriage, which has failed (Purser, 1982).

Van Zyl (1997) supported the notion that divorce is preferable rather than an unhappy marriage because lately it has been thought that divorce is becoming commonplace, that children, surrounded as they are by other children of



divorce, may take the divorce of their parents lightly than in the past. When divorce, was very uncommon marriage was for life, "for better for worse".

According to Arditti and Prouty (1999), children are often keenly perceptive of the fact that they are losing something when their parents divorce. For instance, Drill (1987) cited in Arditti and Prouty (1999) found that when the no custodial parent, who is usually the father, was perceived as lost, the children involved are more depressed. Drill (1987) further emphasized that children's constructions of meaning around loss rather than mere observable circumstances were very important for their later post divorce functioning.

Furthermore, Arditti and Prouty (1999) refine concepts of loss by making a difference between pathology and painful feelings. Their central beliefs are that although divorce is unavoidably associated with child pathology, children do experience a variety of painful feelings and memories, which are linked to the divorce process and subsequent changes. Further, loss can be an element of experience that is not necessarily synonymous failure/poor performance.

## **2.5. Effects of divorce on children schooling and academic performance**

The adjustment of children from divorce parents, to the separation of their parents may be a very traumatic event involving as it does deep-seated feelings of anxiety, insecurity and divided loyalties. As parents are often under tremendous stress during the time of divorce, they may not be capable of providing the kind of support and guidance their children need that could lead to

the children's lack of motivation on their school work which could result in poor academic performance (Gillis, 1996).

According to Lytle (1994), children of divorced parents are especially restless in the classroom. They are often so worried and frightened and depressed, that they cannot concentrate. The anxieties generated in children by a major disruption in their lives can compromise their receptivity to learning, their willingness to experiment with new material, their ability to concentrate, and their overall attitude toward school. According to Jeynes (1999), children of divorced parents are likely to have low grades, drop out of school, become drug addicts, have pre-marital sex, seek psychological help, get divorced eventually in life, end-up in prison, commit murder, etc. Some times the teacher has trouble distinguishing these children from those with learning disabilities (Lytle, 1994).

A study in the United States by Mulholland, et al (1991) reported that children who experience parental divorce appear more troubled academically than children living in intact homes with both natural parents. Children of divorce show dramatic decrements in academic achievement, but such difference in academic achievement cannot be attributed to differences in social class or scholastic aptitude at the time of sampling. This holds strong implications for the divorce group, that is, despite their intellectual ability in comparison to the children from intact families. Their academic deficit is markedly in the areas of motivation and achievement. Mulholland, et al (1991) further emphasized that there are powerful inhibiting factors that impede the children of divorce from

reaching their potentials. They further explained that such inhibiting factors might originate from:

1. It is possible that at the time of divorce the home of these children was not conducive to stable emotional development, which may be a necessary precondition for natural exploration of the world and for building a foundation for internalised academic motivation.
2. It is plausible that the origins of contemporary academic difficulties experienced by the children of divorce can be traced to early developmental events within their families as well as to individual personality deposition.

However it was clear that for some of these children a pattern of progressive discouragement and performance decline gained primary impetus during and after the divorce took place.

Furthermore, Schneider (2002) indicated that children from, divorced do less homework and watch too much of television and are also involved in fewer parent-child activities than children from intact families, which could lead to poor academic performance. The findings by Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001) suggest that adults whose parents divorced when they were between the ages of seven and sixteen often had lower educational achievement and were more likely to be poor compared to their counterparts who are from intact parents. They further emphasized that these differences were somewhat tapered with especially for the male participants when they controlled for predivorce differences.

Van Zyl (1997) noted that consistently behavioural problems and regressive behaviour are reported in school about children of divorced parents. Children may be clinging, withdrawn, aggressive or delinquent, and the standard of their schoolwork may deteriorate and truancy may happen as a result of their parental divorce, somatic behaviour or medical problems may even occur.

Van Zyl (1997) further argues that it is important to note that conducting a reliable study on the effects of divorce on children's academic performance is very difficult for various reasons, chief of which is that it is not often possible to be accurate that a particular effect on a child is a result of divorce rather than some other factors like the loss of security of the familiar home upon relocation with the custodial parent, loss of friends, neighbourhood and school, and apparently, the economical situation of the custodial parent. Hence the assumption that children of divorce are underachievers in the sphere of education and employment could be sought in the impoverishment of the family following divorce.

Clack (2006) indicates that children whose parents are at war are twice as likely to disrupt lessons and underachieve at school. These children are at greater risk of "going off the rail" by turning to drugs and delinquency. Clack (2006) supported what Rothery and Enns (2001) said by emphasizing that, couples who stay together for the sake of their children may cause as much damage to their children as does divorce. Clack (2006) insists that it seems the prolonged fighting between couples, rather than the trauma of divorce is to

blame for problems at school. Children from happy homes do better whether their parents live together or apart.

## **2.6. Social effects of divorce on children**

According to Vitz (2006), children suffer in various aspects of their social adjustment when they are not raised in a “whole home”, that is a home in which both father and mother are present. That one of the most important learning for every child is how to be a full member of its own sex and at the same time fully relate to the opposite sex. This is not an easy learning; it requires the continuing presence of a father and a mother to give it a reality. A child must watch both parents discipline and mould their own impulse so that the child is protected and at adolescence be set free by both parents to go out into the world. This becomes impossible with parental separation or divorce.

Furthermore, in support of the notion of the importance of father's presence in the children's live, Vitz (2006) points to the role of the father in reducing the likelihood of criminal activity in his children, especially boys. He correlated juvenile delinquency with parental strictness, social handicap. He emphasized that delinquent rate in lax families is over seven times that in strict families; the rate in severely socially handicapped families is just under three times that in families with low social handicap. That single mother may confront specific problems of authority in discipline. Children view their fathers as powerful and threatening than mother, and when undesirable behaviours occur, the father can terminate it more readily than the mother can. He iterated that boys who see their parents divorce during their teen years are especially likely to

engage in criminal behaviours. He further added that in comparison to children from intact background, children of divorce are more likely to turn to drugs. Boys reared without their father appear to be substantially disadvantaged by the lack of a significant model for self-appropriate behaviours.

According to Amato and Keith (1991), the estimated negative effects of divorce on the social adjustment are stronger for boys than for girls. Social adjustment includes measures of popularity, loneliness, and cooperativeness. While in other areas, however, such as academic achievement, conduct, or psychological adjustment, no differences between boys and girls were apparent. They stated that reasons why the differences in social adjustment occurred between boys and girls were unclear. They further suggest that girls may be more socially skilled than boys, and this may make them less susceptible to any disruptive effects of divorce. Alternatively, the increased aggressiveness of boys from divorced families may make their social relationships especially problematic, at least in the short term. They argue that nevertheless, boys do not always suffer more detrimental consequences of divorce than girls.

Also in comparison to children of intact families, Sun and Li (2002) noted that children of divorce experience social deficit in life, socially, divorce reduces children's interaction with the noncustodial parent, and leads to inadequate parenting by custodial parent. Predivorce families may present a less desirable social environment, as reflected by an increase in interparental

conflicts, deterioration in parent-child relationship, and a decline in one of the parents' involvements (noncustodial parent) in their children's lives because of the conflicts.

However, Hodges (1986) argues that because of the prevalence of divorce in today's society, some children might not see divorce as a serious loss or as depriving and unusual, or see the social environment as less desirable as many of their peers have also experienced the divorce of their parents.

In a longitudinal study by Sun and Li (2002), in the United States that examined the extent to which parents' marital disruption process affects children psychological well-being, it was found that compared with children from intact families, children from divorced families fare less well in most well-being measures, from approximately 3 years before divorce to 3 years after divorce. Sun and Li (2002) further emphasized that whereas the effects of the disruption process on students' test score demonstrated a linear decline over time, the effects on the children's social/psychological measures exhibited a U-shaped time pattern. Families who go through process of marital disruption or divorce are also characterized by a deficit in economic and social resources at various time points of this process. Sun and Li (2002) argued that these differences in family resources either partially or completely mediate the detrimental effects of the disruption process over time.

## **2.7. Psychological effects of divorce on children**

According to Vitz (2006), children living in single-parent families suffer more emotional distress and problems in school, compared to their counterparts, that is, children living in intact families. Vitz (2006) studied the effects of family structure and found that children from single-parent and stepparent families were two to three times more likely to seek professional help for emotional or behavioural problems than their counterparts living with their both parents.

Spigelman and Spigelman (1991) indicated in their study that explored the appearance of depressive features, as reflected by responses to the Rorschach test, in two groups of children from divorced and intact families (referred to as divorce and nondivorce children). They also studied the relationships between the depression scores and the children's hostility, aggression, and anxiety levels. The Rorschach Inkblot test was individually administered to a nonclinical sample of 108 Swedish school children between the ages of 10 and 12 years. The participants constituted two groups, a divorce group of 27 girls and 27 boys and nondivorce group of 27 girls and 27 boys. According to Spigelman and Spigelman (1991), parental divorce often has adverse effect on the children involved, children from divorced background had significantly higher level of hostility, aggression, and anxiety in the Rorschach test than children from intact families. Furthermore, Spigelman and Spigelman (1991) reported that a substantial body of data shows that most children experience their parental marital breakdown as a stressful process exhibit developmental disruption, emotional distress, and even behavioural disorder.



In a study by Wallerstein and Kelly (cited in Vitz, 2006) that systematically studied the effects of divorce on a fixed set of families for five years which a long period of time, conducted extensive interviews of all the members of the families at the time of the divorce. Their initial intention was to complete the study with another set of interviews one year later, in line with the belief that the first year was the hardest, and by the end of that time the families would have adjusted to the divorce. Wallerstein and Kelly found that eighteen months after the divorce of their parents, many children were still experiencing great difficulties. In view of that the study was extended to five years after the divorce. The findings of their study showed that a significant number (90%) of children suffered fear, worry, sadness, and feelings of rejection, loneliness, anger and guilt. The divorce of parents brought acute sense of shock, intense fears and grieving. The children worried about who would provide for their needs, some of the children they feared being abandoned forever, especially by a parent who had left them. Others were obsessed with the fear of waking up to find both parents.

## **2.8. Differential experiences of divorce on children**

According to Mulholland, et al (1991) parental divorce can be conceptualised as a stressful event for all children, however, one must recognise that reactions to divorce can differ widely among children. Louw (1993) supported the notion that it is true that children are adversely affected by parental divorce and separation, however we must understand that these children reactions to the divorce is determined by a variety of factors which could

include factors like the degree of hostility before the divorce, the extent to which the child's life changes, and the nature of the parent-child relationship.

