# THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL SEPARATION AND DIVORCE ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN A SCHOOL IN THE DURBAN SOUTH REGION.

**By**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that:

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL SEPARATION AND DIVORCE ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN A SCHOOL IN THE DURBAN SOUTH REGION.

is my own work, that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of a complete reference, and that this dissertation was not previously submitted for examination at any other university.

**Signed : _____**

**Date : _____**

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**ABSTRACT**

FOR MY MOTHER

I love you
I hate you
I abuse
And appreciate you

You feed my guilty conscious
I fuel your shattered soul
Your misguided love and affection
Have turned my heart into stone

You are nothing
You are everything
You stole my voice
You made me sing

In this separation we create
We grow together
In love
And in hate
……..Saron

The above poem is written by a learner who comes from a broken home.
There are many children like Saron in our classrooms who have suffered
consequences of parental separation and divorce.
This study investigates the experiences of children from a secondary school in the
Durban South Region. Their parents are either separated or divorced.
The study was undertaken to ascertain how these learners are psychologically affected
by their family situations.

The rationale for the research study is grounded by statistics and a wide variety of literature that indicates that children from separated and divorced families experience multiple problems, develop abnormal behavioural patterns and seek attention and release from alternate sources.

The research study is framed within the social constructivist paradigm to indicate how social phenomena develop in particular social contexts. In order to answer the research questions and gain clarity on the topic, data was gathered using narrative stories, personal narrative diary entries, time line representations and interviews. The narrative diary entries and time line representations were used as prompts for the interviews, whereby the researcher not only allowed the participants to discuss their experiences but also spent a prolonged period of time with them.

The research study was qualitative in nature and aimed to achieve a greater level of depth by studying four participants. This was accomplished using the method of purposive sampling. The data obtained from the participants was transcribed and analysed using the open-coding technique and thematic analysis.

The results revealed that even though the effects of the divorce and separation varied, the participants shared similarities with regard to their emotional state. They all experienced feelings of sadness, distress, abandonment, anger, helplessness, and stress. The results also indicated that the effects of divorce were on the participant's behaviour, their families' financial and economic situation, their academic school lives and integration at school.

The participants reported both positive and negative effects of their parents' separation and divorce. Taking all the data collected into consideration, the researcher was then able to make recommendations which would prove beneficial to all stakeholders.

# KEYWORDS

- Divorce
- Parental separation
- Marriage
- Family
- Adolescent
- Mental health

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

AACAP : The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

ARA : Industry Association for Responsible Alcohol Use

WHO : World Health Organisation

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# CHAPTER ONE
## GENERAL ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

### 1.1. Introduction

*"Melissa's parents were never the happy couple. For as long as she can remember, she never saw them displaying any sort of affection towards one another. In fact, they seemed more like two people who truly disliked each other. They were always fighting with each other inside of their home and Melissa, an only child, tried desperately to ignore the yelling and nasty words being spoken. Being the only child, she was always the person her mother would run to, to complain about her husband and the marriage. As she entered adolescence, the family situation began to worsen. Her mother became very depressed and often blamed Melissa for the failing marriage. Melissa, as well as her father, were being criticized by her mother for her imperfections around the house. Melissa was an average to slow learner and her mother would remind her, constantly of how dumb she was. In her earlier years, and up until about high school, Melissa found a way of becoming resilient. She worked extra hard and actually excelled in school, ignoring her mother's criticism. She became an excellent soccer player and was very involved in her church. As Melissa entered high school, however, the family situation took a turn for the worse and her parents separated. As soon as her parents separated, Melissa became an entirely different person. She was very isolated and reserved, as opposed to the old out-going friendly person everyone was used to. She quit all of her extra activities and her grades began to drop so low that she found herself repeating half of her classes. She started hanging out with a new crowd of friends who were considered, by most, to be the trouble crowd. Finally, after months of a legal battle, her parents were divorced and her father decided to move across the country to get away from his wife. Melissa's mother constantly told her that her dad was an evil, rotten person and a terrible father. Within a short period of time after the divorce, Melissa took up smoking, drugs and alcohol. She got arrested for driving her mother's car without a permit and her mother found drugs and condoms in her room. She began to dress differently than the other kids in her school. She wore baggy clothes, heavy make-up and her hair was always a different colour (from red to purple, to jet black, etc.) before long, she had earrings covering her ears, nipples, navel and tongue."*

(Segui, 2001, p.1).

Divorce is a process that involves the parents in a marriage, yet has a rollercoaster effect on their children as well. Like Melissa in the above excerpt, there are many adolescents who experience difficulties during their parents' divorces. This is further compounded by the mixed emotions they experience during the transitional years of adolescence. It is my perception that these negative behavioural patterns are brought into the classroom as a cry for help or a tactic to seek attention. Often these problems may be equated to juvenile delinquency instead of family dysfunction or divorce. It is essential, in this regard, that the problems of these children are understood in its context and dealt with through the appropriate channels as this becomes imperative for the well-being of the child itself. Keeping the above in mind, the researcher aims to investigate the effects of parental separation and divorce on the psychological well-being of secondary school learners at a school in the Durban South region.

There has been an increase in the divorce rates in South Africa since 1921. The pattern indicates the sharpest peak which occurred from the mid 1960's to the late 1970's which then remained constant during the 1980's (Rodriguez & Arnold, 1998, p.1). Furthermore, the divorce rate in South Africa indicated an increase from 1997 to 2006 in the mixed and African race groups (Statistics South Africa, 2006, p.5). With the constant increase in the number of divorces, there has been a substantial increase in the number of children who end up living with only one of their parents (Rodriguez & Arnold, 1998, p.1).

In the past the concepts of divorce and separation have been mainly viewed as something that is taboo. However, with the rapid increases in the divorce rates as indicated above, one can conclude that many parents in distressed marriages are looking at divorce as a solution to their problems. In their plight to solve aspects of their distressed marriages, many parents fail to envisage the consequences that their decisions may have on their children. The minor children who are placed in these situations are forced to bear the brunt of their parents' decisions.

Oesterreich (1996, p.1) states that studies show that children experience the greatest impact from the process of divorce within two or three years of its occurrence. Amato (1993, p.30) further explains that an unhappy home environment which is marked by high levels of marital discord is less than optimal for the development of children and cites Emery (1982) and Grynch and Fincham (1990) who maintained that marital conflict has a negative impact on children's psychological adjustments.

There is further emphasis that is placed on the profound effects that divorce has on minor children. Researchers explain that these effects include the living arrangements of minor children, their socio-economic background, psychological well-being, behavioural patterns, academic progress and some long term effects (Akpan, 2007; Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas & Murch, 2003; Cunard, 1982; Emery, 1999; Jeynes, 2002; Pillay, 1999; Statistics South Africa, 2006).

## 1.2. Statement of the problem

With reference to the extract provided at the beginning of this chapter, one can envisage the profound effect that divorce and parental separation has, not only on the living arrangements of children, but also on their socio-economic and psychological well-being. Many children are no longer being raised in a family with both parents and tend to seek attention in adverse factors. Researchers indicate that these children experience multiple problems which result in abnormal behavioural patterns ( Cohen, 2002; Emery, 1999; Jeynes, 2002; Pillay, 1999).

## 1.3. The purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to explore how learners at secondary school level are affected by parental separation and divorce. The aim of the study is to carry out an intense investigation of each learner's experience, their behavioural patterns and emotional state of mind thereby aiming to see if there is an association between their family contexts and psychological well-being.

**1.4. Research aims**

The aim of this research is twofold:

- To investigate how parental separation and divorce affects the psychological well- being of adolescents.
- To generate guidelines and recommendations to assist both parents and educators, to help these adolescents cope with these situations.

**1.5. Critical research questions**

The study aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

- To what extent does separation and divorce affect a learner's psychological well-being ?
- What role can the school play in ameliorating these effects ?

**1.6. Rationale**

Parental divorce is associated with negative outcomes in the area of academic achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-esteem and social relations (Amato, 1993, p.23). In many instances these negative behavioural patterns are brought into the classroom as a cry for help or a tactic to seek attention. Educators very seldom understand the dynamics of the situation and may equate the learners' behaviour to juvenile delinquency instead of effects of family dysfunction, separation or divorce. In this regard the study can furnish important information to educators who encounter learners from divorced or separated families.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980, as cited in Amato, 1993, p.33) claim that divorce is known to be a stressful event for both adults and children. Parents are often trying just as hard as children to gain stability from the entire process. Keeping this in mind, the study may be able to give divorced or separated parents an overall insight on the effects parental separation and divorces have on children. Positively viewed this could culminate in reconciliation with some parents.

It is important to take cognisance of the fact that the findings could be useful to the stakeholders at Departmental level, where the information could be used to improve the situations these children find themselves in.

## 1.7. Research design and methodology

### 1.7.1.  Research Design

It is proposed that the present study be conducted within the qualitative paradigm. O' Neill (2006, p.4) explains that qualitative research usually achieves a greater level of depth when fewer participants are studied. As a researcher, my aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of a few learners who come from parentally separated or divorced backgrounds therefore framing it within the qualitative paradigm would be appropriate.

### 1.7.2. Research Methodology

#### 1.7.2.1. Literature research study
A wide variety of literature studies were reviewed and consulted prior to the commencement of the study.

#### 1.7.2.2. Narrative Stories
The researcher's intention was to collect information about the life experiences from a small number of learners whose parents are either separated or divorced. One of the major distinguishing characteristics of narrative studies is that it is a form of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals, and in terms of Creswell's (2003, p.15) distinction, this is done by asking them to provide stories about their lives.

#### 1.7.2.3. Context of study
The study was conducted at a secondary school in the Durban South Region. The school has a multi-racial population of 1277 learners. The aim of the researcher is to involve four multi-racial learners from Grades 8-12 (Ages 12-16) whose parents have either separated or divorced.

Within the capacity of an educator and interacting in daily school activities, the researcher has had the opportunity to interact with learners on a one-to-one basis. Most of the learners displayed behavioural patterns, disciplinary problems, emotional problems, low self-esteem and low self-confidence as proposed by researchers like Akpan (2007), Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas and Murch (2003), Cunard (1982), Emery (1999) Jeynes (2002) and Pillay (1999).

The school in question does not have the facilities of a guidance counselor and these learners do not have a formal avenue to discuss their problems. Due to these constraints, the researcher enlisted the help of an educational psychologist should learners display any signs of distress.

The school's mission statement indicates a commitment to ensure that all learners develop to their full potential, helping them to overcome all hurdles in the process, and was therefore accommodating in the researcher's study.

### 1.7.2.4. Sampling

The researcher used purposive sampling to choose her sample. According to Rubin and Babbie (2005, p.247) by using purposive sampling, the researcher has the advantage to handpick key people who in his/her judgement best represents the range of those persons who would best know the needs of the subject/topic chosen. The common variable among the learners in the proposed study is that their parents have either separated or divorced, therefore the method of purposive sampling is most appropriate.

It is due to the use of this type of methodology that the data collected from the 4 learners will be specific to their contexts only and no generalisation of data can be done. It is recommended by Akpan (2007, p.96) that a sample number of less than 8 participants be used therefore the researcher chose 4 learners. Akpan (2007, p.96) further recommended that research on the effects of divorce be conducted on mixed race groups, as there is an abundance of research on white learners on this topic, hence the choice of a mixed race group.

### 1.7.3. Data collection methods

The researcher used the following data collection methods:

### 1.7.3.1. Narrative Stories

This introductory method of data collection will entail that participants write narrative stories about their life experiences to furnish the researcher with information about their problems, challenges and life experiences from the past. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.1055) state that the use of narratives entails that the participants utilise personal memory, epiphanies, existential crises from his/her biography. This method will then lead the researcher to the second stage of data collection.

### 1.7.3.2.  Personal Narrative Diaries

The second method of data collection intended for use will require that each participant keep a narrative diary for a period of three months. The purpose of these narrative diaries is to gain information on the participant's current situation and emotions. According to McKernan (1996) narrative diaries are unstructured techniques and they permit maximum freedom of the participant's response. By involving the participant's in writing both narrative stories and keeping personal narrative diaries, the researcher aims to gain information about the participants' past and present experiences. It is further noted by Suzuki (2004, p.1) that diaries are important, introspective tools to utilise to obtain descriptive and interpretive research. Corti (1993, p.1) further explains that in comparison to interviews, personal diaries provide a more reliable alternative for accurately recalling sensitive information, yet when used in conjunction with interviews, proves to be one of the most reliable methods of obtaining information. Therefore, the researcher proposed conduct semi - structured interviews with participants every two weeks regarding their narrative diaries.

### 1.7.3.3. Timeline

In conjunction with recording their personal narrative diaries, the participants were required to collect photographs of themselves in the context of their family situation from birth to present. The participants will then be required to create a timeline which will serve as visual representation of the changes that the participants experienced. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that the use of photographs as a method of data collection, will allow the researcher into the everyday world of the subject which is

further supported by Mahadev (2006, p.39). These timelines, once created, will only be viewed by the participants and the researcher.

### 1.7.3.4. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted. The aim of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted was to collect data that was descriptive and meaningful in nature. Maree (2007, p.8) explains that semi-structured interviews are commonly used to collaborate data emerging from other data sources and requires the participants to answer a set of pre-determined questions. It is on this basis that the semi-structured interviews conducted were based on the participant's timelines and personal narrative diaries. The researcher made use of semi-structured interview schedules (Appendix E and F). Drawing from Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.376) it was found that individual interviews yield a large amount of data in comparison to one large focus group being interviewed and, by using this technique the researcher aims to gain insight into the problems experienced by the participants.

By conducting all of the above-mentioned data collection techniques, the researcher wanted to ensure that she had spent a prolonged period of time in the field which would help her gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and also lend credibility to the participants narrative accounts, as stipulated by Creswell (2003, p.196).

### 1.7.4. Data analysis

The qualitative methods of data collection used in the study resulted in large amounts of textual and visual data. Prior to the analysis of data, all interviews were transcribed with the aid of Microsoft Word. The open-coding technique and the process of thematic analysis were used to analyse the data obtained from the participants' narrative stories, personal narrative diaries and interviews. It is stipulated by De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002, p.346) that open-coding entails that data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and then differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data.

## 1.8. Delimitation of study

This study is located in the field of Educational Psychology and it involves the experiences of learners whose parents have divorced or separated. The participants were four learners from a secondary school in the Durban South region. Due to the fact that the researcher investigated the experiences of four learners from divorced or separated backgrounds, the findings may not be generalized.