Furthermore, Cox and Desforges (1987:28), suggested that some children have coping ability that divorce has little or no impact on their well-being. How the child reacts to the divorce of parents depends on so many factors like the age, sex, and the child's cognitive, social and emotional development, it also depend on the relationship that existed with the non-custodial parent.

### **2.8.1. Age**

According to Wellerstein; Wellerstein and Blakeslee, (cited in Wade and Tavis, 1990), the experiences of children of divorce depend on number factors, such as gender, age at the time of parental divorce, and also whether one is looking at the immediate or the long-term reactions. Wellerstein and Blakeslee, (cited in Wade and Tavis, 1990) grouped how children of different ages experience the divorce of their parents.

1. Preschool age (2-6), this group experiences distress immediately following the divorce of parents, yet in the long run they do better. They always blame themselves for the divorce of parents. They are often very needy and anxious. Half of these children especially boys will still be deeply troubled. More than a third of them will still be mildly stress after about five years, but by adolescent most of them will have forgotten about the pain, trauma, distress and fear they felt at the time of parental divorce or separation. Although, some still fantasize about

parents' reconciliation. Most of the children remain emotionally attached to their father.

2. Elementary school age (7-12), these category of children are not as likely to blame themselves as the preschoolers for the divorce of parents, however, most of them feel abandoned and lonely. They have difficulties in managing emotional differences towards the custodial parent, like anger, sadness etc. they are always confronted with the fear of not losing that parent too by making them angry.
3. Adolescent (13-18), these categories of children are often confronted with feelings of anger, helplessness, shame, a sense of betrayal and sadness. Boys are often sexually insecure and threatened always acting out their feelings through the use of drugs and being aggressive. These children often exaggerate their male role. They also become distrustful of the institution of marriage. However, they are better able to see the divorce as parents' problem than younger children because of their cognitive maturity.
4. College age students (18-21), this group of children because of their cognitive maturity understand and accept the parents' divorce, though the understanding does not reduce their emotional disturbances. Some have a feeling of insecurity, report depression and stress. However, they are old enough to feel empathy for their parents, nevertheless, they worry that no one appreciates their own grief and confusion.

Younger school age children from divorce background are not only seen as sad, suffering from the emotional pain, and fearful following parental divorce, but also they have feelings of guilt about the marital break-up. These children

often believe they are the cause of the break-up, (Richardson & Rosen, 1999). Richardson and Rosen (1999) further added that it is not uncommon for children in this developmental stage to think that their loyalties are divided, even when these children are not pressured by parents, they can still feel the pressure to choose.

According to Zieman and Baker-Randall (2000), the negative effect of divorce are equal for both children of late preschool and middle school, only infants, toddlers, and older adolescents are somewhat protected from the greater effect of the disruption and conflict. Zieman and Baker-Randall (2000) further emphasized that however, even young children tend to be at higher risk in the long run, if parents' conflict continue beyond the first year of the divorce or separation. Van Zyl (1997) agrees to the notion that in general, younger children exhibit more severe social and emotional reactions to parental divorce.

In line with Van Zyl (1997), Lachs (2002) argues that late-life divorce has much greater impact on children and even the parents involved than most people realize. There is a superficial view on the effect of divorce of parents on older children. With younger children the divorce of parents is not as devastating as with older children. The truth is that divorce at any age is a major life event, and it can be even harder for the older people, because the marriage is more likely to have been long-standing.

### **2.8.2. Gender**

Lytle (1994) indicated that to those young children of ages five, six, and seven, reactions to the divorce of parents are considerable with distinction between the reactions of boys and those of girls. To the boys the father is very much the identification figure for them. These children act as though they have lost their right arm. They want to know what is going to happen to them without a daddy. There is sadness and real mourning. While little girls fantasize about their dad's presence, for whatever reason little girls are able to comfort themselves with fantasy, whereas little boys are not.

According to Block, Block and Gjerde (cited in Richardson & Rosen, 1999), on the whole, girls are less affected by the divorce or separation of their parents than boys of the same age. This study found that girls appear to be more resistant to environmental stresses. Richardson and Rosen (1999) suggest that teachers have more negative expectations for boys from divorce families than for girls in the same situation; this is found to be a very interesting gender difference.

Brown (2001) notes that boys have more difficult experiences than girls; one difference found between boys and girls is that boys from divorced parents have a higher dropout rate from school than girls in the same situation.

One experience that is common with male and female children of divorce is that they both see their marriages dissolve at significantly higher rates than their counterparts who grew up in intact families (Zinsmeister, 1996). Zinsmeister (1996) suggests that partly this is attitudinal. One eight-year study

of 1,300 men and women found that people who had watched their own parents divorce were much more tolerant of the idea of divorce, and that this tolerance translated into increased marital break-up.

The reason seems to be that boys suffer more by being separated from their fathers when the mothers have custody. Children who live in custody of the same sex parent show significantly more competence, cooperativeness, and self esteem than their counterpart living with the opposite sex parent, (Wade & Tavris, 1990).

The absence of the same sex as a child deprives the children of a role model that they had previously had access to, who was present to answer any questions that they had, (Pillay, 1999). Van Zyl (1997) also supported the notion that there seems no evidence to the fact that children adjustment to living in a one-parent family is more difficult if the parent is of the opposite sex to the child. As prevailing wisdom has it that following parental divorce boys will be disadvantaged and girls advantaged when the resident parent is the mother, and girls will be disadvantaged and boys advantaged when the resident parent is the father, it is a concept that is described as the "same sex tradition", (Pike, 2000). Van Zyl (1997) further indicate that, many researchers have found out that divorce affects boys more seriously than it does the girls. Aggressive behaviour on the part of boys is often reported. In the first two years after the divorce of parents, it is said that a small boy's relationship with custodial mother is often troubled. But Wellerstein, Corbin and Lewis (cited in Van Zyl, 1997) argues that in the ten years study of the

effects of divorce girls, especially older girls, were mostly affected. Female children of divorced parents are more likely to choose “inadequate husbands” and are most often have marital problems of their own (Zinsmeister, 1996). Zinsmeister further indicates that they are substantially more likely to have extensive premarital sexual experience and twice as likely to cohabit before marriage, they also more frequently likely to be pregnant at their weddings.

### **2.9. Short and Long-term effect of divorce**

In a longitudinal birth cohort study of British children Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001) compares children who experienced divorce in childhood with those who were young adults when their parents divorced. This study was done to differentiate between long-term effects of divorce resulting from preexisting factors, which includes the child’s behavioural problems and psychological status as well as the family’s economic circumstances, and those experiences resulting from the divorce itself. The National Child Development study data on 11,409 British children born in 1958, and followed up until age 33 was used. The result of the study found that children’s long-term welfare appears to be linked both to conditions preceding and following the divorce event. The results also points to some limitations of existing studies on divorce and suggested that researcher must be very cautious in drawing conclusions about the effects of divorce.

Furthermore, Van Zyl (1997) indicated that the younger the children at the time of divorce the better they adjusted to it in long term. However, Van Zyl (1997) also notes that the finding of several studies show that, some long

term disruptive effects on children whose parents divorce are marked if the separation comes earlier.

According to Mulholland, et al (1991), many people believe that as time elapses after parental divorce children resolve their feelings about the trauma of divorce and gradually adapt to the alterations in their family life. But by contrast Mulholland et al (1991) noted that children recently exposed to parental divorce are presumed to have had insufficient time to sort out their feelings and come to terms with the dislocations that they have suffered. Although they have no evidence to support their theory, as the grades in school were not related to time since divorce. They also had little evidence of their immediate adjustment to divorce but abundant indications of long-term, subtly and progressively adverse consequences for the children involved as they gained greater distance from the initial disruption. They suggested that the acute disturbances that erupt at the onset of parental divorce, although not easily dismissed, are relatively harmless in contrast with the longer term, more subtle but strong effects that dampen the enthusiasm of children and make them cynical on their outlook on life. They advise that their analysis were not conclusive, but future research should clarify this issue.

In line with Mulholland, et al, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (cited in Vitz, 2006) in their follow-up study of ten years, indicated that almost half of the children from divorce background entered adulthood as worried, underachieving, self-deprecating, and sometimes angry young men and women. That although boys had a harder time over the years than girls, suffering in school



achievement, peer relationships and handling of aggression, the difference in overall adjustment eventually faded. For girls during the time of adulthood when it is time for them to seek commitment with a young man, many found themselves struggling with anxiety and guilt. The sudden shock a sleeper effect, led to many maladaptive pathways, including multiple relationships and impulsive marriages that ended in early divorce.

Furstenberg and Teitler (cited in Pasley, 1996), in their study that examined the effects of predivorce characteristics on long-term well-being of children using data from the National survey of children. The study began in 1976 with a nationally representative sample of children between age 7 and 11 years; the study included 2,279 children from 1,747 households. The children were studied again in 1981 and lastly in 1987 when they were young adults (ages 18-23). The indicators of child well-being in the study were educational and occupational attainment, sexual behaviour, family formation behaviours, use of substances, and depression. Furstenberg and Teitler (1994) found that the quality of family life which, for example, includes (persistent economic stress, high levels of marital conflict, poor parenting practices) before the child's adolescence, had long lasting effects on the child regardless of whether their parents separated, divorced or not. Thus in conclusion Furstenberg and Teitler (1994) argued that characteristics of family functioning and economic stress prior to the divorce explained some of the negative outcomes for children of divorce.

## **2.10. Effects of Remarriage of parents on children after divorce**

The issue of remarriage of a parent after the divorce, or separation can adversely affect a child, although it could also prove beneficial in some cases (Van Zyl, 1997). According to Zinsmeister (1996), the remarriage of parent can add to, rather than subtract from, the stress on a child. The percentage of children from divorce background who express fear of abandonment is higher, for instance, when the mother has remarried than when she has not. It seems that triangular resentments among the natural parents, the substitute-parent, and step-or half –siblings are responsible for these additional disturbances. On the surface, the stepfamily would seem to be a reasonably good substitute for a child's natural family of both parents. The stepfamily has two adults present to provide guidance and care, one of them a natural biological parent. Stepfamilies don't suffer the obvious economic disadvantages of the single parent household. So it's quite striking to note that even where divorce leads children quickly into a solid step family setting, there tend to be consistent problem (Zinsmeister, 1996).

Zinsmeister (1996) also indicated that one reason so many children react badly to their parent's remarriage is because it intrudes on their fantasy of a natural family reconciliation. More children secretly nurse such a dream than might be expected: that one study found over one fourth of divorced children hold onto the belief that "once my parents realize how much I want them to, they will live together again." Zinsmeister noted that another study found that even five years after the divorce, a majority of children still clung to hopes that their parents would reunite. The aspiration often persists even in cases

where the parents have acquired new partners: "if they can get divorce once, they can do it again," is the wistful comment researchers hear.