The large amounts of visual and textual data collected during the study were analyzed using the open-coding technique and the process of thematic analysis will be undertaken to make the task more manageable.

## 1.9. Format of the dissertation

**Chapter one** outlines the background of the study. It also focuses on the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study where the critical research questions are outlined, the significance of the study and a brief discussion of the research design and methodology. The chapter culminates in looking at the delimitations of the study.

**Chapter two** will outline both theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The data collected in this study will be interpreted.

**Chapter three** will focus on literature relevant to the research study.

**Chapter four** concentrates on the research design and methodology. It will outline all the methods that were used to answer the key research questions and will also look at it's effectiveness. It will provide information relating to the context of the study, i.e. the school and the learners. It will also focus on the various measures that were used to judge the worthiness of the study, i.e. credibility, transferability, triangulation, dependability and confirmability.

A discussion of results obtained in the study will be undertaken in **chapter five**. It will provide an analysis of the results in the form of themes thereby aiming to provide answers for the research questions.

**Chapter six** will present a discussion pertaining to the findings. The researcher will discuss some of the limitations of the study and will thereafter make suggestions for future researchers.

## 1.10. Conclusion

In this chapter the researcher has outlined the research study in relation to the topic of parental separation and divorce. On the topic of divorce, Cohen (2002, pp.1019-1023) claims that after the process of divorce, the sense of loss experienced by the children is ongoing. This has an impact on the child's home, school life, family life and social sphere. To a greater extent it is clarified in a study conducted by Cunard (1982) that children from divorced families experience intimacy problems as married adults later on in life.

It is on this basis that the researcher envisaged the need to conduct a study outlining the effects of parental separation and divorce on the psychological well-being of secondary school learners.

# CHAPTER TWO
## THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

"While marriages can be cancelled and remade, families cannot; they live on in the person of the children who move quietly across the boundaries of new partnerships and families."                (Smart, Neale & Wade, 2001, p.67)

## 2.1. Introduction

Chapter one outlined a brief overview of the background of the study, its key purpose and focus and the current significance or need for the study specific to the area and school. It is essential that prior to looking at research associated with the topic, that the researcher frames the study within a theoretical framework and provides a thorough explanation of all the concepts associated with the subject. Chapter two aims to look at the theoretical and conceptual frameworks applicable to the research.

## 2.2. Theoretical  framework

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how parental separation and divorce impacts on the psychological well-being of secondary school learners from a specific school in the Durban South Region.

According to Beckett (2002, p.167) marriage is usually seen as the joining of two individuals; but if we look at families as systems, then marriage involves changing two entire systems which overlap to develop the third system.

When divorce enters this equation, the focus is towards marital discord perpetuated by emotionally strung children, strained family relationships, instability and dissatisfaction regarding the situation.

A theoretical framework that will help the researcher understand the experiences of learners from separated or divorced families is essential. In this case, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory will be used in conjunction with Social Constructivism.

This is due to the fact that the central aspects within the social constructivist paradigm considers how social phenomena develop in particular social contexts (Wikipedia, 2008, p.9). Within the study the researcher aims to gather information to assist in understanding the behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and experiences of learners from separated and divorced families so as to gain clarity on the research topic.

### 2.2.1. Social constructivism

The social constructivist paradigm is best suited to this study as it's focus is on uncovering the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived social reality by looking at the ways social phenomena are created, institutionalized, and made into tradition by humans. The underlying assumption is that socially constructed reality is seen as an ongoing, dynamic process and that reality is reproduced by people acting on their interpretations and their knowledge of it (Wikipedia, 2008, p.9). It is further stated that there is importance in questioning the universality of psychological responses to adversity (Dawes & Donald, 1994, p.1).

Social Constructivists views the living system as a proactive agent that participates in its own life dynamics, whereby an active and motivated organism is one that remains engaged with the challenges of life and the developmental opportunities that those present (Snyder & Lopez, 2005, p.747). Within this perception, the researcher hopes to understand how the participants encountered the challenges placed in front of them due to parental separation and divorce and how they handled them.

Dawes and Donald (1994, p.18) indicates that the main focus of research conducted within the social constructivism paradigm entails the researcher undertaking the process by which people describe, explain or account for the world (including themselves) in which they live. In this instance, the researcher aims to gain a thorough understanding of the learner's emotions, behaviour and attitudes so as to account for them.

Dawes and Donald (1994, p.19) claims that conducting a research study within the social constructivist paradigm, will entail gaining an understanding of people's behaviour by looking at their relationships between behaviour and it's context as that

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context is understood by the individual. Therefore by observing, analyzing and interpreting the practical activities of the participants the researcher aimed to gain a thorough understanding of the lives of the participants.

## 2.2.2. The ecological perspective

In addition to the social constructivist paradigm, the researcher will use Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to frame the research study. According to Emery (1999, p.9) a family is regarded as a system although it comprises of individual members where each member is dependent on interaction with other members and the wider systems outside whereby its function includes protecting the individual in all spheres of life.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory stipulates that every child is embedded in several environmental systems. These systems work in conjunction with subsystems that are found within the family 'system' e.g., subsystem 1 may comprise of the parents, subsystem 2 - the children and subsystem 3 – the grandparents (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p.47).

Researchers studying children need to take cognizance of the fact that these children are part of a family unit and are affected by the actions of other members. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model will be used to understand how parental separation and divorce affect them. This model is indicative of the fact that child development is seen as happening within four nested systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem which interact with the chronosystem (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p.51).

It is these systems which are believed to interact with one another and influence the child's life. Emphasis will be placed on how all four systems are affected by the process over developmental time frames. Bronfenbrenner's model suggest that there are layers or levels of interacting systems resulting in change, growth and development, such as physical, biological, psychological, social and cultural. What happens in one system affects and is affected by other systems (Landsberg, 2005, p.10). Therefore in order for the researcher to understand how separation and divorce

affect a child it will require focus upon the different levels or systems that the child forms part of, such as school, and even the broader social context.

Therefore the focus will be placed on Bronfenbrenner's different levels or systems, known as, the micro system, the mesosystems, the ecosystem and the macrosystem. These systems interact and influence each other on a continual basis (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p.47). Divorce and parental separation are processes involving the parents directly, but when implemented, could affect the children and their grandparents. This cause and effect relationship does not take place in one direction only.

Donald et al. (2002, p.51) refer to the microsystem which refers to the child's family, the school and the peer group in which children are closely involved in continuous face-to-face interactions. The process of a divorce is initiated by parents within the family system and has a direct impact on the child. Pillay (1999) notes marital problems pertaining to alcoholism and abuse could lead to divorce and ultimately the breakdown of the family unit as a whole. This affects the child and the people who he comes into contact with on a regular basis.

Donald et al. (2002, p.51) lends clarification to the mesosystem as being the level where "the peer-group, school and family systems interact with one another. The mesosystem is a set of Microsystems associated with one another. Thus what happens at home or in the peer group can influence how children respond at school, and vice versa." Whitehead (1996, p.174) explains that the union of marriage brings together two families giving support to the couple, but when it breaks up, the child's access to both sides of the family is often weakened, curtailed or entirely missing. It is further noted in Pillay (1999, p.5) that "people need others as they are not isolated beings therefore they need to interact with other systems such as religious institutions, schools and family members."

It is important to note that after a divorce that is characterized by conflict and marital discord, the custodial parent may be forced to change cities for peace of mind. This results in the child losing contact with the school, his/her peer group and other family members.  Therefore, in order for the researcher to develop greater clarity on the

effects of separation and divorce on secondary school learners, it requires focusing upon the different systems and the impact they have upon one another.

The exosystem, according to Donald Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p.52) refers to those systems that the child is not directly involved with, but has some influence. These systems refer to the parent's work environment and the social and religious sectors. Divorce is known to cause much "stress for children, ranging from loss of contact with one parent to economic hardship" (Emery, 1999, p.35). When parents go through a divorce, there is financial strain on the economic status. Events that occur at the parent's place of work may have a bearing on the child even though the child is not directly associated with it. It is due to these elements that the child's life may be affected. The financial constraints experienced by the custodial parent may result in the child having to change his/her lifestyle.

The macrosystem, makes reference to the dominant social structures, as well as beliefs and values that influence and may be influenced by all other levels of the system. (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p.53). This includes cultural values that develop obedience to authority. Within the realms of society and many cultures, divorce is viewed as something that is taboo. There are many negative connotations associated with the way society views divorce. Children are directly affected by these views which may impact on the research findings.

It is important to take note of the chronosystem, which refers to "developmental time frames, which cross through the interactions between these systems and their influences on individual development" (Landsberg, 2005, p.12). Research indicates that many children experience problems during their adult life even though the divorce occurred in his/her childhood. (Ahrons, 2007; Cunard, 1982). In other words the events that took place in an individual's life will be affected by time e.g., a child whose parent's divorce took place in his/her childhood, may experience problems in their teenage years and even later in married life.

By drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory the researcher would be able to gain a thorough understanding of how separation and divorce impacts on the psychological well-being of learners at secondary school level by taking into

consideration how the different systems within the learner's lives are affected.

## 2.3. Core concepts

To ensure a thorough understanding of the research study, the researcher has endeavoured to clarify the following terms : divorce, parental separation, marriage, family, binuclear family, adolescents and mental health.

Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas and Murch (2003, p.5) defines **divorce** as "the point in time at which a couple's marriage is legally terminated and at which they are free to remarry."

In many instances the process of **parental separation** takes place prior to the actual divorce. Therefore in close correlation of the term divorce, **separation** could be defined as "the separation of man and wife which has the effect of making each a single person for all legal purposes but without the ability to contract a new marriage" ( Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, 1913).

Both of these key terms need to be understood in relation to the term of **marriage**. Marriage is defined as a "state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in a consensual and contractual relationship that is recognised by law" (Merriam-Webster, 2008). In addition to this Johnson (1988, p.64) adds that marriage is limited to one male and one female in a monogamous union in which each is expected to be faithful. Marriage is for the purpose of procreation, and the family is based upon a division of labour by gender and a hierarchical relationship between husband and wife.

Moreover, the naturalistic definition of marriage conflicts with current trends in family law e.g., there is a need to move away from a strictly biological definition and move towards a more functional definition of **marriage**. This will further encompass the definition of same-sex marriages as well. The Free Dictionary Thesaurus (2008) defines **same-sex marriages** as "two people of the same sex who live together as a family". To a much larger extent, sociologist Popenoes (1988, as cited in Georgas, 2009) explains that same-sex families comprise of one adult and one dependent

person, where the parents do not have to be part of both sexes and the couple does not have to be married.

The term **'marriage'** can be closely linked to that of **family**. Van Zyl (1997, p.33) explains that the term **'family'** is generally taken to mean the nuclear family consisting of the father, mother and children. However, because of the high incidence of divorce, it is no longer realistic to consider the nuclear family as the norm. Moreover, in keeping with the context of the topic, it is essential to define a 'blended family'. Suite101.com (2007) cites The Merriam Webster dictionary's definition of a blended family as a "family that includes children of a previous marriage of one spouse or both". In addition to this Georgas (2009, cites Murdock, 1949, p.2) who defines family as "a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults."

Bearing the concept of divorce in mind, the formation of the **binuclear family** comes to the forefront. The reorganisation of the nuclear family through the process of divorce frequently results in the establishment of two households, maternal and paternal. Ahrons and Rodgers (1987, p.42) defines the term binuclear family as a family system with two interrelated nuclear households or nuclei of the child's family of orientation, that forms one family system for the child, whether or not the households have equal importance in the child's life experience.

Herein the study aims to investigate the effects of parental separation and divorce on the psychological well-being of secondary school learners. The secondary school learners in question are in the age group of 12 to 16 years of age and may be referred to as adolescents.

An **Adolescent** is defined as the following:
- a person between the ages of 9 and 19 years of age, (Worldreference. com, 2005),
- a person between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age, (WHO, 2005),

- The American Academy of Paediatrics and Society for Adolescent Medicine define it as a person between the ages of 13 and 31 years of age ( Kunins, 1993, as cited by Marcus, 2002).

For the purpose of this research study, the secondary school learners are referred to as adolescents and teenagers, are between the ages of 12 to 16 years.

The psychological well-being of these learners in question makes reference to **mental health**. Merriam – Webster (2009) defines **'mental health'** as "a state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and meet ordinary demands of everyday life."

## 2.4. Conclusion

This chapter focused on how social constructivism and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory could enhance the readers understanding of how parental separation and divorce impacts on the psychological well-being of secondary school learners. In addition to this, it also provided an extensive explanation of terms related to the study.

Chapter three will focus on the literature review related to the research study.

# CHAPTER THREE
# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 3.1. Introduction

The literature review encompasses research done in the past on the same topic whereby researchers may have had differing or similar conclusions.

> "Researching the family is a good place to begin because that is where children are born and raised." (Stearns, 2005)

Many scholars have spent numerous years studying the effects of parental separation and divorce on children. Lees (2006) explains that one reason for studying the family, is that family process (i.e. how well a family functions) is a type of social capital. If a family builds this capital in the first generation, it increases the chances that the second generation will thrive, because they have the experience and models of a good family to draw upon.

Bearing this in mind one can conclude that after parental separation or divorce, the family as a unit will be at a disadvantage. The effects of parental separation and divorce on the family are not just a personal problem but a social one as well.
An important element is brought to the forefront in Ahrons and Rodgers (1987) in that it is stated that while marriages may be discontinued, families – especially those in which there are children, continue after marital disruption.

## 3.2. Statistics and prevalence

Research conducted in the past indicates that there is a rapid increase in the divorce rate. Whitehead (1996) states that the first decades of the 20th century brought a rise in the divorce rate in America. Immediately after The First World War, the divorce rate increased from 4,5 to 7,7 per 1000 marriages, with the steepest rise occurring from 1919 to 1920.

Pike (2000, as cited in Akpan , 2007) claims that over the past 30 years there has been an increase in the divorce rate in Australia. This claim is substantiated with figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics which indicated that two in every five marriages will end in divorce.

The situation pertaining to the statistics of divorce in South Africa is very much similar to that of America and Australia. Central Statistics (1995, as cited in Pillay, 1999) indicates a 21,2% divorce rate among all race groups in South Africa in 1995. In 1999, just 4 years later, Statistics South Africa (2006) reported a divorce rate of 26,4%, this involving 45 330 children in the process. The divorce rate at that time in Kwa-Zulu Natal was reported to be 90,3% , with the highest number of divorces being 1 492. However, in 2002 there was a divorce rate of 520,4 per 100 000 married females indicating 31 566 divorces and 178 639 marriages, as recorded by Statistics South Africa (2005).

The evidence available from the above-mentioned research studies and statistical analysis indicates that children are no longer being raised in a family with both parents. This has a negative impact on the well-being and the developmental growth of children. Many children from divorced families seek attention from alternate sources and develop abnormal behavioural patterns. This is done in an attempt to get their parents back together. Due to the fact that the custodial parent may have to work long hours, they are left to fend for themselves. Their alternate lifestyles involve crime, drugs, sex, homosexuality, pornography and Satanism (Cohen, 2002; Emery, 1999; Jeynes, 2002).

### 3.3. The causes of parental separation and divorce

In today's society, people are socialised in a particular manner whereby they want to be viewed in a positive light and be accepted by societies and their applied norms and standards. Owing to the fact that 'separation and divorce' is against the norm, and viewed as something that is taboo, people affected by this are viewed in a negative light.

According to Panse (2009), society frowns on divorce and divorced people and moreover they are likely to find themselves as social pariah. From the above-mentioned statistics, one can conclude that marriage is no longer the institution that it once was. It is becoming increasingly common for couples to seek a legal separation and even divorce when things are no longer working out. The processes of separation and divorce become a bit easier when just a man and woman are involved. However, it becomes more difficult when the man and woman are parents and there are children to think about as well.

It is noted in Panse (2009) that there are many different and complex causes and reasons for divorce, each of them specific to that particular couple's marital relationship, their individual experiences and personal problems. Furthermore Johnson (1988, p.68) states that marital failure cannot be traced to a single factor, for causes can be attributed to a partner's behaviour, to problems in the relationship or even to broader social factors.

It is further brought to our attention in Panse (2009) that in many cases, quite a few of the problems that cause marital separation and divorce have existed in the couple's relationship before they got married. These problems were either not acknowledged or were ignored in the fond hope that marriage might offer a miraculous panacea.

Clarke-Stewart and Bretano (2006, p.7) explains the traditional 'fault-based' view of divorce, to be where an 'innocent and injured' spouse seeks to obtain relief from the spouse who had done 'a wrong'. A broad spectrum of problems is noted below as probable causes for parental separation and divorce.

### 3.3.1. Financial Problems

Financial problems in a marriage are related to money or aspects pertaining thereof which is a possible cause of disagreements between couples. According to Van Velsen (2008), statistics show that financial difficulties came to the forefront in most divorce cases which were filed for the latter half of 2007 and early 2008.

In adding further clarification to this aspect, Payne (2010) states that the jest of the problem lies in the fact that many couples fail to openly discuss their financial situations before marriage, which may lead to partners having differing attitudes towards finances. These financial issues include information pertaining to the couple's individual spending habits, salary information, debt status, financial responsibilities, financial status and lack of financial support (Payne, 2010 ; Perry, 2010 ; Rowd, 2008).

Moreover, it is noted in Payne (2010) that a common situation is one from a wife who was socialised to believe that the husband is the breadwinner, while the husband believes that they should share financial responsibilities.

A slightly different view is noted in Weston (2010) whereby it is stated that financial problems are part of the mix, but to pick them out and say they're a great cause of separation and divorce is premature.

Conclusively, Glee (2010) notes that if a couple is struggling with issues pertaining to money, it often leads to stress, which can put a great strain on the marriage. Many couples may fail to resolve issues regarding their finances and to a much further extent may not be willing to compromise in order to solve the problem.

### 3.3.2. Abuse

According to Rowd (2008), abuse in a marriage may come in the form of sexual abuse or emotional abuse. Drug and alcohol abuse, as well as excessive gambling, which could be detrimental to the marriage, may also be used as a form of abuse. It is further stated in Inglish (2002) that a spouse's unwillingness even to communicate in a fictional, non-abusive manner is a serious problem and can be noted as verbal abuse.

In relation to alcohol abuse, Clarke-Stewart and Bretano (2006, p.49) claims that numerous studies have documented an association between divorce and alcohol consumption, demonstrating that people who drink are more likely to report that their alcohol abuse, along with their drug and spousal abuse, contributed to their marital separation and divorce. In conjunction to this, Malenowski, Broman and Lewis (1971

as cited in Levinger & Moles, 1979, p.190) reveals a significant relationship between disrupted marriages and multiple hospitalisations for acute alcoholic psychoses.

Keeping the above-mentioned information in mind, it is noted by the researcher that abuse in a marriage is a contributing factor towards marital separation and divorce.

### 3.3.3. Incompatibility

There are numerous kinds and forms of incompatibility that may lead to separation and divorce. Rowd (2008) states that in some cases couples may not be able to find a common ground sexually, intellectually or emotionally between each other. Their marriage situations become unbearable and they are unable to live life with someone they can't relate to.

Johnson (1988, p.69) further places emphasis on the fact that couples with personality differences and poor communication often expressed the need to find happier situations. Personality differences led to flaws in the relationship. In their search for happier situations, they turned to separation and divorce as a solution.

On a more positive note, Rubin (1973 as cited in Levinger & Moles, 1979, p.69) claims that people tend to be most attracted to one another if they are similar or equally matched on a variety of social, physical and intellectual characteristics and attitudes.

### 3.3.4. Sexual Problems

As humans we are driven by biological desires and needs to be physically intimate. Sexual problems in a couple's marriage can also lead to separation and divorce. According to Johnson (1988, p.70) sexual problems are commonly reported as the reason for separation and divorce. Reports range from vague references to sexual difficulties to a change in sexual orientation.

Despite many people saying that physical intimacy is not as important as emotional, spiritual or family intimacy; the fact is that sexual problems or lack of sexuality in a marriage is still a top reason for separation or divorce (Payne, 2010).

Rowd (2008) states that sexual dysfunction or sexual disinterest may begin after couples tie the knot. If a couple is unable to resolve this problem, it may become a reason for separation or divorce.

The nature of sexual problems in a marriage may be due to sexual dysfunction or sexual disinterest. Sexual dysfunction refers to a difficulty experienced by an individual or a couple during any stage of normal sexual activity (Wikipedia, 2010). However, sexual disinterest can be twofold. Spoor (1999) states that the first type is hypoactive desire; which is basically a disinterest in sexual activity. The second type is an aversion to sex; whereby sexual activity actually repulses the person or makes them unusually apprehensive.

### 3.3.5. Marital Infidelity

In close correlation to sexual problems experienced in a marriage, is the problem of marital infidelity.

Rowd (2008) explains the concept of marriage. The law on marriage is that it is common in monogamous societies and that marriage must be a mutually exclusive arrangement between two parties. It is further stated in Inglish (2002) that marriage vows and its acceptance thereof is life-long and permanent. However, cases of abuse and infidelity lead to marriage vows becoming null and void.

Glee (2010) further explains that infidelity is a common cause of separation and divorce, whereby more often than not, it is the man in the relationship that cheats and has another romantic liaison going on behind his wife's back.

Ahrons and Rodgers (1987, p.65) adds that the norms and fidelity in marriage are still quite powerful, despite the prevalence of extra-marital affairs. Establishing any kind of relationship with a new partner, no matter how 'platonic' invokes these norms.

In accordance to the above-mentioned information, Clarke-Stewart and Bretano (2006, p.45) state that having an affair is the ultimate insult to a marriage and one of the most common and consistent causes of separation and divorce. However, it is further noted that an extra-marital relationship may be a symptom of an unhappy relationship which provides the proverbial 'last straw' in the decision to separate or divorce.

Some marital offences such as adultery and desertion are seen as symptoms of the breakdown in the emotional quality of the marriage (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987, p.15). To a much further extent, studies conducted by Goode (1956), Harmsworth and Minnis (1955), Kephart (1955), Levinger (1966a) and Locke (1951) as cited in Levinger & Moles (1979, p.57) lend support to the fact that infidelity appears to play a part in separation and divorce which is common among younger couples. The attractiveness of remarriage and alternate sexual liaisons may account for reasons for separation and divorce among young couples.

Conclusively Payne (2010) adds that many couples work through a cheating occurrence, whereas some allow for open relationships but in general many marriages do fall apart due to infidelity as it greatly blocks the communication pathway between spouses.

### 3.3.6. Communication Problems

It is important to note that most of the above-mentioned problems ultimately lead to communication problems and distancing of partners which in due course decreases the value of marriage.

According to Rowd (2008), communication problems between couples may possibly exist long before they tie the knot. Expectations may not have been made clear or certain issues that could affect a marriage were not brought up. Discussing feelings about aspects that are personally important is also crucial but may not always be practised by couples.

In keeping with Rowd (2008), Perry (2010) also believes that communication problems may prevail from the time the couple got married but adds that they just had not realised it at that moment. Each partner may not be able to meet the expectations the other has of them.

Moreover, Panse (2009) states that lack of communication is one of the leading causes of divorce. A marriage is on the rocks when the lines of communication fail. Couples can't have an effective relationship if either one of them won't discuss their feelings, talk about mutual or personal issues, keep resentments simmering under wraps and expect his/her partner to guess what the whole problem is about.

Conclusively, Clarke-Stewart and Bretano (2006, p.46) state that the major reason for marital breakdown in as many as half of all divorces is conflict between spouses. Non-regulated couples take longer to rebound from a conflict and are less likely to achieve a solution to the problem leading to the reoccurrence of the conflict.

## 3.4. The consequences of parental separation and divorce

> "The divorce of parents is a traumatic event in the lives of children, and often affects them more radically than it does the parents." (Van Zyl, 1997, p.35)

In order to understand how parental separation and divorce impacts on the psychological well-being of secondary school learners at the school in question, it is imperative that one looks at the consequences that the parental separation and divorce may have. A wide variety of literature indicates that the process of separation and divorce impacts on the family as a unit, whereby the children suffer negative consequences ranging from emotional, to behavioural, to academic and even long term effects (Akpan, 2007; Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas & Murch, 2003; Cunard, 1982; Emery, 1999; Jeynes, 2002; Pillay, 1999). It is further indicated in McConnell and Sim (1999) that divorce and the initial separation, is a stressful event in a child's life as they have multiple levels of adjustment to deal with i.e., psychological, cognitive, emotional, academic and social.

With regard to the children's personality, it is noted in Martin-Lebrun, Poussin, Barumandzadeh and Bost (1997) that there were significant differences observed between girls and boys from separated families rather than those from unseparated families.  It can therefore be noted that the process of parental separation and divorce creates a sudden and voluntary (on the part of the parents) imbalance in the family system and this creates a sense of parental betrayal in the hearts of many children (Jeynes, 2002). The process of parental separation or divorce eventually results in each parent going his or her own way, leaving the children in the centre of the process. The increased stress experienced by each parent contributes to a reduction in parental support.

Whitehead (1996, p.182) states that "a high divorce society is a society marked by growing divisions and separation in its social arrangements – further characterised by single mothers and vanished fathers, divided households and split parenting culminating in fractured parent-child bonds and fragmented families and of broken links between marriage and parenthood." With this type of strained parent-child relationship, it is unlikely that the child will be able to function properly and meet the everyday demands of our society.

According to McLanahan and Sandefur (1994, as cited in Jeynes, 2002), less parental support means less parental involvement in the child's life or schoolwork , which ultimately results in less parental supervision and parental control. Jeynes (2002) further adds that this culminates in less time spent with the child. These views are further supported by Stearns (2005, p.8) who states that adolescents from divorced families tend to drink more frequently than adolescents whose parents are not divorced .

Having taken the decision to separate, a couple has to face the consequences of their decision. According to Clarke-Stewart and Bretano (2006, p.56) the period immediately before and after the separation is more stressful than when the divorce becomes final. The period of separation is characterised by anger, anxiety, guilt and depression which is more intense in separation than the actual divorce itself.

Furthermore with reference to conflict in marriage, Van Zyl (1997, p.55) notes that "any form of conflict, both before and after the divorce has a marked impact on children and so too does the psychological adjustment of the custodial parent." Conclusively, Cohen (2002, p.1019) notes that although divorce and separation may be solutions to a discordant marriage and any decrease in intra-family hostility may be constructive, however, for many children their parent's tension continue and the entire divorce process is a long searing experience.

**3.5. The impact of parental separation and divorce on children**

> "Divorce may have a profound effect, not only on the living arrangements of minor children, but also on their socio-economic and psychological wellbeing."                          (Statistics South Africa, 2006, p.11)

For further clarification, Cohen (1971, as cited in Johnson, 1988, p.62) states that the psychologically orientated perspectives explain divorce to be "the culmination of a process of estrangement or a loss of attachment, which is followed by a period of mourning and bereavement" ; whereas the social science perspectives, which is in contrast explains divorce theoretically as a "social process in which one unit of social organisation, the family, breaks down and subsequently undergoes re-organisation."

Butler et al. (2003, p.19) explains that the paternalistic approach towards children affected by divorce is that they are commonly viewed as suffering a pathological experience. In explaining marital separation, Levinger and Moles (1979, p.205) states that it "is an extensively disruptive event, not only ending the continued accessibility of the spouse but also producing fundamental changes in an individual's social role and in his or her relationships with children, kin and friends."

It is stated in Ahrons and Rodgers (1987, p.65) that the early separation phase during parental separation is more likely to be a time of potential crisis for the family. This places the family in a highly vulnerable state. This change in family structure precipitated by separation shatters the everyday family routines as they require re-thinking. According to Weiss (1975, p. 223) troubled children are more likely to exist in families headed for separation than other families. It is further emphasised in Lees

(2006) that children who experience parental separation and divorce exhibit more conduct problems, more symptoms of psychological maladjustment, lower academic achievement, more social difficulties and poorer self-concepts. From the above-mentioned, the researcher notes that parental separation or divorce can be a critically important incident in the autobiographies of these children.

When investigating the topic of parental separation and divorce, the family structure plays a vital role. Stearns (2005) brings to our attention that one needs to take cognizance of the fact that society is based on the family support system and structure which has a huge impact on the adolescent. Disagreements and some degree of conflict that is present between parents may ultimately result in strain on the parent-child relationship. It is for this reason solely that the State considers it necessary to intervene in parents' exercise of their authority or responsibility and to protect children at the time of divorce specifically (Van Zyl ,1997, p.20).

Divorce and parental separation affects both the parents and the children. Cox and Desforges (1987, p.5) claim that after the divorce both parents may experience anxiety, depression and anger with feelings of rejection and incompetence which may then lead them to smoking and drinking heavily. The stress from this may manifest itself as a physical illness. With this situation initiated by the divorce, it is important to note that the parents are not in the best position to meet the needs of their children. It is further noted in McIntosh (1995) and Weiss (1975, p.223) that parental separation; parental conflict and the persisting disturbances associated with them, impacts on the children's development and their capacity to adjust to the separation and divorce.