## **2.11. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The focus of this research is on exploration of the experiences of children of divorced parents. The focus also includes investigating the relationship of the divorce experiences to children's academic performance, as well as emotional and psychological well-being.

Divorce in this context means marriage breakdown or separation of a couple that has been living together. Although some people see the death of a parent as divorce, the intention of this research is to look at the category of marital disruption, or breakdown.

According to Mitchell (1986), divorce represents a disrupted home, a family torn asunder, children cast from the environment to which they had a right to belong, broken hearts, and uprooted family associations. The divorce of parents brought with it many transformations as well as a change in family's status, which could be, physical, financial and social (Pillay, 1999). All the many transformations, or changes, the divorce of parents bring have great effects on kids especially.

Wheaton (cited in Booth and Amato (2001), using longitudinal data, demonstrated that when individuals are moderately happy in their marriages,

divorce could result in a decline in psychological well-being. But when individuals are unhappy in their marriages, divorce could result in an increase in psychological well-being. Wheaton (cited in Booth and Amato (2001), further stated that divorce represents an increase in stress that is negative effects for the former groups and a decrease in stress that is positive effects for the latter groups. These groups could define divorce differently or the children involve in such two families, could have a different view of their experiences of divorce. According to Booth and Amato (2001), a stress perspective views marital breakdown as a process that begins while parents are still living together and ends long after the legal divorce is concluded. The disruption process in most cases sets into motion many events that most children experience as stressful. These stressor, increase the risk of negative emotional, behavioral, and health outcomes for children, also the severity and duration of these negative outcomes varies, depending on the presence of a variety of moderating or protecting factors in children's live.

Some researchers argue that the stress perspectives tend to focus completely on the negative aspects of divorce and ignoring the positive outcomes for the children, the idea that divorce can be beneficial to the children involved is not inconsistent with a stress perspective, (Barber & Eccles, 1992; Gately & Schwebel, 1991) (cited in Booth & Amato, 2001). Booth and Amato (2001) explained that potentially stressful event, such as parental divorce, can have positive long-term consequences when parents resolve their conflicts successfully.

While Mulholland, et al (1991), emphasize the issue of children resiliency. Some children are more resilient, that is, they have a greater likelihood of successful adaptation despite exposure to stressful life event, or that some children can withstand stress much more than others.

Booth and Amato (2001) also argue that researchers have employed a variety of theories and conceptual perspective to explain how divorce affects children. Most studies are with the assumption that marital disruption is a potentially stressful life transition to which children must adjust. But this absolutely depends on how a child defines divorce. The theoretical framework guiding this research is going to be based on this principle that children experiences of the divorce of their parents widely differ among the children involved, because while some children perceive divorce as personal tragedy others perceive it as an escape from a strongly disliked and dysfunctional family. Ongoing hostility, abuse (e.g. child abuse, domestic violence) that cannot be stopped is more damaging to a child than divorce itself. Others believe that the disruption process typically sets into motions numerous events that most children experience as stressful. For instance, the divorce of parents sometimes results in less effective parenting from the custodial parent, a decrease in involvement with the noncustodial parent, exposure to continuing interparental discord, a decline in economic resources, and other disruptive life events, such as moving and changing schools (Booth & Amato, 2001).

Thus, there are no common answers to how divorce affects the children involved. It is important to understand the views of an individual child

experiencing the divorce of parents, and not necessarily believing in the generalization of the effects of divorce on children, or that coming from divorce background makes a child a victim.

The lens that is going to guide this research methodology is interpretive paradigm; it provides a rich theoretical context from which to study divorce and how children experience the divorce of their parent. Interpretive paradigm attempts to understand and explain the individual world basically from the point of view of the individual directly involved. According to Burrell and Morgan (1982:28), "the interpretive paradigm is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of social world at the level of subjective experience". This research focuses on seeking to understand individual children's' perceptions of divorce, their feelings, and the way it is expressed in their outward actions and achievements.

An interpretive researcher also wants to make sense of feelings, experiences, social situations or phenomena as they occur in their natural setting, (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In this regard the intention of the researcher is to make sense of this experience by interacting with the participants directly and reporting base on what the participants say about how they experience the divorce of their parents.

There is therefore a legitimate concern for children whose parents are divorce or separated (Mulholland, et al, 1991). As recent research revealed divorce has a far greater effect on children than was at first thought (Van Zyl, 1997).

Parents must learn to communicate with children about their divorce. Communication helps to begin the process of the children integrating the changes in their lives. Excluding children from this process reinforces the feeling that no one cares and understands their plight or cares to understand (Everett, 1985).

This chapter provided an overview of related literature to this study, and also discussed the conceptual and theoretical perspective.

The next chapter discusses the methodology adopted for this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The focus of this chapter is on the methodology adopted for the study. The researcher provides a brief discussion of the research design, the sampling method, data collection technique, data analysis and ethical consideration.

#### **3.2. Research Design**

This research is located in the qualitative paradigm. In order to have a better understanding of how children experiences the divorce of their parents, the researcher chose an approach that sought to go in-depth into understanding the experiences of children of divorce from the children's perspective.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

The reasons for using qualitative research is that it is field focus, it gave an opportunity for producing rich data based on its personal and interactive



nature, with a sense of personal involvement and not just producing data by sending questionnaire to be answered (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Qualitative research allows for better understanding of the concept of divorce and how children experienced it and then interpreted based on the meaning the individual child gave. Qualitative research also gives the researcher an opportunity to have a “voice” in the research as it emphasizes on the researcher’s voice. It also gives voice to the subjects and examines their perceptions and experiences. Qualitative researcher relies on self as research instrument used in producing data, for example, a qualitative interpretive researcher must learn to listen, to look, to question and to interpret the data, and the interpretative nature of qualitative research also allows for better understanding (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). According to de Vos, Strydom, Fouche’ and Delport (2002), qualitative methodology is based on the assumption that valid understanding can be gained through accumulated knowledge gained at first hand. Generalization is avoided as the focus is on the individual’s experiences.

The actual method within the qualitative paradigm employed for this study is case study. Case studies are intensive investigations of particular individuals or situations; case studies are defined as ideographic research method (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). It is a method that studies individuals as individuals rather than as members of a group or population. Case study guarantees the opportunity of an in-depth investigation to depict the complicated design of what is being studied in sufficient depth and detail so

that someone who has not experienced it can have an understanding of it (Arkava & Lane, 1983). Case studies are usually descriptive in nature and provide rich longitudinal information about a particular situation or individual (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The context of this research is in a school, where all the data will be collected from senior primary school children from divorce families. The main reason for involving senior primary school children is because children of this age group can understand and have the verbal capabilities to relate their experiences fairly satisfactorily.

### **3.2.1. Participants**

Eight children of a senior primary school in the suburb of Durban were involved in this study. The method underpinning the sampling method is the purposive sampling method, which is a non-probability method of sampling. According to Bless and Smith (1995), purposive sampling is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample, or a sample composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or conforming attributes of the population. The researcher has purposively selected eight (8) children whose parents are divorced or separated to produce the data required. Only children who are from divorced families can relate their experiences correctly as they are directly affected by it. The researcher had intended to involve only black African children to produce the required data as no research has been done on the experiences of children of divorced black African parents, but on

getting there the researcher discovered that the idea was not feasible based on some of these reasons. One of the reasons was that after sending out the consent letters to parents, I got feedback from only white children of divorced parents who gave their consent and indicated their willingness to offer useful information for the study. Secondly, there are not many black African children in school and the few there, were not from divorced parents. The participants in this research were white senior primary school children from divorced or separated parents. All the children were either living with their mothers in the case of separation pending the finalization of the divorce or custodial parents, which were also their mothers at the time.

**Table 1. Participants by gender and grade levels**

|        | Grade Levels |         |         |       |
|--------|--------------|---------|---------|-------|
|        | Grade 4      | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Total |
|        |              |         |         |       |
|        | Female       | 2       | 1       | 3     |
|        | Male         | 2       | 1       | 5     |
| Gender | Total        | 4       | 2       | 8     |
|        |              |         |         |       |

There were three girls and five boys who participated in the study.

Two children (Boys) from divorced parents were from grade four (4), four children (two boys and two girls) from grade five (5) and two children (one boy and one girl) from grade six (6).

**Table 3. Age of participants**

| Number of children | Age |
|--------------------|-----|
| 2                  | 10  |
| 4                  | 11  |
| 2                  | 12  |

The ages of the children from divorced background who participated ranged from 10 years to 12 years.

### **3.3. Data collection technique**

Interview method was most appropriate for the approach adopted for this study. Conducting interview was a more natural form of interacting with participants than making them fill out questionnaires, do test or perform some experimental task, (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Face-to-face interview fits quite well with this research approach as it gives opportunity to get to know the participants intimately, and understand how they feel about their experiences.

The interviews were tape-recorded. Each participant was interviewed twice with interview session lasting an average of one hour. The interview took a little long because an effort was made to make the atmosphere as relax as possible and to give the children opportunity to take their time at responding.

An interview according to Bogdan and Taylor (1999) is defined as a purposeful conversation between two people that is used to gather descriptive data in the subject own words, or language, so that the researcher can develop understanding of how subjects make interpretation of their world. There were two sessions of interview for each participant. The first session was to establish a relationship of trust and to discuss the purpose of the interview. This session also gave opportunity for participants for time to reflect on what information to freely surrender during the second session; it was necessary as they were surrendering private and intimate information. The researcher had the opportunity of observing the children also during the course of the interview. According to Blanche and Durrheim (1999), talking to people is a good and direct way of getting to know their feelings and experiences, but it usually comes 'after the fact' in the sense of relying on the interviewee's recollection of an experience. Observation, also another form of data collection technique in interpretive research, takes place while things are actually happening, and thus gets you closer to the action. During the interview process, the researcher observed the participants' facial expression, body language, while they related their experiences.

### **3.4. Confidentiality**

About the issue of confidentiality, the researcher was very open to the participants. The researcher stated clearly that she is training and has a supervisor and examiners to read her report. The supervisor and examiners would have access to the information, but the identity of each individual

subject would not be given away, as pseudonyms would be used in the study to assure confidentiality. The participants were told not to identify themselves on tape; the participants were also assured that the researcher is the only one likely to listen to the tape play back. In this way anonymity of data was assured. The researcher carefully formulates questions that were easily understood, and ambiguities were avoided.

The questions asked were related to:

- How children feel about their parents' divorce, or separation.
- How the divorce or separation has affected their education, social relationship and generally their out look on life
- What areas they feel it has affected them the most.

The participants who were involved in this study were only children whose parents' consent were given to participation in the research.

### **3.5. Analysis of Data**

All the interviews were tape-recorded, but before the recording the researcher asked for permission to record the interview from the participants. One of the most important principles of interpretive analysis is to stay close to the data, to interpret the data from a position of understanding. Thus, the raw data produced from the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and read thoroughly, to check for any incomplete, inconsistent or irrelevant data.