It is also noted in Van Zyl (1997, p.52), that in writing on children's experiences one notes, that divorce places emphasis on the fact that children are consistently reported to experience feelings of sadness and anger and it may be further noted that older children may fear unhappy marriages for themselves.

Substantial literature suggests that child relations constitute an important influence on children's well-being (Videon, 2002). A study conducted by Videon (2002) aimed to investigate the effects of parental separation on adolescent delinquency and

depression indicated that there was a link between parental separation and the delinquent behaviour of adolescents. These results further highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships within the family.

With reference to children's physical health, Lui and Heiland (2007) claim that children whose parents separate are more likely to develop problems such as asthma in comparison to if their parents remained romantically involved. Weiss (1975, p.214) adds that children may regress to earlier modes of functioning, experience sleep disturbances and somatic symptoms such as cramps or asthma.

In correlation to this, Hois (2007) further adds, that separation from parents impacts on a child's physical health, psychological and cognitive development. It is further stated in Ahrons and Rodgers (1987, p.72) that dealing with health and nutritional needs of children during separation requires additional support outside of the parents. Bearing this in mind, the researcher notes that the extended family and the school can afford the support to the children.

In explaining how adolescents view parental separation and divorce, Levinger and Moles (1979, p.304) states that they have the capacity to assume a much more realistic view of their parents, recognizing each of them as an individual with individual needs and interests. It is due to this that adolescents have a better understanding of their parent's marriage as being a mutually incompatible and unsatisfying relationship.

### 3.5.1. The emotional well-being of the child

> "Marital disruption and physical and emotional disorders are clearly interactive, in the sense that each has the potential to influence the other."
>
> (Levinger & Moles, 1979, p.197)

It is stated in Butler et al. (2003, p.57) that parental divorce constitutes a moment of emotional shock and high anxiety for most children. From the moment that the children become aware of their parental separation, they become involved, at least emotionally, in the process of their parent's divorce.

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Most children from divorced or separated families display instability in their emotional well-being (Jeynes, 2002). Pillay (1999) claims that the process of divorce and the manner in which it is carried out affects not only the couple, but other members of the family as well e.g., the children, spouses' parents and relatives. Emery (1999, p.43) outlines the emotional problems experienced by these children and explains that they "internalise problems such as depression, anxiety and low-self esteem." These sentiments are further reiterated for the South African context in Pillay (1999, p.53) where it is clarified that some of the negative consequences are "conduct problems and delinquency, more teen childbirth, lower educational attainment, an increased likelihood of getting divorced and even increased utilization of mental health services."

Baydar (1988) conducted a study, utilizing data from the National Survey of Children, to investigate the effects of parental separation and ways in which to re-establish their emotional well-being. Results indicated an increase in emotional and behavioural problems which could be attributed to parental separation. Research of this nature lends support to the fact that parental separation and divorce are characterized by problem-laden environments and therefore children who experience these family transitions will carry these undesirable and lasting effects.

In her experience of working with children, the researcher noted that they can be very emotional entities. It is stated in Amato (1993) that divorce is associated with events such as moving, changing schools, giving up pets and loss of contact with grandparents, which is distressing to children. According to Ahrons and Rodgers (1987, p.70) "early marital separation causes emotional distress as parents are compounded by the daily management tasks of two separate households." This sometimes results in role overload for the parent. Hetherington et al. (1978, 1979 as cited in Ahrons & Rodgers,1987) state that research on the effects of marital disruption on children has indicated that role overload for separated parents is a major stressor which frequently results in emotional distress in children. In conjunction to these above-mentioned effects, Cohen (2002) further explains that parental separation and divorce causes "traumatic stress which is brought about when children cannot adequately express what they are feeling about what is happening to them."

Cohen (2002) further notes that the effects of divorce are described as "emotionally traumatic from the beginning of the parental disagreement and rancor, through the divorce and often for many years thereafter."

In correlation to this, an adolescent's emotional state would be affected if he/she experiences separation distress. This profound source of psychological turmoil in divorce is aptly explained by Weiss (1975, p.42) as "a response to intolerable inaccessibility of the attachment figure." It is displayed in a child as follows: withdrawal of attention from other matters, tension, sadness, apprehensiveness, anxiety, fear or panic, and problems in their adult lives as well. It is further explained in Levinger and Moles (1979, p.204) that continued attachment to a parent is displayed by separation distress on contemplating departure from the home. Since loss of attachment produces the intense discomfort of separation distress, it might be expected to give rise to feelings of anger as well.

To a much further extent, Butler et al. (2003, p.185) explains that the parental separation experienced by children from separated and divorced families, and the consequent upheaval in their everyday lives could be regarded as a 'crisis'. The term crisis is defined as "a period of emotional turmoil and stress which temporarily disturbs the normal psychological equilibrium or homeostasis (i.e. the reasonably steady state of everyday life)."

Parental separation and divorce leads to adolescents experiencing feelings of anger towards their parents. It is explained in Weiss (1975, p.212) that children's anger elicits parental irritation which in turn sustains the children's anger, or perhaps anger leads to emotional distress, which then prevents corrective experience.
It is further elucidated in Butler et al. (2003, p.169) that if children are introverted and solitary in nature, they often deal with emotional distress alone, through quiet reflection. Children who have plenty of support from parents, relatives and friends are fortunate, while those who lack this support end up feeling isolated and unsupported.

In addition to these, Twort (2009) places emphasis on the fact that parental separation and divorce leads children to feel hurt and rejected about their family situations. Adolescents may also experience difficulties in discussing things with their parents, as

they are so deeply involved in the situation and are probably upset themselves.

The inter-parental conflict displayed during the process of divorce can also affect children in several ways. According to Amato (1993, p.30) children react to inter-parental hostility with negative emotions such as fear, anger and distress. It is further stated that children also tend to be drawn into the conflict between their parents and are sometimes forced to take sides which ultimately results in deterioration in the parent-child relationship and general family cohesiveness. It is further stated in Weiss (1975, p.215) that adolescents believe that parental separation is disgracing and feel ashamed by it; some may withdraw from friends rather than have to confess to it. Adolescents may even question their parent's moral worth.

To a much larger extent, Butler et al. (2003, p.116) places emphasis on the fact that where conflict continues between the adults, children are sometimes made to carry very uncomfortable emotional burdens and some children may have imposed upon them the entire responsibility for the failure of the marriage. Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, pp.3-5) further emphasizes that parents who are engaged in conflict are less consistent in the discipline they provide, have disruptive bonds of attachment with their children, serve as models for negative behaviour for their children and place them under emotional and cognitive stress.

It is due to this that adolescents reported a lower psychological well-being, lower self-esteem, lower sense of mastery and higher strain with parents. It is further reiterated in Cohen (2002, pp.1019-1023) that adolescents experiencing feelings of decreased self-esteem, may develop premature emotional autonomy to deal with negative feelings about the divorce and their de-idealization of each parent. Their anger and confusion often lead to relationship problems, substance abuse, decreased school performance, inappropriate sexual behaviour, depression and aggressive and delinquent behaviour.

Weiss (1975, p.218) notes that in some mother-custody cases, the adolescents noted their mother depended on them for support, which resulted in them experiencing mixed feelings. Some felt pleased about the fact that their mothers turned to them for support, whereas others felt that they were being over-burdened. In this instance, the

emotional well-being of the child is at stake. Adolescents who offer constant support to the single-parent run the risk of maturing earlier and are constantly having to fill the gap left by the absent spouse. Whereas, adolescents who acknowledged being over-burdened by this, would have to suffer consequences of constantly worrying about the single-parent.

These perspectives emphasize that it is not a single stressor, but the accumulation of negative events that may result in problems for children.

### 3.5.2. Behavioural problems experienced by children

The imbalance in their emotional state leads to a display of negative behavioural patterns. Jeynes (2002, pp.13-19) states that several research studies indicate that children from divorced families have a higher incidence of juvenile delinquency, disciplinary problems, emotional problems and overall behavioural problems. Taking this into account one can identify that the effects of separation and divorce can be severely profound.

It is also imperative that when investigating these behavioural problems experienced by the adolescents, one needs to take cognizance of the factors that contribute to these problems. Herein the study, the participants come from home environments where the parents are either separated or divorced. Cohen (2002, p.1021) explains that parental conflict before the separation often leads to the internalising and externalising of behavioural problems.

With reference to the adolescent's personality, Hois (2007) places emphasis on the issue of control which impacts on the adolescent's behaviour. This occurs when the adolescent feels that a large part of the decisions about his family and life are out of his control. It is further stated in Stearns (2005) that adolescents who spend less time with their parents would spend more time outside the house participating in deviant behaviour such as vandalism. Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, pp.4-5) further noted that children negatively experiencing the marital disruption of their parents exhibit a disproportionately high range of negative behavioural problems and this viewpoint is later supported by Jeynes (2002). Cox and Desforges (1987, pp.50-51) add that there

is also a tendency for girls to become promiscuous.

It is also noted in Van Zyl (1997, p.52) that often behavioural problems and aggressive behaviour are reported in children from divorced families. These children may be clingy, withdrawn and may display delinquent behaviour which will ultimately lead to a deterioration in the level of their school work.
However, a slightly different view is brought forward by Amato (1993, p.30), who claims that children are merely victims of circumstances and attributes these negative tendencies to the modelling of verbal and physical aggression displayed by their parents. It is emphasized that parents indirectly teach their children that fighting is an appropriate method of dealing with disagreements.

Stearns (2005, p.8) notes another perspective whereby it is mentioned that living in a single parent household may result in less attention being paid to the child due to the many responsibilities that the single parent may have. Stearns (2005, p.8) further notes that the introduction of the step parent and the lack of parental supervision may also be the source of problems and may later lead to the child consuming alcohol as a cry for attention. In addition to this, Weiss (1975, p.179) explicates that single-parent mothers complain that their children become less respectful, more wilful and harder to control after their husbands left the home.

The problem of substance use and abuse is also common among children from separated or divorced home environments. This view is supported by Stearns (2005, p.5) who claims that adolescents with divorced parents are more likely to smoke marijuana, and is further emphasized by Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.4) who stated that following the divorce, boys reveal a disproportionate increase in substance use. However, in support of the eradication of such problems, Stearns (2005, p.9) conclusively notes that the more quality time spent with parents, the less likely the adolescents were to indulge in such acts of deviant behaviour.

To a much larger extent Steven, Chris and Bryan (1998) conducted a study to investigate the association between parental separation and alcohol consumption and problem drinking. The results noted higher levels of alcohol consumption, heavy drinking and problem drinking were found for those adolescents who had experienced

parental separation and divorce.

A further issue of concern is noted in Hois (2007), where she explains that when an adolescent believes he/she has lost control over his/her life due to parental separation or divorce, he/she is likely to become suicidal or act out in a variety of anti-social ways.

### 3.5.3. The impact on academic excellence and school life

While many of the research studies indicate that separation and divorce impacts negatively on the psychological well-being of the learner, research studies also draw our attention towards its effects on the learner's educational achievement. Divorce literature also indicates that "no matter what the grade level of the child is, divorce shows a consistent effect on the academic achievement among students" and children of divorce tend to "suffer the greatest academic decline in their areas of greatest strength previous to the divorce" (Jeynes, 2002, pp.13- 15). These views are further substantiated by McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) and Kurdek and Sinclair (1998) as cited in Jeynes (2002). Clarke-Stewart and Brentano (2006, p.114) justifies this as, due to the fact that they "can't keep their minds of the divorce, school-age children often have problems in school."

According to Lees (2006), educational attainment is easier to quantify than other outcomes, as research studies clearly show that when parents divorce, children's educational attainment tends to suffer. Lytle (1994) further adds that children from divorced families are especially restless in the classroom. They tend to be worried, frightened and depressed and this impacts negatively on their concentration. This disruption compromises their receptivity to learning. This is further confirmed by Cox and Desforges (1987, p.6) where it is stated that children from divorced homes show marked changes in school behaviour such as deterioration in work standards, noticeable restlessness, an inability to concentrate on work and a big increase in time spent day-dreaming.

In support of the above-mentioned researchers, Clarke-Stewart and Brentano (2006, p.114) cites a study conducted by the National Association of School Psychologists of 700 children from divorced and separated families. Results indicated that children from these families not only performed worse on tests of reading, spelling and mathematics achievements, but also received worse ratings on classroom behaviour. These learners were less regular in their school attendance, less popular and socially competent, and more likely to be referred to a psychologist or placed in special education.

It is further stated in Cornell (1994) that the psychological damage regarding parental separation and divorce builds up before the divorce and dissipates after it, but the academic performance of children from these families continue to weaken. They fall behind academically and are not able to catch up. Once they fall behind, they lose self-esteem and motivation.

With specific reference to the academic performance of female learners from separated and divorced families, Ham (2003) concluded that separation and divorce hurts female high school students more than it hurts their male peers. In analyzing data collected from 265 high schools, Ham (2003) established that students from intact families outperform those students from divorced families across all categories. It is further noted in Lees (2006) that a study using a sample based in Christchurch noted that children whose parents had separated or divorced had consistently lower test scores and cognitive ability compared to those from married parent families. In support of the above-mentioned researchers, Elliott and Richards (1991) state that children whose parents divorced when they were between 7 and 16 years old were found to obtain worse academic scores than those children whose parents remained married. In addition to this, it was noted that having a stable home environment, after their custodial mother remarried, had no positive effect on academic performance.

In further support of the above-mentioned researchers, Burgoyne and Morison (1977 as cited in Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, p.117) states that adolescents from divorced families get lower grades, do more poorly on achievement tests, and have lower educational aspirations than adolescents from intact families.

With reference to activities pertaining to school-life, Lees (2006) states that parental separation and divorce has also been linked with a greater number of school problems, including suspension from school, lower school grades and truancy. However, on a more concerning note, Rodriguez and Arnold (1998) go one step further stating that children from divorced families are twice as likely to drop out of school. The process of divorce also creates a sudden and voluntary (on the part of the parents) imbalance in the structure of the family as a unit. Many children experience feelings of loneliness and betrayal. "Less parental support means less parental involvement in the child's life and schoolwork; less parental supervision; less parental control" and "less time spent with their children" (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994 as cited in Jeynes, 2002, p.14).

The deterioration in academic work can also have a profound effect at some stages in a pupil's educational career (Cox & Desforges, 1987, p.97). The ultimate result of this deterioration in academic work will lead to poor academic results, and eventually a bad or no career choice. To a much further extent, Lees (2006) claims that results from a long-term study showed that divorce in the first generation was associated with lower educational outcomes in the third generation.