The grounded analysis approach was used, which according to Strauss and Corbin (1990) is a method of systematic data collection and analysis of the data related to the phenomenon. The data collection, data analysis and the

theory must be closely related with one another. The researcher did not begin with a theory, but rather began with an area of study, which is the experiences of children of divorce parents, and what was relevant to this study was gradually allowed to emerge. A systematic set procedure for the data collection and analysis was followed. Data was collected by means of interviews with multiple individuals, which are children from divorced backgrounds, to saturate categories and detail a theory. The analysis of this study was through an open selective coding in an attempt to deliver a theoretical framework as a product of this study, (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin (1990) is one that is systematically developed from the data inductively derived from the study of the phenomena.

Thus, the following steps as outlined by Blanche and Durrheim (1999) were taken: 1. Familiarisation and immersion, 2. Inducing themes, 3. Coding, and 4. Interpretation and checking.

#### **3.5.1. Familiarisation and immersion**

The researcher read through the transcribed interview many times over. Notes were made and brainstormed. By that time the researcher knew the data well enough to know what kind of things can be found, where, as well as the sorts of interpretations that were likely to be supported by the data and what not.

### **3.5.2. Inducing themes**

This is different from the top-down approach, where the researcher is expected to use ready made categories and simply look, for instances, to fit the categories. There is no best way of organising any given collection of raw data though. But at first the researcher used the language of the participants to label the categories (for example, "I felt sad"). The content was not just summarised, but it was organised base on comments, quotations, and direct illustrations. Most of the themes are related to how children of divorced parents experienced the divorce of their parents.

### **3.5.3. Coding**

During the activity of developing themes, the researcher tried to code the data, by marking different sections of the data as being instances of, or relevant to, one or more themes.

### **3.5.4. Interpretations and checking**

Finally when the interpretations were put together, the researcher then went through to check for contradictory points in the interpretations, parts of the interpretation that are just summaries and noting more, instances that were over interpreted and also check if there is any instances where researcher got carried away by prejudices.



### **3.5.5. Trustworthiness:**

It is important as a qualitative researcher to have in mind the issue of trustworthiness as a form of validity when conducting qualitative research. In this research therefore the researcher addressed the issue of trustworthiness, by following Guba's model on identification of four aspects of trustworthiness that is truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality (Krefting, 1991), which is relevant to this research given its qualitative nature.

Truth-value: after the data is collected the researcher presented accurately the interpretation of the experiences of children of divorce so that people who also shared the experiences recognised immediately the description.

Truth-value is important in qualitative research for credibility purpose. In other words the researcher went back to some of the participants to sample their opinions as to the correctness of the interpretations, by this procedure the consistency and neutrality of the study was satisfied.

Applicability: applicability is not relevant to this research; the purpose of this research is to describe the experiences of individual children of divorce and not to generalize to others.

Consistency: this research sought to understand the uniqueness of individual children experiences of divorce. It is the aim of the researcher to learn from what the participants say; therefore there is no control for them. The emphasis

of this research is on variation of divorce experiences rather than identical repetition.

Neutrality: the findings of this research will be solely a function of informants and conditions of the research and not of other forms of biases (Krefting, 1991).

### **3.6. Ethical Consideration**

The researcher secured permission to carry out a research from the university, as part of the fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree for which the study is a part of the programme. Ethical clearance certificate of the University of KwaZulu Natal for this study is in the appendix. The permission of provincial department of education Kwazulu Natal was also sought as the school involved in this study was under its jurisdiction. The letter of approval for the study by the department of education is in the appendix. The researcher also applied to the school for permission to carry out the study with the children. Earlier the researcher was afforded opportunity to indicate her interest in the study to a wide spectrum of stakeholders of the school through living within the neighbourhood and interacting with the parents of the children of the school; and through other forms of social leisure club activities and religious church membership activities. Through these forms of interactions the researcher was given assurance by parents, teachers and even children, of their cooperation in the study. Moreover, before the interview the researcher spoke to each of the parents to personally impress on them the confidential nature of information. It

was also made clear that if a parent so wished he/she could be present with his/her child during the interview they were free to do so. This first interview with the parents was face-to-face with some and telephonically with others. In this regard the researcher only dealt with those children whose parents were comfortable about divulging the information and signed the consent form. During the interview with children the researcher made every effort to avoid any situation that could result into harm. In case of recalling traumatic events of separation and associated anxiety attack, the researcher already contacted a school counsellor to help handle such situation. The issue of confidentiality on every data produced was discussed extensively with the children's parents, the children and their teachers. The researcher was very transparent about the purpose of the research to all parties concern.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

This chapter provided discussions on the methodology adopted for this study. The research design, data collection technique and the data analysis were also discussed. The focus of the next chapter will be on the results and discussion on the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **4. Introduction**

The results of this study are presented and discussed in this chapter. The results presented in this chapter include the personal data of the participants and the results of the interviews conducted with the participants indicating their experiences of the divorce of their parents.

#### **4.2. Setting and personal data of participants (pseudonyms)**

##### **1st participant**

Dave (pseudonym) was 11years old in grade 5 at the time of the interview that was conducted during the lunch break. Dave was an average pupil in school and was living with his mom. Dave was three years old when his parents got divorced; he was told that his parents fought a lot when they were still married. He was allowed spending time with his dad, but his dad was not welcomed at Dave's home as his parents still fought even after the divorce. Dave's mom had a boyfriend that Dave looked up to as father figure, although he was also abusive towards Dave's mom. His dad paid maintenance for his upkeep.

##### **2<sup>nd</sup> participant**

Kattie (pseudonym) was three at the time of her parents' divorce. She was 11 years old and in grade 5 at the time of the interview, which was conducted at

school during lunch break. Kattie was very emotional during the course of the interview; she so badly wanted her parents back together as a family. After her parents got divorced she was taken to a psychiatrist for help, which she got, although she still felt the pain of not seeing her family together. She visited her father every second weekend, but he was not allowed at her mom's house because of the on going animosity between both her parents. Her mom had not remarried, but her dad remarried and got divorced the second time. Kattie was the first child of three children and her dad supported all of them financially only concerning their education (school fees, uniforms, stationeries etc). She was not very close to any of her parents; she only had a parent's child relationship with both of them. Kattie blamed herself for her parents divorce.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> participant**

Like Kattie and Dave, Brendan (pseudonyms) was also very young when his parents got divorced. Brendan was 11 years old at the time of the interview, which was also done at school during lunch break. He did not know what his dad looked like, as he had never met him, he was only told that his dad was a successful businessman and lived in Pretoria. Brendan lived with his mom and uncle in a suburb in Durban. His dad did not even support them and his mom battled financially as a single parent. Brendan was a very intelligent young man, he had been in "A" class from his grade 4, and was in grade 6 at the time of the interview, he has been asked to repeat grade 6, as he is only supposed to be in grade 6 when he is twelve (12) years old. Brendan's mom got remarried and divorced twice after her first divorce, but with no children as

Brendan was an only child. He sometimes felt bad about not having a father around, and wondered what kind of a man would abandon his only son.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> participants**

Martin's (pseudonym), parents got separated quite recently; they were still going through the divorce process at the time of the interviews. Martin seemed not to understand why his parents were no longer living together, although his parents fought a lot when they were together. Martin was the first of two children. He was in grade five at the time of the interview and was living with his brother, his mom and grand mom. His dad always visited them sometimes and took them out, and his mom got jealous whenever his dad did that because she was not working and could not afford to do the same. His dad had a girlfriend that was living with him, and Martin felt jealous and depressed that someone was taking his mother's position. He was really battling in school, but he fought harder to do better.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Participant**

Jude (pseudonym) was the second child of his parents. His parents got divorced when Jude was in grade R. and his sister in grade three. Both himself and his sister were living with their mother. Jude's father remarried about a year after the divorce when he was in grade one and his mother also got a boy friend, and he got along quite well with both his step mother and his mother's boyfriend. He was told by his parents that the reason they got divorced was that both his parents never got along well, and they fought a lot. Jude's mother and stepmother later become friends, likewise his father and

his mother's boyfriend. He was allowed to visit his dad every second weekend; he was very close to both his parents. His father supported them financially, and the two families (Jude's parents and their spouses with the kids) sometimes had lunch together.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> Participant**

Augustine's (pseudonym) parents got divorced when Augustine was in grade two. Augustine's parents had a big fight when they both decided to go their separate ways. He and his mom moved out of their home afterwards, and he was forbidden from telling his dad where they lived because even after the divorced his parents continued post divorce battles. His mom only dropped him whenever he went to see his dad. Both his parents contributed to his education and up-keep. He was also allowed to spend every weekend with his dad.

#### **7<sup>th</sup> Participant**

Sheryl's (pseudonym) parents got separated for about seven years before they finally got divorced. Within those seven years there were a lot of battles. Sheryl was the second child of her parents; she had a sister who was older than her. Sheryl's parents got separated when she was a little girl, she was told her parents fought a lot before the separation. She felt happier when her parent's divorce finally went through because of the fighting. She spent every weekend with her dad, but her dad was not allowed to visit her at her mother's house, he was only allowed to pick and drop her outside the gate, by the drive way. Her dad only paid for her education.

### **8<sup>th</sup> Participant**

Charles like Brendan (pseudonyms) had never seen his dad, although he knew his name. Charles grew up with his mom and his sister who was about sixteen. He did not talk about his dad, he saw his mom's partner as a father, as his mom had a boyfriend that lived with them. His mom's partner sometime paid for his education, and played the father role that made Charles like him.

### **4.3. Results of interviews conducted with participants**

All the data collected from the interviews with the children from divorced background, which was tape-recorded was transcribed in the language of the participants, and then the researcher read thoroughly through the transcribed data. Phrases and sentences that pertained directly to divorce experiences were highlighted and extracted. The researcher established the meanings of the statements and grouped them into clusters of themes. The researcher then rechecked the original data in order to ensure the relevance and validity of the themes. The following themes indicating various experiences of the children thus emerged from the data:

### **4.4. Experiences of Divorce of parents by Children**

The participants of this study generally expressed very painful experiences associated with the divorce of their parents. Participants stated that because of the divorce of their parents they experienced feelings of sadness, shock, anger, depression and stress. Some examples of the ways participants expressed these feelings are contained in the following statements.



#### **4.4.1. Sadness and stress**

For example one participant described her feeling of sadness and stress this way:

*I felt very sad inside and stressed, in fact I feel sorry for my family, I still feel sad and when I feel that way, I just cry.*

A participant described her feelings as if her world was falling apart, as follows:

*I feel bad, it is not a good thing, it's like my whole world is falling apart, it is like one part is here and the other part is on it own accord, in a stand still.*

#### **4.4.2. Shock**

Some participants experienced feelings of shock. A participant described his feeling of shock this way:

*They were happy, so I thought, but all of a sudden I saw them fighting and they decided to get divorce, I was shocked, very shocked at that time.*

#### **4.4.3. Anger**

Some of the participants in this study experience feeling of anger. A participant described his angry feelings in relation to the divorce of his parents as follows:

*I didn't want to talk to either of my parents or anyone after the divorce, because they let it happen. They could have done some thing to make the marriage work. I hated them both, especially my dad, he just left us.*

A very important revelation from the experience of the children of divorced parents is that these experiences are related to various factors in the stages of the divorce process of their parents'. Some factors are associated with the stage preparatory to divorce, some at the point of divorce, while other factors immediately after the divorce, were stated by the participants as being responsible for evoking the feelings associated with divorce of the parents. These factors include fighting, loss of a parent (the fact that one parent had to leave home), relocation, sudden change in financial resources and hence quality of life and the reality of staying in a failed relationship.

#### **4.4.4. Fighting**

Almost all the participants stated that they witnessed their parents fighting at one time or the other. Prior to the actual break-up some participants stated that the fighting they witnessed between their parents actually tore them apart making them to feel sad and depressed. Some participants describe their experiences of their homes, at this stage of the divorce, as being a "war zone", and this fighting affected them emotionally making them to feel sad and confused. One participant described her experience with regard to her parents fighting as follows:

*My parents fought a lot when my dad was around, almost all the time they fought. They didn't get along at all; it was sad having to come home every day to see them at each other's throat*

Another participant also said:

*My parents were always fighting, when they were fighting a lot my dad moved out and got another place to live before they finally got divorced, I felt so sorry for my parents during that time and it made me sad*

#### **4.4.5. Divided loyalties**

During this stage of divorce, when parents were always fighting participants indicated that they experienced confusion and helplessness. The participants felt confused because they found themselves caught up in the conflict of loyalty between parents. They were confused as to which parents to support or which parent to go with or choose as custodial parent. They also feared the consequences of openly supporting one parent against the other. The participants also feared losing one or both parents as they fight among themselves. One participant described his experience thus:

*I don't want to lose my dad, or make my mum angry, I'm scared. It is like they are pulling me apart, one part here and the other side there. Yet I am close to both of my parents.*

#### **4.4.6. Helplessness**

To some participants the fighting between their parents made them to experience feeling of helplessness, they felt the need to step in, separate the warring parties or defend the weaker parent but were not sure whether they should intervene or how they should intervene as they didn't know why the parents were fighting and they are not strong enough to separate the warring parents. A participant described her experiences as follows:

*I couldn't stop them when they are fighting, I just left them, and that was because at that time I wouldn't know what to do.*

#### **4.4.7. Feeling of loss for one parent**

At the stage of complete break-up, that is at the time when parents finally got divorce or were separated, some of the participants described their experiences as associated with feeling of a sense of loss for the absent parent and loss for a role model and father figure as one parent left the house and the children are now left with just a parent. One of the participants describe his feeling of a sense of loss for his dad as follows:

*I still care about him, I would have love to have him around, it would have been nice, because then when my mom is working he can pick me up from school, I would like to have my dad, I miss that, and it makes me feel sad.*

#### **4.4.8. Feeling of loss for father figure**

Even though participants felt that they were attached to their moms (usually the custodial parent): they felt the need to have their dads around during the stage of complete divorce. The boys especially expressed strong feelings at growing up without their fathers around to mould their lives, or for somebody to emulate, or a father figure. The participants felt that absence of a parent in the home is like missing out on an important aspect of their life. A participant stated that:

*It would have been good to have a man around,  
and to have a role model. I feel I'm missing a lot.*

#### **4.4.9. Feeling of abandonment**

To some participants the separation brought feeling of abandonment. Some participants felt abandoned by their fathers, the non-custodial parent, who had to move out. Some participants stated that they lost contact with their dads following the divorce of their parents, this to them indicate that their fathers did not care about them and that their fathers have abandoned them. A participant described his experience as follows:

*I don't even know what my dad looks like; he does not  
even visit me, my mom told me he lives some where in  
Gauteng. I some time wonder what kind of a dad  
abandons his own son, a father who does not care about  
his only son, in fact the only child he's got.*

#### **4.4.10. Feeling of self-blame versus parental blame**

Some of the participants following their parents' divorce felt responsible for the break-up, the participants felt that there was probable something they had done, or not done, right, that had cause their parents to divorce. One of the participants blamed herself for her parents divorce and said this:

*I blame myself, it is my fault, and I must have done, or not done, something right that has made my parents to divorce. I would do any thing to bring them back together.*

Some of the participants blamed their parents; they felt their parents were responsible for the divorce for not working things out in the marriage. A participant described how she felt about her parents not working things out in the marriage, blamed her parents and stated that:

*I blamed them for putting us through all that, we hated them; they could have just worked things out, I did not want to talk to them ever.*

The participants felt in some way or the other that someone was responsible for the divorce, either themselves or their parents.

#### **4.4. 11. Feeling of their parents staying in a failed relationship**

Some of the participant after the actual divorce faced the reality of not having one of their parents around and wished that their parents stayed married regardless of the fact that their parents were fighting and the marriage wasn't working. They wished that their parents could have stayed and tried to work

things out. The participants were willing to endure the fighting and bickering rather than the divorce, they felt that whatever damaging effects marital conflicts would have had on them, was still better than divorce. To these children divorce was not an option. They felt their parents were selfish for having gone through with the divorce and putting them through the ordeal of a broken family. One of the participants' spoke of how he felt:

*Even when they were fighting a lot, I still wished they worked things out and stayed together, I didn't wish for them to divorce. I wouldn't have mind that they stayed and fought rather than the divorce because every relationship has its bad side and it's good side, I feel so sad and depressed. I feel they don't care much about me.*

#### **4.4.12. Feeling of Jealousy over parent's new partners after divorce**

After the divorce some parents of the participants got new partners who were not the participant's biological parents. Some of the participants during this period were happy about the fact that their parents had other partners, who supported and cared for them. However, some of the participants did not like the idea, they felt jealous that other person had taken the position of their mom or dad. Especially in situation where the partner were somehow not warm towards them, the participants resented the partners so much and they did not hide the way they felt towards their parent's partners, their parents knew they resented who ever they were with, so long as it wasn't the participants biological parents. One of the participants who felt jealous about her father's involvement with someone who wasn't her mom said:

*My dad has a girlfriend, and I don't really care about her, she is not my mom. I don't like my dad's girlfriend at all; I avoid her when I go to see my dad, she also pretends to be cool with me when I go to see my dad. I hate her, I really feel jealous that someone else is with my dad instead of my mom.*

Another participant who did not mind that her mother had another man in her life described how he feels about his mom's partner and said:

*I think my step-father is cool he cares about me; I don't mind that he is not my biological father. I like him.*

#### **4.5. The relationship between the experiences of divorce on the children scholastic well-being**

This is not a cause-and-effect relationship. Rather it is an associational relationship. That is, some factors are associated with certain event but not that the factors necessarily cause a change in the event. The participants indicated several factors associated with the divorce of their parents, which they strongly believed adversely affected, their scholastic performances. These factors include those associated with conflicts during the initial stage of the divorce process and the continued animosity between parents even after the divorce. Other factors identified as having negative effects on participants' academic performance are the change in environment or having to relocate after the divorce, the change in the finance of the custodial parents, and the remarriage of the parents.



#### **4.5.1. Effects of marital conflicts, during the process of divorce, on children schooling**

In some instances divorce was rather the better option for some of the participants. Some of the participants stated that they went through a lot of pain always having to wake up every day in a war zone, with parents bickering and abusing each other, which was even more detrimental to their emotional well-being and affected their scholastic achievement. Some of the participants thought that the conflict during the process of their parents divorce affected their schooling, as they were unable to concentrate on their study. With both parents shouting and yelling at each other, the fighting disturbed the children and they (the latter) were not able to study or receive assistance from their parents to study.

One of the participants expressed how she felt after her parents divorced.

*I am happier now that they are finally divorced, they were fighting too much; I rather know that I have a father and a mother who are happier on their own, rather than staying together and fighting all the time. Because when they were fighting, sometimes my head will be spinning.*

Another of the participants spoke on how his parents fighting affected his concentration academically:

*My parents, fighting affected me academically, especially when my dad was around and I'm trying to do my homework and they are fighting, I could not concentrate and I will try to find out what they were doing, ya! The*

*fighting really affected my concentration with my schoolwork.*

Another participant also spoke about how his parents' bickering at one another and fighting made him feel, that it made him lose concentration and the motivation to even study before his parents finally got divorced:

*The fighting especially made me feel ugly; it made feel terrible, I could not study or even do my homework. The fact that I could not stop them made me very bitter inside. I spoke to my mom about the fighting and how I was being distracted because of the fighting.*

#### **4.5.2. Effects of animosity between parents even after divorce on children schooling**

Some parents even after the divorce carried on with constant animosity and bitterness with each other. Some of the participants' parental post marital conflicts had even more damaging effects on them than the actual separation or divorce itself. Some of the participants stated that they battled to come to terms with the fact that their parents were no longer living together, broken family union, having to deal with the fighting tend to be too much for them to cope with. Some of the participants spoke of how their parents' continuous fighting even after the divorce affected their concentration in school, knowing that their parents can't even see eye-to-eye. One of the participants said:

*My dad cannot visit my house, they do not see eye to eye with my mother, he doesn't like my mom, they don't talk at all and it breaks my heart. The only thing that can make me feel better is if my mom and dad could at least be friends, even if they cannot be married again, but at least be friends. I'm going through a lot of pain right now, I can't even concentrate on my schoolwork.*

Another participant also said:

*Even now that my parents are divorced they still fight on the phone over maintenance. They shout and yell at each other, it affects me, and I wish they could just stop fighting.*

Participants claimed that their energies and time were devoted to thinking about their parents' fighting and not knowing what they would face when they got home, possibly they would kill each other and the children would be without parents. Thought like these left little room for children to pay attention to instruction or study on their own.

#### **4.5.3. Effects of family instability on children schooling**

Some of the participants felt their parents' divorce, or separation, brought about instability in their families. The instability in the home had caused the participants lack of concentration at school. The participants said that after the divorce they were worried about the future of the family, worried about who was going to provide for their material needs after the divorce. They were also worried about not having someone to help with schoolwork

when one of the parents was not available to help, and all these worries had cause their lack of concentration too, which affected their performances scholastically. One of the participants opened up to the way she felt the instability caused by divorce affected her achievement scholastically and said:

*I'm really struggling because of the situation of seeing my dad one day and not seeing him another, and sometimes seeing him with another woman. My mom sometimes helps with homework, but most times I manage. But it's really hard to concentrate, because I miss having two people who care for me, I'm really worried about my parents, especially my dad. I think about it a lot, but I try most times to suppress my feelings.*

The participant felt that if her parents stayed married, then she would have both her parents together to support and encourage her, and she would focus and concentrate more on her studies rather than thinking all the time about the divorce.