Conclusively, on a slightly more positive note, Hetherington (1989, as cited in Butler et al. , 2003, p.145) claims that children from separated and divorced families who displayed academic excellence, have high self-esteem and a good sense of humour, are  more likely to adapt to the challenges posed by stressful life experiences.

**3.5.4. The impact on the financial and economic situation of the family**

In many instances maintaining financial stability in normal and intact families becomes a demanding and arduous task for both husband and wife. This becomes an even more strenuous task for a single parent. Grasping the complex challenges of the economic problems of divorce and coming up with constructive solutions, are the key tasks of separation (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, p.59).

Van Zyl (1997, p.51) states that after the actual divorce, there is usually a decline in the family's standard of living. It is also widely acknowledged that women suffer

more economically after the divorce than men and that one-parent families are socially and economically disadvantaged.

Cox and Desforges (1987, p.30) also draws our attention to the fact that the economic status of the parents after the divorce is important as that would determine whether or not there will have to be any fundamental changes in the lifestyle. Whitehead (1996, p.93) explains that divorce carries multiple risks and losses for children, which includes the loss of income, residential stability and other social resources. It presents a picture of a downward spiral in children's economic and family fortunes causing reductions in income, losses in household economics, increased risk of poverty which ultimately leads to welfare dependency.

Clarke-Stewart and Brentano (2006, p.59) further adds clarification to the concept of the economic adjustment process for separated and divorced families, in explaining that it may include the establishing of two new households, the splitting of property, household goods and personal items in addition to finding new housing and relocating.

According to Ohlemacher (2006) divorce has a direct bearing on the financial and economic situation of the family, which impacts on the lives of the children. It is further clarified that married households accumulate twice as much personal wealth in comparison to those who divorce and have to give up half of their assets.
The impact of divorce is explained by Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.4) where it is noted that the reduction in family economic resources and standard of living as a consequence of divorce is partly associated with disruptive and antisocial behaviours, especially in boys.

Conclusively it is noted by Whitehead (1996, p.104) that divorce leads to spouts of short-term unemployment resulting in a spell of poverty. The end-result of this culminates in governmental support for the monitoring of child well-being.

### 3.5.5. Long term effects of parental separation and divorce

With the vast range of problems stated above, it can also be noted that children from divorced or single parent families suffer from long term effects later on in life. According to Levinger and Moles (1979, p.219) although a sudden and unexpected separation produces strong initial distress, the long term effects are variable. In the long run, the degree to which the problem persists will depend on how well the individual is able to adjust to his/her new life style.

In identifying the effects of parental separation and divorce, Rodgers and Pryor (1998, as cited in Butler et al., 2003, p.19) states that children of separated families have about twice the probability of experiencing poor outcomes in the long term, compared to children in intact families. These outcomes include greater levels of poverty, lower educational attainment, poorer health, higher levels of behavioural problems and depressive symptoms and higher levels of smoking, drinking, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy. It is further explained in Butler et al. (2003) that the risk of suffering such outcomes is associated with parental conflict, parental distress and multiple changes in family structure.

Corak (1999) states that adolescents who came from divorced families, tend to put off marriage for a later age and are more likely to experience either separation or divorce in their own marriages thereby perpetuating the cycle.

The results of a research study conducted on married adults based on the long term effects of divorce on children in respect to intimacy in their marriages by Cunard (1982) indicated that children of all ages who have undergone the trauma of divorce experienced less intimate relationships and this results in communication problems arising in their marriages.

The presence of each parent during the developmental phase of a child's life is important. Whitehead (1996, p.63) explains that children experience a developmental phase during childhood during which the child needs the father (who is usually the absent parent) as an object of love, security or identification or even a figure against whom to rebel safely. However, after the process of the divorce, the father figure is

absent and this may have adverse effects leaving the child feeling isolated and rejected. Lutchman (1980, pp.67-68) also found that boys whose fathers were absent during the early stages of their lives showed many signs of maladjustment, namely, they were more dependent on adults, displayed more social and emotional problems, showed more feminine sex role orientations and identified with females more.

Another long term effect is explained by Cohen (2002) where he claims that parental conflict increases a sense of loss in children which is compounded by having to relate to changes in every sphere of their lives. These effects limit or delay their capacity for intimacy and commitment as young adults. This view is further supported in Ahrons (2007), where it is stated that divorce resulted in emotional, stressful and complex transitions for families which affected children in adulthood.  A further impact is noted regarding the relationships maintained by the child. When children's relationships with their father deteriorated, there was a marked deterioration with their relationships with their paternal family members. This further correlates with the mesosystem level as stipulated in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, whereby the effect of the divorce can impact on all systems that the child is in close contact with (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p.52).

Corak (1999) further notes that teenagers from divorced families could also end up becoming less successful adults in the labour market. This is attributed to the fact that their parents were more likely to have lower incomes and less stable attachments to work. This also ties in with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of child development where it is explained that one's environment influences an individual to a large extent (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p.53).

## 3.6. Advice for separated and divorced parents

As we have established separation and divorce has a profound effect on children in the family. It is essential that parents (both the husband and wife) help them triumph over their inhibitions. It is noted in Cox and Desforges (1987, p.20) that many children secretly believe that they must have done something to cause the separation and divorce. Van Zyl (1997, p.55) notes that, first and foremost, continued contact between parents usually has a beneficial effect on the child, and may be the most

important element in the child's adjustment to the divorce.

Furthermore Hois (2007) notes that the negative impact of parental separation can be minimized if the child can live in an environment that is supportive to the entire process and able to offer an explanation and understanding of their life events. Butler et al. (2003) states that children whose parents managed to establish an effective parenting relationship, with an absence of ongoing conflict, seemed best placed to adapt to family change. Likewise, those children who were able to continue positive relationships with both of their parents, despite living in different places and sharing only part of their lives, had less difficulty coming to terms with their parent's marriage breakdown.

With the ever increasing number of divorces, Cohen (2002, p.1020) states that more than one million children are traumatically affected by their parent's divorce. Moreover, pediatricians can play a vital role in offering families guidance in dealing with their troubled children. The role of the pediatrician is described as a buffer, mediator and care-giver, as at the time when children's needs are increased, parents are at an emotional disadvantage and are often less able to address the needs of their children. Van Zyl (1997, p.89) further emphasizes the point that it is the responsibility of both parents to support their children through the divorce which they need to share proportionately, according to their means.

In correlation to affording support to their children, Butler et al. (2003, p.186) explains that it is important for children to obtain reliable information about the separation and divorce, so that they have a better understanding of what is happening and what to expect. It is further noted that children who are well informed are better able to buffer the impact of the crisis, have a stronger self-esteem and a capacity to understand and manage their lives. By contrast, lack of information and confusion adds to children's uncertainties and have long-term adverse repercussions.

In addition to this, Hois (2007) states that during the time of separation, adolescents need to feel that they have increasing control over their own lives, by being an integral part of the decision making process for their future. It is advised that adults need to provide adolescents with as many opportunities as possible so that they feel in

control of some aspects of their lives.

Oesterreich (1996) in his article on the effects of divorce places emphasis on the fact that children of different age groups reacted differently to their parents' divorce. He advises parents of adolescents to take their feelings, input and opinions into consideration when making decisions. It is further noted in Segui (2001) that adolescents who experience difficulties pertaining to their parent's divorce would display tell-tale signs prior to becoming a rebel or displaying delinquent behaviour (as in the case of Melissa mentioned in Chapter 1). These signs should be dealt with good parenting communication skills.

According to Van Zyl (1997, p.56) children spend approximately 15 000 hours at school from the age of five until they complete their schooling. Teachers are, therefore, in a position to objectively observe a child's behaviour and any learning problems that he or she may have. It is, therefore, advisable that both parents try to maintain constant contact with educators at school. This does not necessarily have to be a joint effort. Each parent can do it on his/her own accord to monitor the child's progress.

Counselling can play a vital role in helping children deal with the transition of divorce. McConnell and Sim (1999) conducted research on children from divorced families who underwent the process of counseling in comparison to those who were not counseled. It was found that there were marked differences in counselled and non-counselled children. These differences were found in the children's level of self-esteem, their feelings about separations and their relationships with parents after the separation. The data concluded that the non-counselled children were not as well adjusted to the parental separation as were the counselled children implying a greater need for counseling.

An important aspect for parents to note is that of the siblings. During and after the divorce, many families end up broken. Van Zyl (1997, p.67) states that it is universally acknowledged that, all other factors being equal, siblings should preferably be kept together as this will give the children some sense of continuity and stability, especially during the time of change and trauma in their lives.

Golan (1978 as cited in Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987, p.102) points out that in marital separation and divorce, while crisis may be the initial experience, resolution of the crisis may reveal unanticipated internal and external resources. Such experiences can result in greater system morale and enhanced self-esteem in family members. It is such an outcomes that makes it clear that marital crisis does not inevitably result in a negative experience.

**3.7. Conclusion**

For many years the concept of divorce has been regarded as something that is taboo in society. Although it is seen as a means to put an end to marital discord, the true victims in the entire process are the children. Maintaining a strong parent-child relationship in a household is essential. Stearns (2005, p.9) draws our attention to the fact that "when there is openness and trust in a family the children are less likely to want to break their parent's trust." Conclusively, one can note that the more quality time spent with parents, the less likely are adolescents to get into deviant behaviour.

Chapter three focused on the literature review related to the research study.

Chapter four will focus on the research design and methodology associated with the research study.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter's main focus lies with all aspects pertaining to the research design and methodology adopted by the researcher. Precise emphasis is placed on the aim, statement of the problem, data collection methods and analysis of data.

## 4.2. The purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to explore how learners at secondary school level are affected by parental separation and divorce. According to Smith (1995) the distress caused through parental separation and divorce is "manifested by a variety of symptoms including anti-social acts of aggression, anxiety, depression and other behaviour all of which are cause for concern". Owing to this the researcher further aimed to carry out an intense investigation of each learner's experience, their behavioural patterns and emotional state of mind thereby aiming to see if there is an association between their family contexts and psychological well-being.

## 4.3. Problem statement

The research questions can be stated as follows:
- To what extent does separation and divorce affect learner's psychological well-being?
- What role can the school play in ameliorating these effects to assist learners improve their academic performance?

## 4.4. Research aims

The aim of this research is twofold:
- To investigate how parental separation and divorce affects the psychological well-being of adolescents.

- To generate guidelines and recommendations to assist both parents and educators, to help these adolescents cope with these situations.

## 4.5. Research design

The research study is qualitative in nature as it is in keeping with O'Neill (2006) who explains that qualitative research usually achieves a greater level of depth when fewer participants are studied. Seeing that qualitative research methodologies allows "sensitive subjects to be approached in sensitive ways by allowing the researcher to employ personal skills to help lessen the difficulties of their subject matter" (O'Neill, 2006), adopting it for the topic of parental separation and divorce was appropriate.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that by using qualitative research methods, researchers aim to gather rich data which provides an understanding of experiences of the participants. This allows researchers the opportunity to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of it in terms of the meanings the subjects bring to them. The researcher attempted to gain in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences of coming from broken homes hence framing the researcher's study within a qualitative research framework was appropriate.

Henning (2004) asserted that in qualitative research studies the variables are usually not controlled because the freedom and natural development of action and representation is what the researcher is inclined to capture. Seeing that parental separation and divorce, both are normal everyday life experiences for the participants, by adapting these methods the researcher aimed to capture data that is a true reflection of their reality.

Becker and Hedges (1992) explain that one of the major distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research is the fact that the researcher "attempts to understand people in terms of their own definition of their world which means that the focus is on an insider-perspective rather than an outsider-perspective". This qualitative approach therefore has the capacity to enable the researcher to explore the experiences of these adolescents from separated and divorced families by looking at their experiences from their perspectives.

## 4.6. Research methodology

### 4.6.1. Narrative Inquiry

The research study was framed within the boundaries of a narrative study as the researcher intended to collect information about their life experiences from a small number of learners. It is explained in Creswell (2003, p.15) that narrative research is a form of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives.

The qualitative researcher "collects words (text) and images (pictures) about the central phenomenon and this is collected from people immersed in the setting of everyday life in which the study is framed" (Maree, 2007). Therefore in keeping with these sentiments the researcher asked the participants to write stories pertaining to their experiences.

Divorce places the child under emotional and cognitive stress which could adversely affect his/her state of mind (Jeynes, 2002). Seeing that a child spends approximately seven hours at school, this emotional stress could filter through into the classroom situation. Narrative research allowed the researcher insight into some of this emotional stress experienced by the participants.

### 4.6.2. Context:

The study took place at a secondary school in the Durban South Region. It involved four learners from Grades 8 – 12 (Ages 12-17) whose parents had either separated or divorced. The school has a multi-racial population of 1277 learners. The researcher chose to conduct the research at this school as she is an educator currently teaching at this school which allowed her relatively easy access and interaction with these learners. Within the capacity of an educator and the daily school activities, the researcher interacted with some of the learners in the proposed sample and they indicated some kind of distress and juvenile behaviour. However, during the process of the research study, if these learners indicated signs of distress, counselling was arranged for the learners. It was the firm belief of the researcher that these learners are in need of some kind of support and would therefore be able to provide her with

important, relevant information during her investigation. The school's mission statement also indicates a commitment to ensuring that all learners develop to their full potential, helping them to overcome all hurdles in the process. It is on these grounds that the school accommodated the research study.

### 4.6.3. Literature Review

An intensive literature review focussing on the topic of divorce was carried out by the researcher and this provided her with much needed support as backup for the study. De Vos et al. (2002, p.127) indicates that the function of literature review is to "contribute towards a clearer understanding of the nature and of the problem that has been identified".

The literature review helped the researcher place the research study "in context, indicated the path of prior research and specified how the current research study was linked to those done in the past" (De Vos et al., 2002, p.129). In doing so the researcher was able to identify and build on any limitations and shortcomings other researchers may have encountered in previous research studies.

### 4.6.4. Paradigm

As the researcher was aiming to understand how parental separation and divorce affects the psychological well-being of secondary school learners at a specific school in the  Durban South Region, the research study was framed within the boundaries of social constructivism. Donald et al. (2002, p.42) explains that the central tenets of social constructivism is that of people being shaped by and being active participants of their social context. This guided the researcher's choice of direction in her research. It is further explained in McMillan (2000, p.5) that reality is socially constructed and that rather than a single objective reality, there are multiple realities, each related to the complexity of natural occurring behaviour characterised by the perspectives of the participants. Within the constraints and boundaries of social constructivism, the researcher aimed to understand how the participants encountered the challenges that were placed in front of them due to parental separation and divorce.