#### **4.5.4. Effects of change of environment after divorce on the children scholastic well-being**

The change of environment due to marital breakdown had an effect on some of the participants in this study. Some of them relocated with their moms to new homes after the divorce, and some of them were moving from one parent house to another parent house, in situation of joined custody. In the case of joined custody they were expected to spend a couple of days with their moms

as well as their dads, which made the participants' adjustment to the divorce difficult. In that case they felt that the movement disrupted their scholastic routine, and because they lacked a stable routine, they could not maintain a rhythm in their school activities, which in turn affected their focus on schoolwork.

*The movement here and there has affected my schooling somehow I would say. Because I'm always like going to different places and sometimes it is very hard for me to concentrate on anything. The change of environment has really affected me because my dad especially is like changing houses, and still expects me to follow him everywhere in order to spend time with him too.*

#### **4.5.5. Economic challenges of divorce on children scholastic well-being**

All the participants in this study were immensely affected during and after divorce of parent economically. After the divorce parents experienced a drop in their income. The custodial parent in particular, usually the mother, suddenly had to depend on her income and without the partner's (or the father) who in most cases has higher income. Sometimes divorce may also lead to lose of job for the mother, especially if she has to move and therefore resigned from her job. Having to raise children without financial support from the fathers put a lot of strains on the living conditions of the family and the academic performance of the children. Some participants felt bad and pity for their custodial parents, although they also worried about the non-custodial

ones. These findings affected their concentration and their motivation to study. A participant complained:

*I feel so bad because my mom battles a lot with money, she has no helper, and my dad does not support us at all. My mom pays for my school and everything, she sometimes asked him for money, but he never gave her.*

Another one said:

*I feel the divorce has affected my studies, because If my dad were around, he would contribute and then I would go to a better school and have all the fancy stuffs like other kids have. Even my school stuffs cost a lot of money and my mom battles sometimes, I feel a little bit mad sometimes, and I think about it a lot.*

Another participant whose mom was not working said:

*When my dad comes to take us out my mom feels jealous because my dad earns a lot of money and she does not. My mom does not work, she is medically boarded, and she is only being paid three thousand Rand a month from the medical insurance. The divorce has really affected us financially.*

All the participants faced the problem of poor financial resources after the divorce, compared to when their parents were still married and putting their resources together for their welfare. The participants compared how things changed from their parents being able to afford everything they needed when

they were married and having to cut down on some things after the divorce, which has affected them scholastically.

#### **4.5.6. The effects of remarriage of parents after divorce on children schooling**

Remarriage of parents after divorce sometimes contribute positively to the well-being of the children. Some parents' remarriage after the divorce had a lot of impact on some of the participants. Some of them saw the remarriage as a blessing in disguise, having a man around to act as a role model. Some participants acknowledged that they saw these men as father figure, someone who assisted them financially with their school fees, and even with their schoolwork, which mediated the effects of divorce on the participants schooling. A participant pointed out how he felt about his mom's remarriage:

*I don't feel jealous of other people's dads because my mom is with another man now, he is also a divorcee, and he cares a lot for me, he sometimes pays for my school. He is good to me, which is the reason I don't feel any thing, although I miss my real dad sometimes.*

Some of the participants were happy that they were being support by their step-parents. They did not resent having another man around who wasn't their father with their mother; all that mattered to them was the fact that they have someone around who could reach out to them when they were in need.

*I like my step-dad; he sometimes helps me with my homework, when he is around, I look to him*

*like a father figure, and I don't mind that he is with my mom.*

Children in this study wanted people who would always be there for them, even if they were not their biological parents. They transferred the love they had for their biological fathers to their step-fathers who showed them love in return.

#### **4.5.7. No relationship due to the ages of the participants at the time of divorce**

To some of the participants divorce had nothing to do with their performance scholastically. Some of the reasons participants stated for why they felt divorce had no effect on their schooling was that some of them were very young during the time of the divorce and time has healed their wounds as they have gotten over the divorce. One of the participants said:

*I don't think the divorce has any effect on my studies, as I was very young when my parents got divorced, I was about three years old, it is a long time, I have gotten over it now, I have moved on and I'm doing well at school.*

#### **4.6. Relationships between divorce experiences and the social well-being of children**

Years ago divorce used to be a very rare and shameful thing in the society, but now it is no longer uncommon and even the children involve no longer feel alienated and ashamed because of their parental marriage break down. Most of the participants being surrounded by other friends in the same situation did



not feel ashamed of their parents divorce, but rather still related freely with their peers regardless of the situation. Some of the participants spoke on their relationship with their friends after their parents divorce and said:

*My friends do not judge me based on my parents divorce, they just look at me as their friend, that is because most of them also come from divorced homes, like two of them I know don't have both parents around.*

Another one also said:

*Initially my friends used to tease me that they had two parents and I had one, I used to feel bad and I used to cry, but some of my friends would stand up for me, like some of them whose parents were also divorced and they would defend me. But now there are no problems because for most of them their parents are also divorced. It is no longer a shameful thing because we are now many.*

The commonality of divorce in our society today has reduced the effect it used to have on both the adults social lives and that of their children respectively. Children now feel free to talk to their friends and even strangers like the researcher about their background without withholding any information.

#### **4.6.1. Lack of a desirable social environment due to divorce**

To some of the participants, divorce brought about lack of a desirable social environment.

Some of the participants during and after the divorce of their parents experienced a deficit in social lives, as parents were unable to provide the attention and social security their children needed. Prior to the divorce many parents were preoccupied with conflicts and divorce process, during this stage of the divorce parents were unable to teach their children how to relate with peers of same sex and even opposite sex, as the learning stage for the children required the complete attention of their parents. A participant described how he relates with his peers and stated:

*I don't know how to relate to other children of my age, even my teacher says I'm anti-social*

The participants also stated that the inter-parental conflicts also made them to become withdrawn and to keep to themselves during the divorce process and after the actual divorce. One of the participants spoke about how his parents' divorce affected his social life and stated:

*I didn't want to speak to any one; I was preoccupied with what was going on in my home before my parents divorce. And even after the divorce I just keep to myself because I did not want people to know.*

#### **4.7. Other factors that mediated children experiences of their parents divorce**

Some of the participants stated other factors that mediated the experiences of their parents' divorce. This factors includes: the avoidance of animosity between parents after divorce, parents maintaining good relation with each

other after divorce, spending time with non-custodial parent after divorce, getting financial support from non-custodial parents, having good relationship with both parents, age of children at the time of divorce, the effect of early divorce and the effect of parents communication about the divorce to children prior and after the actual divorce.

#### **4.7.1. Avoidance of animosity**

Some of the participants were subjected to hiding from their fathers because of the constant animosity between parents even after the actual divorce had taken place. After the divorce some parents of the participants continued with the animosity against each other whenever they met, which affected the participants psychologically. Some of the participants were made not to tell their fathers where they lived, and when ever they felt like seeing their fathers, arrangements were made for the participants to be dropped off some where for their father to meet with them in the absence of their mothers to avoid fighting. A participant said:

*I'm not allowed telling my dad where I live because after the divorce, my parents are still fighting, they fight whenever they meet, one day they met and my dad punched my mom. My mom doesn't want my dad to know where we live so that they wouldn't continue fighting. My mom drops me off whenever I want to see my dad, sometimes by the gate at my dad's house and drives off before my dad get there, or I will arrange for my dad to*

*pick me up where my mom will drop me, sometimes at the mall.*

#### **4.7.2. Effects of maintaining a good relationship after divorce and the psychological adjustments of children**

It seems that some of the participants in this study were contented with the fact that their parent were getting along well after divorce. They didn't seem to feel that their parents' divorce has affected them negatively, because their parents were still seen together and getting along nicely. To some of these participants, the fact that they could still have their parents come together at anytime helped them adjust psychologically. They however stated that, given a choice, they wouldn't have mind that their parents were still married. One of the participants said:

*I'm fine; I don't have any problem because both my mom and dad get along fine. My mom and dad sometimes have lunch together with my step-mom and my mom's boyfriend with us as a family. They are both happy with their partners, it's okay with me as long as they are both happy, I know they both care for me; I'm fine with it, although I sometimes wish that they were still married.*

Like adults, children also wish their parents to be happy; they love to see smiles on their parents' faces. Nevertheless children desire more than anything to feel the love of they parents, they want to always be sure that divorce has not changed the way their parents feel about them and some of these participants are not exceptions.

#### **4.7.3. Effects of spending time with non-custodial parents and the psychological adjustments of children**

Most of the participants in this study were allowed to spend time with their non-custodial parents (their dads) after the divorce, which meant a lot for them. It seems that the time spent with their dad give them a lot of satisfaction, they felt they were not losing too much because they were allowed to spend time with their dads whenever they wanted, it made a lot of difference to them, it gave them closure from the bitterness they felt initially regarding the divorce and also helped them adjust psychologically. A participant said:

*I'm okay now; I can visit my dad any time. I can talk to him about some stuffs, I'm still very close to my dad.*

#### **4.7.4. Financial support from non-custodial parents**

Some of the participants who were still being supported financially by their non-custodial parents after the divorce, had different views on how their parents divorce affected them financial, the financial support they received from their non-custodial parents made a great difference, because for those who were not being supported the changes in life style tend to have affected them a lot both physically and emotionally and even scholastically, as they were unable to afford the things they were used to having when they had both their parents living together. Those who were being supported felt they were not losing much, as some of them were allowed to visit their non-custodial parent anytime, and also were still able to get whatever they needed. The

change in lifestyle after the divorce to them was not different from when their parents was still married; their lifestyle during and even after the divorce was more or less still the same, the only difference was that they were not living in the same house with both their parents. A participant said:

*I don't feel too badly about it, I can see my dad any time. My dad takes me out often, he pays for my school and everything, and he gives me all I need, even gifts sometime.*

#### **4.7.5. Maintaining a good relationship with both parents**

It seems that some of the participants in this study fought so hard to maintain a good relationship with both their parents. They tried not to show favouritism to one of their parents against the other. The participants showed both their parents that they appreciated them in spite of the divorce, that they still loved and cared for them as their parents. One of them said:

*I am close to my dad, and also close to my mom, I don't know who I'm closer to. I love them both even though they fought a lot. My dad comes to us often; I love my parents a lot despite the divorce.*

These participants did not feel divorce affected the relationship they had with both their parents, as they avoided taking the one side against the other parent.