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### 4.6.5. Sampling: Purposive

The common variable among the learners in the proposed study is that their parents have divorced, therefore the purposive sampling method which was used to select participants was most appropriate for the research study. Rubin and Babbie (2005) explain that within the use of purposive sampling, the researcher has the advantage to handpick key people who in his/her judgement best represents the range of those persons who would best know the needs of the subject/topic chosen. This point is reiterated by Maree (2007, p.178) explaining that the method of purposive sampling is used in special situations where the sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind. Due to the use of purposive sampling, the data collected from the four learners will be specific to their contexts and the researcher would not be able to generalise any information to other learners experiencing the same problems.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001) purposeful sampling is done to increase the utility of information obtained from the sample. The participants selected were information rich participants who were well-informed and had experienced the realms of coming from families where parents were either separated or divorced.

Akpan (2007) further recommends that researchers conducting studies on divorce in the future make use of a sample number of less than eight participants. This will allow for a more comprehensive study.  It is therefore on the basis of this suggestion that the researcher used a relatively small sample in the research study. A further recommendation is made to avoid white participants as intensive research studies have already been done on them; therefore the researcher intended to choose participants from the other race groups pending their availability.

It is further stated in Bless and Smith (1995) that the method of purposive sampling is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher regarding the characteristics of the representative sample, or a sample composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or conforming attributes of the population.
 It is in keeping with the above characteristics that the researcher chose the method of purposive sampling for the research study.

In order to obtain the required information, the researcher purposively selected participants from families where their parents were either separated or divorced. The researcher intended to collect data from a mixed sample group of both males and females, as the school's population comprised mainly of learners from the African, Indian and Coloured race denominations. However, during the initial stages of sampling, the researcher noted that although many of the African learners lived with a single parent, their parents were not officially married due to the fact that their fathers were not able to pay 'the bride price' for their mothers. The few learners that the researcher approached from the Coloured race group were reluctant to participate in the study. It is due to these two preceding factors that the researcher ended up with female participants from the Indian race group.

**4.6.5.1. Sampling Characteristics**

Table 4.1. Participant information according to age, gender and grade

| Leaner / Participant : Pseudonyms | Age | Gender | Grade |
|---|---|---|---|
| No. 1 : Saron | 17 | Female | Grade 12 |
| No. 2 : Kimona | 16 | Female | Grade 10 |
| No. 3 : Cathy | 16 | Female | Grade 10 |
| No. 4 : Tania | 15 | Female | Grade 10 |

Table 4.2. Participant information according to family status

| Leaner / Participant | Family Status | No of years parents divorced/separated | Age at which parents were divorced/separated | Socio-economic Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. 1 : Saron | Divorced | 13 years | 4 years | Self-employed |
| No. 2 : Kimona | Separated | 9 years | 7 years | Self-employed |
| No. 3 : Cathy | Divorced | 6 years | 10 years | Employed |
| No. 4 : Tania | Divorced | 10 years | 5 years | Self-employed |

There were four female learners who participated in the study. During the duration of the study two of the participants were living with their mothers and two were living with their fathers. Of the three participants in Grade 10 (15 - 16 years of age), two were living with their mothers and one was living with her father. The fourth participant who was in Grade 12 was living with her father.

Due to the fact that each participant interviewed in the research study is unique and diverse in terms of their personality, the researcher found it necessary to give a brief description of each one of them. To protect their identity, pseudonyms will be used herein.

### Participant No. 1 : Saron

At the time of the research study Saron was 17 years old and in Grade 12. She enrolled at the school in 2008 for admission to Grade 11. During the duration of the research study, Saron was living with her father and her elder brother. Her parents divorced when she was 4 years old leaving her to experience the situation of divorce for 13 years. Her mother, with whom she had minimum contact, was living in another province, although both parents have joint custody of the children. During her schooling career, Saron attended 5 different schools due to family relocation.

### Participant No. 2 : Kimona

Kimona was 16 years of age and in Grade 10 at the time of the research study. She was enrolled at the school in 2005 in Grade 8. Her parents legally separated when she was seven years old; therefore she lived within the realms of a separated family for nine years. She lived with her father since the separation occurred as it was her mother who abandoned the family. Her parents are currently going through the process of being divorced. Kimona is still in contact with her mother but she claims that their relationship is not good. Since the separation Kimona has attended seven different schools due to the turmoil experienced in the family. Kimona has three elder sisters. Her father is a self-employed businessman.

**Participant No. 3 : Cathy**

Cathy is 16 years of age and had been living with her mother, the custodial parent during the duration of the research study. Her father left South Africa to settle in another country and was in a relationship with another woman. Cathy experienced living with a single parent for six years, when her parent's divorced she was six years of age. Cathy has two younger siblings who also live with her mother.

**Participant No. 4 : Tania**

Tania, the last participant in the research study was 15 years old. She was in Grade 10. Her parents divorced when she was five years old and she has been living in a single-parent household for the duration of 10 years. From the time of the divorce, Tania has been living with her mother and her elder brother. Her father has not been in contact with them. Tania's elder brother was in Grade 12 during the year of the research study. Her mother is self-employed.

### 4.6.6. Data collection

De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2002, p.291) advises researchers that the purpose of the research must guide the researcher to choose the most effective method. Bearing this in mind the researcher used the following data collection techniques, to collect data that is fairly narrative and descriptive: narrative stories, personal narrative diaries, time line and semi-structured interviews with the participants.

### 4.6.6.1. Narrative Stories

This preliminary method of data collection used in the research study required that the participants write narrative stories about their life experiences. The intention of the researcher here was that these narrative stories would furnish her with information about the problems, challenges and life experiences of the participants from their past. It is noted in Heo (2004, p.374) that narrative inquiry is a way of making sense of human life and entails the ways in which humans experience the world. This view is further supported by Bruner (1996). The researcher presented each participant with a set of written guidelines (See Appendix D) as to what was expected from them when writing out their narrative stories. Using narrative stories as a method of data collection helped the researcher gain an

understanding of how the participants viewed the consequences of parental separation and divorce and further indicated the impact it had on the participants.

Heo (2004, p.375) claims that narratives is a mode of knowing and understanding which captures the richness and variety of meaning in humanity, as well as a way of communicating who we are, what we do, how we feel,  and why we ought to follow a certain course of action. It is further relayed in Jonassen and Hernandez –Serrano (2002) that narrative stories can be used as an exemplar of concepts, principles, or theories , and as cases to represent a real situation or a problematic situation which needs to be solved. Here, within the research study, the researcher aimed to seek solutions or strategies to help the participants deal with the problem of parental separation and divorce.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.1055) also explain that narratives entails utilising personal memory, epiphanies, existential crises in the person's biography and allows the researcher exploration of other forms of writing, which lead the researcher to the next method of data collection.

### 4.6.6.2. Personal Narrative Diaries

The second proposed method of data collection entailed that the participants keep narrative diaries for a period of three months. The purpose of these narrative diaries was to gain information on the current situation and emotions that the participants would find themselves in and experiencing. The researcher chose this method of data collection as the participants were adolescent females. It is a trend among the female youth to keep diaries in which they note the events of each day. This activity would then be a task that they would be able to relate to.

According to McKernan (1996) narrative diaries are unstructured techniques and they permit maximum freedom of the participant's response and this allowed for the researcher to collect a continuous stream of events and behaviours. By involving the participants in writing both narrative stories and diaries the researcher aimed to collect information about the participant's past and present life situations. It is further noted by Suzuki (2004) that diaries are important, introspective tools when researchers attempt to undertake descriptive and interpretive research. The researcher provided the participants with a template of a diary page (See attached Appendix H). In addition the researcher ensured

that each participant had a sufficient number of copies to take them through the stipulated time period.

In addition to the above researchers, Corti (1993) also gives explanation to the fact that in comparison to interviews, personal diaries provide a more reliable alternative for accurately recalling sensitive information. Yet, it is also stated that when these diary entries are used in conjunction with interviews it proves to be one of the most reliable methods of obtaining information. Therefore, the researcher conducted unstructured interviews with each participant at two week intervals.

### 4.6.6.3. Timeline

In conjunction with recording the personal narrative diaries, the participants were required to collect photographs of themselves in context of their family situation from birth to present. These photographs were then used to create a timeline. The use of a timeline will allow for a visual representation of the changes experienced by the participants. The researcher chose to use photographs in the form of a time line as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stipulates that photographs "take the researcher into the everyday world of the subject". This viewpoint is further reinforced by Mahadev (2006).

The researcher collected the photographs that the participants intended to use in their timelines. These photographs were then scanned and printed in colour. The prints were then handed back to the participants for them to make use of in their timelines. The researcher felt that in doing so, the participants would still be able to preserve their memories in the form of their original photographs and so too complete their timelines. The researcher further provided them with the required stationery in which to complete their timelines.

As the data that the researcher was aiming to collect is for the most part descriptive in nature, the methods of data collection needed to allow the participants the freedom and comfort to express their views. This lead the researcher to the next method of data collection which was used in conjunction with the timelines. The researcher went on to use the timeline as a prompt to elicit a response from the participants during the semi-structured interviews.

### 4.6.6.4. Semi-structured interviews

An interview is defined as a data collection encounter in which one person (an interviewer) asks questions of another (a respondent) which may be conducted face-to-face (Rubin & Babbie, 2005, p.750). According to Cohen et al. (2007, p.349) interviews, "enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view." Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) further explain that conducting interviews is a more natural form of interacting with participants. The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule (See attached Appendix E) for the interviews based on timeline and an interview schedule (See attached Appendix F) for the interviews based on narrative diary entries to interview the four participants. These interviews were conducted mainly after school and, where possible, during lunch breaks.

Maree (2007, p.8) places importance on the fact that semi-structured interviews yield best results when collaborated with other data. It is in keeping with this tenet that the researcher based the first set of interviews on the timeline and the next set on the narrative diaries which were conducted at intervals of two weeks. The aim within the research study was to conduct three semi-structured interviews per participant for the stipulated time period which was accomplished with ease.

Cohen et al. (2007, p.376) explain that conducting individual interviews will yield a large amount of data in comparison to focus-group interviews. The researcher anticipated that the information obtained from these semi-structured interviews would provide her with an in-depth insight into some of the problems experienced by the participants.

All the above-mentioned data collection techniques ensured that the researcher spent a prolonged period of time with the respondents. Creswell (2003, p.196) states that by spending a prolonged period of time in the field, the researcher will develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and will be able to convey detail about the site and the people which will lend credibility to the participant's narrative account.

### 4.6.7. Process of data analysis

The process of data analysis is explained as the process of "making sense out of text and image data" collected during a research study (Creswell, 2003, p.190). The qualitative methods of data collection used in the study resulted in large amounts of textual and visual data. Prior to beginning with the process of data analysis, the researcher had to organise and prepare the raw data. Here the researcher transcribed all semi-structured interviews that were based on the personal narrative diary entries and the timelines. These transcripts were then typed and given to the participants who then had to verify if they were the true reflection of each interview that took place. Each participant was then required to sign each page of the typed interview as a means of compliance. Furthermore, once all the data was analysed and the researcher had identified the relevant themes, these themes were taken back to the participants for verification.

This process is termed as "member-checking" and is explained in Creswell (2003, p.196) as a process to "determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate." The process of "member-checking" is further asserted in Lincoln and Guba (1985) as an excellent strategy for researchers to implement to ensure trustworthiness of their research study.

Creswell (2003, p.190) further explains that the process of data analysis "involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data."

The narrative stories, and transcripts of the interviews based on the personal narrative diary entries and timeline were then analysed using the "open-coding" technique. De Vos et al. (2002, p.346) explains that "open-coding" entails a process whereby "data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data." Within the process of analyzing the textual data obtained from the three data sources mentioned above, the researcher began by reading through the raw data to obtain a

general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. The researcher also made notes in the margin and made a recording of general thoughts that came to mind.

The researcher then began the next step of detailed analysis within the coding process. In keeping with Rossman and Rallis (1998, p.171, as cited in Creswell, 2003, p.192), the researcher began organizing the textual data into "chunks", whereby she assigned labels to each "chunk" of information. Once this was completed, the researcher was then able to use this coding technique to identify the emerging themes. The researcher worked with each participant's interviews independently. However, the researcher noted that there were some similarities which existed among all four participants. This data analysis process was adapted from De Vos et al. (2002, p.346). These will be discussed later on in the chapter on results and discussion.

### 4.6.8. Design limitations

The qualitative data collection methods used in the research study resulted in large amounts of visual and textual data. It was time consuming for the researcher to analyse and interpret this information. However, the researcher was able to overcome this by adopting the open coding technique during the data analysis stage and thus the task became more manageable.

Using interviews as a method of data collection involving learners was relatively more challenging in comparison to interviewing adults. Cohen et al. (2007, p.268) explains that interviewing is a social, interpersonal encounter where power relations can influence the process. The researcher found that by her being present during the interview resulted in the respondents having the opportunity to respond in a biased manner. The researcher had anticipated this at the initial stage and therefore used the personal narrative stories and narrative diary entries in conjunction with the interviews. By doing this the researcher was able to eliminate some degree of this bias.

During the interview process, the researcher encountered occasions where some of the respondents were reluctant with their answers. The researcher had to make use of the two probing techniques as stipulated by Zorn (1991) in order to minimise this problem. These were the 'basic probe' technique and the 'explanatory probe' technique. The 'basic probe' technique entailed that the researcher repeat the question so that the respondent could gain clarity, and the 'explanatory probe' technique required the researcher to ask smaller, more directing questions in order to gain a more in-depth understanding.

By using the timelines in conjunction with the interviews the researcher's aim was to reach a conclusion that was a fair reflection of their experiences and also gain some aspect of accuracy. However, as noted earlier, some participants experienced feelings of apprehension during the interview process, especially noting the fact that divorce may be a sensitive issue. The researcher being an educator at the school, had not only been in contact with them daily for a relatively long period of time, but had also been able to maintain a good relationship with the participants in the research study, even out of the boundaries of the study. This had helped the participants get rid of any reservations that they may have had. All aspects of the interview that appeared to be unclear to the participant, was clarified by the researcher and by doing this the researcher was able to eliminate problems that the participants had regarding issues they did not understand.

### 4.6.9. Trustworthiness

Research done within the qualitative paradigm is "largely an investigative process where the researcher gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing and classifying the object of the study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are "worth paying attention to" and this is done by paying attention to credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.525).

**4.6.9.1. Credibility**

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006, p.62) states that "credible research ultimately produces findings that are convincing and believable." Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.296) further make clear that "credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a 'credible' conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data." In this regard, the researcher undertook to use the process of "member checking" whereby participants were provided with transcripts of the interviews and themes identified after the analysis of the data to provide clarification on the information obtained.

Due to the fact that the researcher chose a variety of methods of data collection, she was able to triangulate the data. TEL 598 (2007, p.1) explains that triangulation of data ensures that the data that is collected from one source confirms the data that is collected from another source. Seeking out data from several different types of sources can provide insights about the same events and relationships. Perone and Tucker (2003, p.2) further explains that the process of triangulation will capture a complete, holistic and contextual view of the problem and each method will contribute to this perspective. With reference to the topic of divorce, Akpan (2007) in her research study, suggests the triangulation of data collection methods as it may yield more favourable results. Keeping the above-mentioned in mind, the researcher used a variety of data collecting techniques, i.e. narrative stories, personal narrative diary entries, interviews and visual representations in the form of timelines.

**4.6.9.2. Transferability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) put in plain words that the process of transferability "is the degree to which the findings of the inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project." Due to the research topic being based on the topic of parental separation and divorce, and the researcher having used the method of purposive sampling, to handpick her participants, the data collected from the four learners will be specific to their contexts and the researcher would not be able to generalise any information to other learners experiencing the same problems. However, the recommendations given at the end of the study would be most useful to all stakeholders in education.

### 4.6.9.3. Dependability

Dependability is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006, p.64) states that dependability within qualitative research indicates the extent to which a researcher will be convinced that the findings occurred as proposed. The researcher achieved this by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the process of data collection to the participants during the data collection process. Further, in keeping with the guidelines stipulated by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006), the researcher ensured that the process of data collection, the analysis and reporting of the findings were described in as much detail as possible.

### 4.6.9.4.Confirmability

Another aspect used to ensure that the research study was worthy, was that of 'confirmability'. De Vos et al. (2002, p.352) explains that confirmability looks at the degree to which the results of one study could be confirmed and corroborated by other researchers. Confirmability is further explained as "a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure that the aspect of confirmability was maintained, the researcher ensured that checking and rechecking of the data was done throughout the study. The themes and categories identified from the personal narrative diary entries and the transcripts of the interviews were checked and the changes were documented in the form of a data audit which was done by a fellow researcher.

The data analysis process was further guided by an audit trail. Rubin and Babbie (2005, p. 465) explain that auditing in research occurs when "a researcher leaves a paper trail of field notes, transcripts of interviews, journals, and memos documenting decisions made along the way."

The researcher used the open-coding technique during the process of data analysis and the outcomes achieved here were further discussed with a colleague who had already completed her research study. This is termed as 'peer debriefing and support'. The concept of peer debriefing  and support can be of advantage to researchers conducting research studies. Rubin and Babbie (2005, p.465) explains that this occurs when "teams of investigators meet regularly to give each other feedback, emotional support, alternative

perspectives and new ideas about how they are collecting data or about problems."

## 4.6.10. Ethical issues

According to Mouton (2001, p.238) the "ultimate goal of all science is the search for truth' and 'scientists have the right to search for truth but not at the expense of the rights of other individuals in society" (Mouton, 2001, p.239). Research more often requires people to reveal personal information about themselves (Rubin & Babbie, 2005, p.71).

It, therefore, becomes incumbent upon the researcher to take all ethical issues pertaining to the research study into consideration.

### 4.6.10.1. Informed consent

Creswell (2003, pp.63-65) explains that it is imperative that the researcher conveys the purpose of the study to the participants at the onset of the study. Keeping this in mind the researcher informed all participants of the aims, purpose and process of the research study in writing (See Appendix G).

Due to the fact that the participants were minors, who were under the age of 18, informed consent forms were drawn up (See Appendix A) and given to their custodial parent. The consent forms, in addition to obtaining consent from the custodial parent, explained the purpose of the study, the nature and procedures it would undertake, clarified the fact that all aspects of confidentiality will be adhered to strictly and that participation in the research study was on a voluntary basis whereby the participants had the freedom to withdraw from the research study at any time. The researcher further went on to offer a copy of all results to the participants and their parents once completed.

The gatekeepers, in this instance - were The Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of Education and the school principal. The researcher also sent out letters requesting permission to conduct the study at the stipulated school. The researcher exercised extra caution, especially during the data analysis process. The names of the participants were not used and, where it became crucial for names to be mentioned,

aliases or pseudonyms were used to protect the participants identities (See Appendix B for the letter to The Department of Education and Appendix C for the letter to the school principal).

Once the data is analysed it will be on record at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Edgewood campus, in the care of the supervisor, for a period of 5 years, after which it will be disposed of. The data that was obtained during the study was not shared with any individual who was not involved in the project.

**4.7. Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the research study, with emphasis on the research design and research methodology used by the researcher. It also stressed on the importance of taking all ethical issues into consideration, especially considering the sensitive nature of the topic.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

## 5.1. Introduction

Chapter five will outline the major themes identified during the data analysis process. These themes pertain to the lives and experiences of the learners from separated or divorced families.

The aim of this research was twofold:

- To investigate how parental separation and divorce affects the psychological well-being of adolescents.
- To generate guidelines and recommendations to assist both parents and educators, to help these adolescents cope with these situations.

Furthermore, the research study aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

- To what extent does separation and divorce affect a learner's psychological well-being?
- What role can the school play in ameliorating these effects ?

The information presented herein is a result of narrative stories and personal narratives diary entries written in collaboration with timelines created by the participants. Interviews pertaining to the personal narrative diary entries and timelines were conducted by the researcher. In order to protect the identity of the participants pseudonyms are used in place of their real names.

## 5.2. Setting and personal data of participants:
### Our stories thus far . . .

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems ( Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p.56) places emphasis on the fact that the learner is embedded in several environmental systems, all of which influence the learner in one way or another. To a greater extent,

Seifert and Hoffnung (2000, p.7) explain that within Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, there are different levels of interacting systems which refer to the sets of people, settings and recurring events that are related to one another, have stability and influence the child over a given period of time. Bearing this in mind, the researcher thought it crucial to furnish the background history of each participant which would ensure a thorough understanding of these interacting systems. The information pertaining to the participants' lives herein was abstracted from the narrative stories written by the participants themselves.

**Participant No. 1 : Saron**

In her narrative story, Saron relates her life experiences from when her parents were married, through their divorce, to the aftermath thereof. She takes us on a journey through the physical and verbal spousal abuse she witnessed as a child, and although her parents tried to stay together 'for the sake of the children', it never worked out.

After the divorce her parents were granted joint custody- setting in motion a chain of events that would become the rollercoaster ride of her life. The joint custody resulted in her siblings being split up, and her having to move constantly. She speaks about difficulties in adjusting to life with her mum and siblings in a small one-bedroom flat, and how her mum struggled to give them a good life.

Due to her dad's superior financial capabilities, they moved in with him. While living with her dad, she was plagued by a constant fear of what may happen to her mum. She expresses further discomfort at experiencing puberty in the absence of her mother, though her elder sister filled the 'void' of her mother and proved to be her role model. As a result of academic excellence, she was awarded a scholarship in Grade 8. She experienced difficulties when her sister relocated to another province and her dad ruled the house in a disciplined manner.

When she moved back in with her mother, she was exposed to a life of promiscuity and drugs. Her mum, at that time, was engrossed in her 'youthful' ways, and was subsequently unable to render much attention and care to Saron. Her mother indulged in an array of failed and abusive relationships, to which Saron was exposed. As a

consequence of these relationships, her mother lost the support of her family members.

As a result of an increasingly strained relationship with her mum, they were forced to move back in with her dad, who had an immense amount of adjusting to do regarding the new situation. While living with her father, she sought the help of a social worker to confront her use of marijuana, and her increasing amount of casual sexual relationships. Her visits to the social worker proved rather fruitful, and she was able to gain stability in her behaviour.

Saron admits that she is not religious, to a point of being an atheist. Due to the constant destructive nature of her mother, Saron has not maintained a steady relationship with her, a fact to which Saron remains indifferent. Her relationship with her father is much more stable and she admits that he is more supportive. She ultimately admits to an inability to connect with the members of the opposite sex, especially on a romantic level.

**Participant No. 2 : Kimona**

Kimona speaks of her parents being separated for the past eight years. The separation resulted in them living in a joint family scenario: her father, two elder sisters, her dad's mum and his aunt. Following the separation, her third sister chose to live with her mother, resulting in a split in the sibling unit – a reiteration of Saron's situation.

She tells of her mother's abandonment of them without a legitimate reason, and how to this day, she has not been able to internally confront this issue. Kimona attributes her mother's decision to the fact that her parent's marriage was arranged, and to the young age at which her mum married.

Her father, though a successful businessman, excessively indulged in alcohol – a factor that affected the happiness of their family unit. She expresses resentment towards her mother – especially for abandoning the family. She further goes on to explain the difficulties experienced by her father, in juggling the dual role of a businessman as well as a father to three teenage daughters.

She sought the role of a mother-figure in her grandmother and grand-aunt. The profound support which Kimona received from her father could not wholly compensate for her detachment from her mother, who failed to call them even on their birthdays. Life for her father took a turn for the worse after the loss of his business, which resulted in a relapse. Consequently, Kimona and her sister were 'forced' to move in with their estranged mother – an arrangement which was short-lived as they had developed a strong bond with their father – and soon moved back with him.

Her parents have remained single-parents, and communication between the two is non-existent. She visits her mother on weekends, and has accepted the concept of her parents never re-uniting.

**Participant No. 3 : Cathy**

Cathy holds fond memories of her early childhood days. She was the first born to her parents and the apple of her father's eye. Her father's unemployment at the time was a cause of conflict between him and other family members. Nevertheless, Cathy, being the only child, was extremely spoilt.

Upon the birth of her baby brother, who arrived when Cathy was three years old, she was filled with excitement at the prospect of being an elder sister. Aged four, Cathy and her family resided with her grandmother and she would often join her father on trips to the beach.

After a few years, Cathy and her family migrated to another province to move in with her dad's friends, and soon thereafter they were able to move into a luxurious house of their own. To Cathy's disappointment, her parents conceived again, and shortly thereafter chose to return to Durban where they resided with her father's sister. They were forced to move house yet again when things became strained, and this time they lived with her mother's sister. Six months later, they were able to acquire a home of their own, but due to the inferior living conditions, they were forced to move back in with her aunt.

This added strain to her parent's already conflicting marriage. When her parents decided to divorce, it was her mother who broke the shattering news to her, enraging her father as he wished to be part of that conversation.

**Participant No. 4 : Tania**

Tania was 15 years old and living with her mother and her older brother. Her father had deserted them in favour of his family from his first marriage, putting an immense amount of financial strain on her self-employed mother, who struggled with the unstable nature of her income. Her older sibling, in Grade 12, took on a weekend job to supplement his mother's income.

Tania stresses the hardships that her mother endures in fulfilling the roles of both mother and father, which becomes emotionally challenging. Life for her without a father figure is a constant challenge, especially his failure to acknowledge the special days in her life. There is no contact between Tania and her dad. As a result she experienced many milestones and special occasions in his absence (e.g. birthdays, dance graduation ceremonies, school awards day functions, etc.).

Tania, although extremely disturbed by the situation, has managed to come to terms with her circumstances. She receives a tremendous amount of support from her extended family, namely her aunt and uncle, with whom she shares a very close bond. They cater for all her needs, and her uncle fills the void of a paternal figure.

Her family's constant financial difficulties are emotionally strenuous, an adversity which she deals with by speaking to a close confidante. She is grateful for the encouragement and support which her extended family have bestowed upon her, although it does not compensate for the absence of her dad, whom she misses immensely as she feels that every daughter is fond of her father.

**5.3. Results of data collection**

The researcher's study entailed the participant's writing narrative stories, keeping personal narrative diaries for a period of two months and creating a timeline using photographs of their family members from birth to present. The researcher used these

data collecting techniques to gather data. The personal narrative diary entries and the timelines were used as prompts for the semi-structured interviews. These interviews were then recorded, transcribed and typed prior to handing them back to the participants for member-checking. The researcher thereafter commenced with the data analysis process. During this process the researcher identified a number of themes. Table 5.1. depicts the themes indicating the different experiences of the children.

**Table 5.1.**

| MAIN THEMES | RELATED CATEGORIES |
|---|---|
| Theme 1 : Divorce and the emotional well-being of the learner | » Feelings of sadness and distress<br>» Feelings of abandonment<br>» Feelings of anger<br>» Feelings of helplessness<br>» Feelings of stress<br>» Thoughts of suicide |
| Theme 2 : The relationship between behavioural problems and divorce | » Smoking and drug usage<br>» Alcohol use<br>» Relationships with members of the opposite sex<br>» Delinquent behaviour displayed by participants<br>» Reasons for indulging in delinquent behaviour |
| Theme 3 : The impact of parental separation and divorce | » Unstable home environment<br>» Relationship with custodial parent<br>» Yearning for absent parent<br>» Ascribing the missing parent figure<br>» Moving house<br>» Relationships with siblings<br>» Additional responsibilities<br>» Coping strategies |
| Theme 4 : Financial and economic factors | |
| Theme 5 : The impact of divorce on academic life | |

### 5.3.1. Divorce and the emotional well-being of the learner

Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.3) explains that "children experiencing the disruption of their parents' marriage tend to have poorer emotional adjustment, in comparison to those children not undergoing this experience." All of the participants in the research study expressed varying degrees of emotional stress pertaining to their parents' separation and divorce. The statements below indicate the extent to which they were affected by the separation or divorce.

### 5.3.1.1. Feelings of sadness and distress

Some of the participants expressed immense feelings of sadness and distress regarding the parental separation and divorce. The statements listed below bear testament to this:

Kimona attributes her distress to the actions of her mother and writes:

*"Sometimes I hate my mum for abandoning us….."*

Tania writes about the feelings of sadness she experiences for her absent father, and writes: *"It's hurting….because it's sad. Because we don't get to see each other."*

However, Saron is the most profoundly affected, expressing her feelings surrounding the divorce as: *"I am feeling physically and emotionally exhausted which include a whole array of emotions, ranging from dread to sadness."*

Emotionally Saron experiences the pain that her mother goes through in the abusive relationship that she engages in after the divorce and writes:

*"I break down in tears for my mother's pain, and for my own. I understand fully that my mother needs us now more than ever, but no one understands how much they are asking for when they ask me to let her back into my life."*

Saron expresses feelings of distress over the situation her mother has put her in. She writes about eliminating external sources of pain from her life:

*"Yes mum, that includes you, no matter how difficult it may be I'm sorry, I love you, it's for the best. I have cried many a silent tear in the dark of night, in the comfort of my bed. All on your account."*

Taking into account the state of mind of the three above-mentioned participants, the researcher concluded that the process of parental separation and divorce has affected them negatively. The view of the researcher is further supported by Ahrons (2007, p.55) where it is stated that "divorce presents certain risks, is an emotionally stressful and complex transition for families and affects children drastically." This is further in keeping with Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.6) who state that girls who experience parental divorce "manifest distress in ways that are more difficult to observe, such as becoming more anxious or depressed."