#### **4.7.6. Early divorce and children's adjustment**

It seems that some of the participants in this study because of their age at the time of their parents' divorce did not seriously feel the impact of their parent's marital break down, as some of them were about three years of age at the time. When they grew up they got used to the idea of living with just a parent. Since they did not know what it was like to have the two parents living together, they did not feel they have lost anything and therefore were indifferent. While some the participants also seemed to have gotten over the divorce of their parent because of the same, which was that the divorce had taken place was a long time ago and now they have grown and are over it. One of the participants said:

*I was very young when my parents divorced, I was about three years old, it is long time and right now I have gotten over it.*

And some due to professional help (counselling) they have received helped them to get over the divorce. For example a participant stated that:

*After the divorce, I use to always be by myself, so my mom took us to see a psychologist for counselling, so that they can make us understand what was going on. After a couple of sessions with the psychologist I moved on, right now I have gotten over it.*

#### **4.7.7. Effects of communicating about the divorce with the children**

Prior to divorce in many ways it helps to discuss the intention to divorce to the children by their parents. At times as adults parents feel children will not understand even if they were told about the divorce, and in such cases exclude the children completely. Talking to children sometimes helps to heal the pain they go through quicker when parents eventually divorce. Some of the children in this study appreciated the fact that they were told why their parent were getting divorce and it helped them during the process of the divorce and after the divorce had taken place to get over the anger, sadness and the pain of the divorce quicker than those who were not spoken to. One of the participants describes how the communication helped her to heal from the pain of the divorce quicker and stated that:

*We understand why my mom and dad got divorce because my mom called us and spoke to us about the divorce. We did not feel too bad about it because we understand we are fine.*



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the discussions of the results in the previous chapter, as well as recommendation and conclusion of this study.

This study explored the experiences of divorce of parents by primary school children in a school in the suburb of Durban. The study also investigated the relationship between the children's experiences of their parents' divorce and the children's scholastic, social and emotional well-being. The results from the data in the previous chapter indicated that children of divorced parents go through various experiences at various stages of their parental divorce. The results also indicated that there were factors that were responsible for the children's experiences, which affected the children's scholastic, social and psychological well-being at different stages of their parents' divorce process.

#### **5.2. Children's experiences of the divorce of parents**

The results of the analysis of data, in this study, indicated generally that, most of the participants viewed their parents' divorce negatively, and experienced feelings of sadness, abandonment, anger, divided loyalties, shock, self blame, and worry for the absent parent after divorce and depression about their parents divorce. To explain the reason behind these experiences of children from divorced parents Pillay (1999), notes that children from divorce background saw their parents' divorce in a way that subjected them to dealing

themselves for the divorce of their parents tend to be more poorly adjusted, which could lead to poor scholastic performance.

### **5.3. Differential experiences of parental divorce on children**

From the themes that emerged from the analyses of the data in this study, it is also evident that divorce effected children in one way or another, either positively or negatively. It was also revealed that divorce of parents affected the pattern of lifestyles the children were used to. For example the changes some of the participants experienced was from having a home that was a “warring zone” to having a peaceful home, or from having both their parents around to having only the custodial parent. The findings also revealed that the participants of this study reacted to the divorce of their parents differently. Evidence to support this finding is in the literature where it is found out that children react to the divorce of their parents differently depending on their age at the time of divorce and developmental stage, their temperament, the way the process is managed by their parents, and the events that follows after the break-up, such as the economic impacts or the amount of lingering conflict (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; Amato & Booth, 1997; Emery, 1999; Hetherington, Law, & O’Connor, 1997; Kiernan, 1997; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). These experiences and reactions of participants to parental divorce differed from one participant to another. Some of them saw their parents divorce as personal tragedy while others saw it as a relief or as an escape from a stressful life style of conflicts.

with the fact that families that were seen, as a unit, were broken and this made them sad. To some of the participants there were no reasons why their parents couldn't have worked things out, rather than divorce. The participants were of the view that irrespective of the differences between their parents, the parents should not have seen these as irreconcilable. Rather the parents should not have divorced or separated. Zieman and Baker-Randall (2000) note that even in situation where there is on-going conflict in the family and parents are unhappy in their marriage, children still feel that it is still better to have both parents living together rather than have them separated or divorced.

The results also revealed that some participants *blamed themselves* for the divorce of their parents. The participants' were of the view that they were the reason their parents were no longer married. They felt that maybe there is something they have done wrong, and if they could have done it better their parents would still be together. According to Hetherington, Law and O'Connor (1997) because so much marital conflicts may be related to the stress of parenting, children often feel responsible for their parent's divorce, they feel that somehow their behaviour contributed to the divorced of their parents. That this is especially true when parents are fighting during exchange of the children or in negotiating schedules: children see that parents are fighting over them. They may try to bargain their parents back together by promise of good behaviour; they may have difficulty with the transition, which further supports Amato (2000) notion that children who place some of the blame on

According to Harhai (2006), divorce may represent a severe stressor for some children, resulting in substantial impairment and decline in well-being. But for other children, divorce may be relatively inconsequential, as some children may show improvements following divorce. For instance, some of the participants were indifferent about their parents' divorce, while some of the participants in this study viewed the divorce of their parents positively. Some participants felt that the divorce had changed what used to look like a "war zone" to a peaceful habitable home, which was better for their psychological well-being. Cawood (2000) supports this position by stating that children are better off when parents are divorced rather than stay in an environment where there is on going conflicts. However, Zieman and Baker-Randall (2000) are of the opinion that children develop better emotionally and behaviourally in an unhappy marriage with both parents staying together, than to experience divorce and separation of parents. This is because divorce deprives the children of having the two parents to cater for their emotional needs. For example, growing up and looking on to both parents as role models, together providing emotional and psychological supports when the children needed it.

#### **5.4. Mediating factors of divorce on the psychological well-being and scholastic performance of children**

##### **5.4.1. Parental conflicts**

The results of this study indicated that some of the negative experiences children had of their parents divorce were due to the lingering battles in their families. According to Amato and Keith (1991), parental conflicts negatively affect children well-being. The results further support this notion that parental

However, some children do not mind the fighting between their parents. This study finding revealed some participants expressing that they would have preferred their parents stay together and continued fighting rather the divorce. To the participants living in a “war zone” was preferred to the divorce. Zinsmeister (1996) is of the view that children’s view of divorce of their parents is unambiguous and that divorce hurt children much more than the fighting they witness between their parents prior to divorce. Zinsmeister (1996) stated further that the misery in an unhappy marriage is usually less significant than the changes kids see after divorce. Children would rather that their parents keep fighting and not get divorce. However, consistent with Allison and Furstenberg (1989) study, the results in this study did not indicate as to whether parental conflict or parental divorce affected boys and girls differently.

The effects of divorce on participants’ *scholastic performance* seemed to also differ in this study. The configuration of findings that emerged in this study revealed strong evidence that in spite of the divorce of parents some of the participants were doing exceptionally well and others battling to cope because of the divorce. Divorce, to some children, represent pain and tragic experiences, which results in substantial impairment and decline in scholastic well-being, whereas to some other children, divorce may be relatively inconsequential, and in fact some children may show improvement in their scholastic well-being following their parents’ divorce (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; Amato & Booth, 1997; Emery, 1999; Hetherington, Law, & O’Connor, 1997; Kienan, 1997; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

conflict may be a more important influence on children's well-being and adjustments than divorce by itself. Some of the participants in this study experienced conflict prior to the actual divorce and some participants experienced what is known as post divorce conflict, as most of the participant's parents even after divorce continued the conflict. This continuous conflict got to the point of parents not seeing themselves eye-to-eye without fighting, which resulted to parents avoiding themselves. The experiences of conflict in the family affected the participants in all areas of their well-being rather than the divorce by itself. As some of the participants got to the point where the divorce no longer mattered because of the conflicts, but rather all they wanted was for parents to stop the conflict and at least try to get along, if they couldn't be married. The conflicts disrupted the participants' concentration at school as well as their social lives. During this period of the conflicts the children were unable to focus, because of their parents fighting and yelling, which caused distress and depression for them, as they have to wake up every day to warring parents. Vitz (2006) pointed out that conflict between parents, both during marriage and after separation or divorce, is especially destructive to children psychologically, this is because according to Zieman and Baker-Randall (2000), even long after stable life situations have been re-established after divorce; children continue to feel very torn apart and distressed by situations demanding divided loyalties. In situation where there is continuous post divorce conflict, the issue of divided loyalties is worst for children.

#### **5.4.2. Contact with non-custodial parents**

Most of the participants in this study were constantly in *contacts with their non-custodial* parents (their dads). Contrary to what Zinsmeister (1996) said that half of all divorce children living with their moms have no contact with their fathers for at least a full year. That only one child in ten sees his non-custodial parent as often as once a week. Only one child in five is able to maintain a close relationship with both parents. Interestingly almost all the participants in this study visited their non-custodial parents at least once or twice a week, and they also tried to maintain a healthy relationship with both their parents, which is contrary to the findings by Zinsmeister (1996). This regular contact with the non-custodial parents helped to minimise the pain of the divorce, because most of them also received financial support from their non-custodial parents. However, some of them did not enjoy the movement back and forth, the stress of always changing environment, and not being able to maintain a stable relationship with friends, affected children. This is in line with what Zinsmeister (1996) noted that some children feel torn into two after a divorce, particularly in cases of joint custody where they must physically bounce back and forth between two houses. "It is hello, goodbye, hello, goodbye, all the time.

Some of the participants in this study were also not in contact at all with their non-custodial parents. For these participants it was a case of abandonment, they felt abandoned by their non-custodial parents (their father), they also felt that they were not appreciated. According to Vitz (2006), a significant number

of children worry about who would provide for their needs after a divorce. Children also fear divorce because of rejection and abandonment, as they reason that if the marital tie could dissolve, the parent-child relationship could also dissolve and they could be abandoned forever.

#### **5.4.3. Economic challenges**

Sun and Li's (2002) study evaluated the role of financial and social resources in mediating the effects of marital disruption, and found that families in the process of divorce suffer from general shortage in family resources and the financial disadvantage seems to be persistent over time. Sun and Li (2002) also note that the occurrence of divorce typically triggers economic hardship in families of divorce. Almost all the participants in this study agreed to the fact that, during the process of the divorce and after the divorce, parents suffered financial hardships and material shortages. Even in situations where the non-custodial parent supported financially after the divorce, it still was not the same as when both parents were together and planning their finances together. The financial hardship was even worse in situations where there was no support coming from non-custodial parent, the children involved suffered material hardship, as they depended on only one source to provide for all their needs. Most of the participants complained of not being able to afford the things they used to have because of the divorce.



#### **5.4.4. Parents' communication with children**

One of the themes that stood out as highlight in this study is that of the importance of communicating the divorce situation with children. Some of the participants in this study found closure in their parents' divorce and finally moved on, after their parents took time to explain things to them. During the divorce process parents sometimes exclude the children with the idea of protecting them from pains. By keeping silent and not talking about the situation with the children, sometimes affect children negatively (Van Zyl, 1997). It is important, to know that sometimes communicating situations even with children helps, especially in situations of matters that involve the whole family.

According to Zieman and Baker-Randall (2000) many children do quite well a couple of years after divorce, and the key factors in how well the children recover are heavily dependent on parents' behaviour. Children who function well are those who experience high daily stability in the new households established by their parents, they significantly involved with both their parents, and perceive their divorced parents as communicating regularly and congenially. After the divorce some parents of the participants in this study, maintained a cordial relationship with one another for the sake of their children. And some of the participants were contented to the fact that after the divorce their parents were friends, and were relating and communicating regularly. Also the fact that they were allowed to visit their non-custodial parent at any time, and the fact that both parents still went out as a family to

dinners for their sake, helped the children to come to terms and found healing from the emotional trauma of divorce.

### **5.5. The social effects of divorce on children**

Divorce is currently a very common phenomenon; it seemed that some of the participants did not feel uncomfortable or ashamed about their situation, as many of their friends were also from divorced homes. They felt free to talk about their parent's divorce to their friends because they were not judged based on that. This supports Hodges (1986) argument that children of divorce parents might not see the social environment as less desirable as divorce is common within the society, and children being surrounded by other children in the same situation might not see divorce as unusual. However, sociological theories argues that children are harmed by their parents' divorce in the area of effective parenting by their parents during divorce, because during this period parents are unable to exercise as much social control and regulation of their children's behaviour (Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001). Some of these participants were also affected socially by parental divorce, their involvement in the divorce process, parent-child relationship deteriorated during this divorce process. As during this time of divorce, parents gave little or no time to their children during the period of the divorce because they preoccupied with the divorce process and family conflicts.

## **5.6. Another mediating factor of divorce on the children involve**

### **5.6.1. Parental remarriage**

In this study some participants saw their *parents' remarriage* as a blessing in disguise, it provided them with the opportunity of having someone who acted as a father to them. According to Zinsmeister (1996) and Van Zyl (1997), the remarriage of a parent could make a stepfamily seem like a reasonably good substitute for child's natural family of both parents. The child may see the stepfamily as having two adults present to provide guidance and care. Which is consistent to what the participants in this study felt, the fact that there was someone around who cared for them, someone they saw as a father figure who was willing to reach out to them when they needed help, reduced the pain they felt for the absence of their biological father. And that is because some of these participants also got financial and emotional support from their stepfathers, something they never enjoyed from their biological fathers.

However, not all the participants felt that way about the parent remarriage. Some of the participants resented the fact that someone had taken one of their parent positions, and has further jeopardised any intention of their parent's reconciliation. According to Zinsmeister (1996), one reason so many children react badly to their parent's remarriage is because it intrudes on the children fantasy of parent's reconciliation, as many children hold that dream of parental reconciliation.

### **5.7. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, certain recommendations need to be made in this section to help children deal with the divorce of parents.

The department of education should create post for school counsellor, as this will help in caring for the needs of children from divorce parents at the school.

The school should develop a vibrant guidance programmes by which the school counsellors can provide services that will cater and support the emotional, social and scholastic needs of children from divorce parents.

Parenting education programmes should be developed to assist parents to communicate properly with their children about issues in the homes including issues about marital conflicts and the need to involve children in decision-making. Parents also need to be taught to consider the welfare of children before making decision about divorce.

Children from divorce background experience a wide range of emotions, which includes fear, sadness, guilt, rejection, and abandonment. Children need time to come to term with the lost of a parent and adjust to new circumstances of not having one of their parents around. Parents must encourage children to talk about their feelings by acknowledging and empathising with them.

With fear of what instability the future will bring after divorce, parent should constantly reassure the children that: The divorce will not affect their love for

them, they will be secure financially, they will have access to the non-custodial parent and also reassure them that the divorce is not their fault, etc.

The idea of share custody is best for the children's well-being and can only be achieved if parents get along well, as it alienates the children from the fear of losing a parent completely after divorce. However, if there is constant conflict between parents it makes shared custody a misery for the children. So whatever the living arrangement each parent must encourage the involvement of the other.

Children want to know that they have both their parent in their lives. Parents must not frown at a child for wanting to spend time with the other parent, but rather it should be seen as a healthy desire for the children wanting to stay connected to both parents. Children must be encouraged to enjoy the time spent with the other parent.

Children must not be put in the middle, and must not be put in a situation where they have to choose between their mom and dad. By asking children to choose means putting them in a no-win situation, because by choosing one over another means forcing them to reject the other.

Children appreciate time spent with their parents; parents must regularly spend one-on-one time with child, as this helps them positively in their growth and development. Parents must be approachable and askable, children must be made to know that they can come to their parents with any concerns they have.

## **5.8. CONCLUSION**

This study is an exploration of the experiences of children from divorced parents, and the relationship between these children's experiences and children's scholastic, emotional and social well-being. This research is located in the qualitative paradigm, and the data collection approach employed for this study were interviews from children of senior primary school from divorced parents. The results of this study indicated that divorce is not a pleasant experience to the children involve, children generally experienced feelings of anger, worry, abandonment, sadness, shock and self blame. However, based on the common themes emerged in this study; it is evident that not all divorce experiences are the same. Children experiences of divorce differ from one child to another, with some of these children being affected negatively and other positively by the divorce. How children experienced parental divorce in this study depended on a lot of factors surrounding the divorce before and after. And these were factors like children's relationship with non-custodial parents after divorce, family conflicts prior to divorce, post divorce conflicts, economic challenges the children faced during and after, support received from parents a etc. It was also found that a lot of these factors mediated the children experiences of their parent divorce, which further affected the children scholastic, social and psychological well-being.

## **5.9. LIMITATIONS**

The first limitation of this study lies on the methodology, which was qualitative research method. It is thought that perhaps the results would have been different if quantitative approach was employed in this study.

Perhaps if the data gathering method was questionnaire and not interview, or perhaps if both methods were employed the findings would have indicated different experiences.

Maybe if the participants involved were a multi racial group the results would be different. And maybe if much younger or older children were involved in the study, or perhaps if more or less participants were involved in the study, would have yielded a different result.

Based on the sensitive nature of divorce, children might not have been completely honest about their divorce experiences as they might not have been comfortable discussing private family life with an outsider.

## **5.10. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Based on the limitations of this research, the researcher would like to recommend that a broader research with a larger sample be carried out and ensuring the participation of a multi racial group to determine whether there is going to be a different result.

The researcher would like to comment on the fact that most research done on this topic, the experiences of children of divorced parents, are done with the participation of only white children as research sample, in this regard the

researcher would like to encourage that black children be included for further research on this topic to compare results.

In subsequent research triangulation of methods could be employed to compare for more comprehensive data.



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## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX ONE      ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

APPENDIX TWO      LETTER OF PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH  
FROM THE DEPT OF EDUCATION

APPENX THREE      LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARENTS



RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)  
WESTVILLE CAMPUS  
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587  
EMAIL: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

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6 JULY 2006

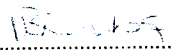
MS. ON NSAN (204001587)  
EDUCATION

Dear Ms. Nsan

**ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/06174A      "THE EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN DIVORCED PARENTS IN A SCHOOL"**

I wish to confirm that whilst ethical clearance has been granted for the above project, the Human & Social Science Ethics Committee has requested that you be informed that retrospective applications for ethical clearance constitute a violation of the UKZN Research Ethics Policy:

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA  
RESEARCH OFFICE

**PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:**

**THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS. WHERE QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USED IN THE PROJECT, THE RESEARCHER SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDES A SECTION AT THE END WHICH SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE PARTICIPANT (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE) INDICATING THAT HE/SHE WAS INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.**

cc. Faculty Research Office (Derek Buchler)  
cc. Supervisor (Prof. O Bojuwoye)



PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU-NATALI  
PROVINSIE KWAZULU-NATAL

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
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DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWYS

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PIETERMARITZBURG

HEAD OFFICE

Enquiries:  
Imibuzo: Sibusiso Alwar  
Navrae:

Reference:  
Inkomba: 0130/06  
Verwysing:

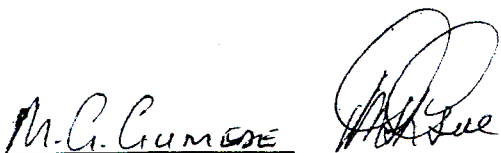
Date:  
Usuku: 13 March 2006  
Datum:

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

This is to serve as a notice that O. Nsan has been granted permission to conduct research with the following terms and conditions:

- That as a researcher, he/she must present a copy of the written permission from the Department to the Head of the Institution concerned before any research may be undertaken at a departmental institution.
- Attached is the list of schools she/he has been granted permission to conduct research in. however, it must be noted that the schools are not obligated to participate in the research if it is not a KZNDoe project.
- O. Nsan has been granted special permission to conduct his/her research during official contact times, as it is believed that their presence would not interrupt education programmes. Should education programmes be interrupted, he/she must, therefore, conduct his/her research during nonofficial contact times.
- No school is expected to participate in the research during the fourth school term, as this is the critical period for schools to focus on their exams.

  
for **SUPERINTENDENT GENERAL**  
KwaZulu Natal Department of Education

|  |
|--|
| <b>UHULUMENI WAKWAZULU NATAL</b>   |
| UMNYANGO WEMFUNDO<br>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION<br>DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWYS |
| 2006 -03- 29   |
| ISIKHWAMA SEPOSI<br>PRIVATE BAG / PRIVAAT SAK X04<br>JLUNDI 3838         |
| RESEARCH, STRATEGY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT                                |



## LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARENT/ GUARDIAN

Dear parent/guardian,

Letter of consent for your child participation in my study.

I am doing an M.Ed degree at the University of Kwazulu Natal and have chosen to research the experiences of senior primary school children of divorce in a school, as one of the requirements for the completion of my degree.

This study involves my interviewing your child, the interviews will be tape-recorded and all information provided would be kept in strict confidence, except for the examiners and supervisor who will read the report with anonymous identity of subjects. The interview with children will be done in school and will take thirty minutes.

The data produced will be disposed of after transcription of the report. Participation for this study is voluntary and subjects are free to withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason with out any penalties.

Should you consent please sign this form.

I ..... (Full names participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to my child participating in the research project.

I understand that participation for this study is voluntary and I am free to withdraw my child from the study at any stage and for any reason with out any penalties.

-----  
Parent/Guardian's Signature

-----  
Date

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully researcher,  
Orok Nsan  
Phone (031)7656026, cell 0732011829

Phone Supervisor (031) 2607583