### 5.3.1.2. Feelings of abandonment

Some of the participants, within the research study felt the absent parent had abandoned them. They made reference to the parent with whom they were not living.

Saron expresses her feelings of abandonment towards her mother: *"it's like a whole lot of mixed emotions … its like although she was staying here … now I feel like she is just abandoning me"*. She further explains: *"I feel like she doesn't care much"* which ultimately leads to her saying *"I don't think that I …can rely on her for anything."*

Kimona reiterates these feelings of abandonment which stem from her mother:
*"...there are stages where things are very hard because my mum left us when I was very small."*

Tania, however, expresses these feelings towards her father when her sibling needed him:
*"My father is not even here to guide him"*
and for when she too needed him :
*"My mum is worried because it has been so long since I have fallen sick. The worst part is that my father retired this year, and we don't have access to medical aid anymore."*

Taking into account the views of the above participants, one can conclude that the void left by the absent parent was profound and affected the participants adversely. Rutler (1981, as cited in Mc Connell and Sim, 1999) states that the needs of the child

includes that of a stable, warm, intimate family relationship and the freedom to love both parents.

### 5.3.1.3. Feelings of anger

It was noted by the researcher during the data analysis process that some of the participants expressed feelings of anger over the situations they found themselves in.

Kimona expresses anger towards her mum. In her personal narrative diary, she writes: *"...she blames everyone except herself for all the crap things in her life, she keeps forgetting the fact that she's the only one to blame for her mistakes, the biggest mistake she made nine years ago, when she left my dad, 3 sisters and I to fend for ourselves, God – I hate her."*

Saron too experienced an extreme sense of anger at the situation her mum found herself in and blamed the people with whom her mother was associated: *"I'm enraged because of her stupid boss, I'm angry at Peter (pseudonym) for beating up mum the last time and I'm angry because she's leaving me again."*

Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.2) explain that parents who divorce are more likely to have experienced difficulties such as alcoholism, drug abuse and physical and emotional abuse.

Her feelings of resentment for the abuse experienced by her mother are further articulated during an interview session when she affirms in a distressed and angry state: *"What I don't understand is after someone can hit somebody else so badly, that they are willing to go through stuff like that just to be with each other."*
She explains how she is affected by her mum's situation when she explains to the researcher in an interview: *"I mean seeing your mum being beaten up… things like that really hurt me – it really affected me terribly."*

Saron indicated a passion and love for poetry writing. The poem below, extracted from her narrative diary entries, indicates the true extent to which she is upset about the divorce. This poem was written after she had an argument with her father:

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Day after day
You invade the terrace of my mind
Scraping up the remains
Of the filth I tried to leave behind

As soon as I am safe
As soon as I relax
You come crawling out again
Breathing down my back

I hate you, I hate you
I hate the pain you bring
For a second of pure glory
I endure a lifetime of suffering

Where does it end?
When will I be okay?
And do I have to die?
To live one peaceful day?

From the above it is evident that the feelings of anger caused by the interacting systems as indicated by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model ( Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p.56) affected the participants to a large extent. Moreover, Oesterreich (1996) states that research show that children are greatly affected by divorce throughout their youth and one way of indicating this is by displaying feelings of anger.

### 5.3.1.4. Feelings of helplessness

It was noted that in conjunction with the feelings of anger, most of the participants expressed feelings of helplessness with regard to their situations.

Kimona expresses her feelings of helplessness in a narrative diary entry when she wanted to visit her mum. She writes: *"I wanted to go and see mummy and them today but daddy said that I couldn't go. He is so ……. frustrating. How does he just expect me to sit at home and not visit?"*

Although Saron expressed immense feelings of anger towards both her parents about their divorce, she also felt extremely helpless about the situation. On two different diary entries she noted the following:

*"Dad refuses to take us to see mom. I'm absolutely infuriated! How dare he? I've spent almost the entire evening crying because I know how much I'll miss her, and I keep wondering if she'll be okay."*

She goes on to express her feelings about moving in with her dad: *"I feel like a burden to him because things are so tough these days and he has to provide for me single-handedly and without a job. Mom makes no financial contributions at all."*

### 5.3.1.5. Feelings of stress

Parental separation and divorce are known to cause stress for both parents and their children. Research studies done on the stress caused by parental separation and divorce are extensive. Amato (1993, p.30) cite Amato (1986), Johnston, Kline and Tschann (1989) and Wolchik, Sandler, Braver and Fogas (1985) who claim that divorce is associated with other events such as moving, changing schools, giving up pets and loss of contact with grandparents that may be distressing to the children. This perspective emphasizes that it is not a single stressor, but the accumulation of negative events that may result in problems for children. Not only are events around the time of family disruption often stressful for children, but parental divorce can also set in motion future events that may decrease children's well-being.

The participants in the research study also experienced stress regarding their family situations. However, it was further noted that the stress that each learner felt was as a result of varying circumstances. Tania explains her reason for being stressed in a narrative diary entry: *"My brother and I did the house chores because mum goes on deliveries with my aunt. I am so tired and stressed."*

Another participant, Cathy, explains in an interview with the researcher that the strained relationship with her mother after the divorce was the cause of her stress: *" And we had a big argument in the morning – so I started smoking on that day."*

The stress experienced by Kimona subsequently affected her physical health as she narrates an event in her diary entry: *"I've been really sick recently, I don't know if it's a coincidence but whenever I'm stressed I start vomiting, getting headaches and my chest blocks up."*

Saron, too admits, that the stress gets to her as it is her matric year. She experiences the stress at home when her dad and brother argue: *"I felt it was very unfair on me because I wasn't part of the issue and yet I had to suffer the consequences of them arguing."*

### 5.3.1.6. Thoughts of suicide

Three out of the four participants had indicated having thoughts of suicide.

Saron writes about her thoughts of suicide: *"Things are strained at home. We got into another argument. I'm not even sure about what. I'm tired and I feel even more suicidal than yesterday."* She further adds her thoughts regarding her strained home environment: *"The pain is indescribable. I feel like I'm just a burden. I feel like no one cares. I feel unwanted and worthless. I cried all morning – even at school. What scares me is the fact that I can't handle this stuff anymore. I feel emotionally exhausted and very, very suicidal. I'm trying hard to resist."*

Saron conveys an extension of these feelings in a poem:

<div align="center">

DISQUIET

A cigarette and a blade
And I'm out of this place
Do you wish you cherished
The day you kissed my face?

Looking at the pool of love
In which you shot me dead
Can you stop the voices
That scream inside your head??

</div>

She documents her thoughts on an incident pertaining to her birthday:
*"My father and I had a fight today – money is the issue as usual … I'm really f\*\*\*\*\*\* pissed off… I feel like killing myself …And where's my mother when I need her?"*
Kimona expresses similar sentiments regarding suicide. She writes in a narrative diary entry: *"Today when I went home my dad's aunt started taking off with me for no reason and we had a huge fight. I felt like killing myself. I even wrote a suicide note and addressed it to all the important people in my life."*

The issue of concern pertaining to Kimona is that she admits that she has contemplated suicide prior to this. She writes: *"And then there's my dad's aunt. We just don't get on and I tried killing myself four times because of her."*
These sentiments are reiterated in her interview with the researcher and she adds: *"…she was digging at me for nothing and it became a whole big story and she swore me and I wanted to just kill myself."* She speaks of her history of attempted suicide: *"Yes, because we moved house because I tried to kill myself at that time – I tried strangling myself and then my granny found me."*

Cathy also expresses thoughts of suicide. She records details of how she feels that her life is going down the similar lines as her friend Jenny (pseudonym), a learner from a divorced family who experienced similar problems which ultimately resulted in her committing suicide: *"One of my friends said that I remind her of Jenny. I didn't say anything. I feel my life going the way Jenny's did."* These thoughts are later affirmed during her interview session with the researcher: *"recently everybody's been looking at me and seeing Jenny's face… I feel that my life is heading in that direction too."*

She relates her emotions regarding a fight with her mother: *"I told her that I'm going to my father and she shouldn't worry about me. Its days like this that I want to throw myself off a bridge."* On writing about her strained home environment a few days later, Cathy explains: *"I can't handle all this stress…everyone has their own opinion about me leaving … I can't take it anymore, I feel like killing myself."*
Later on in her diary entries, her mind is once more preoccupied by thoughts of suicide and she writes: *"I tried to pay attention in school but my mind drifts away. I have thoughts of suicide. What my father would do or would he even care that I'm gone. What would life be like without me, sure life would carry on for other people – but would it be the same?"*

Taking the above into account, it can be concluded that the compounded stress experienced by the participants led them to experience these feelings of suicide. It is noted in Kennedy and King (1994, p.11) that depression is a debilitating condition that many who go through life have to combat.

**5.3.2. The relationship between behavioural problems and divorce**

At the stage of experiencing these emotional set-backs, many of the participants displayed behavioural problems.

**5.3.2.1.  Smoking and drug usage**

According to Stearns (2005) family support and structure have a huge impact on the behaviour of adolescents. Some participants indicated that they turned to smoking cigarettes as a coping strategy for the problems that they experienced.

Cathy explains in an interview with the researcher: *"And we had an argument in the morning – so I started smoking that day."*

She goes on to note various smoking incidences:

- *"I went to the side of the shop and smoked…. After entering school, I went again and smoked in the toilet."*
- *"I smoked before I went to school"*
- *"My friends and I bunked class to go and smoke"*

She puts her history of smoking into perspective during her interviews:

- *"I started smoking cigarettes about 3 years ago…."*
- *"My father started smoking when he was 13 years old, so did I."*
- *"I smoke about 3 cigarettes a day."*

Cathy goes on to explicate that smoking cigarettes was ultimately an inadequate coping method for her, which lead to her smoking marijuana: *"I felt that it was not giving me enough… nothing was happening."*

She writes about her constant use of marijuana on numerous days in her diary entries:

- *"I got goofed. I smoked 2 'zol' myself …."*
- *"My friends and I got goofed today again. I get stoned everyday during the first and second breaks."*
- *"I got stoned again today and my boyfriend picked me up after school."*
- *"I got stoned so badly that I passed out in class today."*
- *"I got goofed during the second break and went to class with my eyes red"*
- *"I was so goofed that my friends had to carry me to class today."*

Saron, in keeping with Cathy, also writes about her addiction to marijuana in her numerous diary entries:

- *"As usual, there was no shortage of marijuana, so we all got completely stoned and lay on the beach just talking and laughing, laughing and laughing."*
- *"We had WEED – so we smoked and smoked until we couldn't smoke anymore and then we laughed and laughed until I thought I might suffocate."*
- *"We decided to stay, so we blazed up some weed and got really, really stoned."*
- *"I bought a shit load of weed today."*
- *"We smoked all the weed I bought on Friday and then we took a drive."*
- *" … and then we went to the beach and indulged in weed smoking."*

These incidences of marijuana smoking are further spoken about during her interviews with the researcher: *"After we got drunk we smoked."*

Consequently, the researcher found that adolescents from divorced families indulged excessively in the smoking of marijuana. This finding is supported by Stearns (2005, p.5) where the results of the study also indicated that adolescents with divorced parents were more likely to smoke marijuana compared to those adolescents whose parents were still married.

### 5.3.2.2.  Alcohol use

The researcher found that some of the participants in the research study also indulged in alcohol usage.

Kimona writes of social drinking: *"I went out for supper……. And I was a bit tipsy because I had four Martinis."* She further explains about a night that she went out with some of her friends: *"…we went to the car park and drank some Vodka. John (pseudonym) is mad at me because he found out that I drank."*

Cathy communicates her experiences of drinking: *"My mother went out with her friends tonight. I drank a bit and then went on MXIT."* She further explains about another incident: *"I met up with some of my bras (colloquial for friends) from the shopping centre. They were drinking so I started drinking with them."*

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Saron also documented her experiences pertaining to alcohol usage. She gives details surrounding a party that she attended: *"It was really such fun, we just danced and drank and smoked weed all night."*

On relating a night out with her friends: *"It was so much of fun, even though I was the only girl, I fitted in and everything was so relaxed – or was that just the alcohol speaking."* During another occasion, she describes an outing that she had with her brother: *"...we had some time to kill so we went to the sports bar and had a few drinks."*

She tells of yet another incident pertaining to casual drinking: *"Everything was closed by then (it was about 11pm) so we ended up at a bar in .... We had a few drinks."*

Saron goes on to describe the party that she had for her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, which began at the local shopping mall: *"We all had a few drinks and then we were off to the beach. ..... where we indulged in some weed smoking..... after that we went to ..... for some more alcohol, drugs and partying."*

On another occasion, she describes her state of mind upon returning home from a party: *"I got back home at 2am. Everyone was asleep. Luckily, since I was quite drunk. Ha ha, another brilliant night."*

The researcher concluded that it is common for adolescents from divorced and separated families to indulge in drinking alcohol. Her view is further supported by Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.4) who claim that adolescents who experienced parental divorce were more likely to be involved in substance use and to report problematic substance use than children who experienced no divorce.

### 5.3.2.3. Relationships with members of the opposite sex

Some of the participants engaged in casual relationships with members of the opposite sex.

Cathy writes about her relationship: *"Simon (pseudonym) asked me out today. He is kinda cute, so I said I'll think about it. I have three boyfriends already, so one more won't hurt."*

Saron also communicates the numerous casual sexual relationships she has had:

- *"I've noticed that I am unable to emotionally connect with any boy on a romantic level…"*
- *"I kissed Jimmy's (pseudonym) best friend! I hate myself for that"*. This she claims was done while she was under the influence of alcohol.
- She writes about an incident she had at a disco: *" I ended up kissing two guys in there – both ex-students of my current school."*
- On a movie date out with some friends she tells of an incident involving a friend of a friend: *"I end up sitting next to Mark (pseudonym). We watched 5 minutes of the movie and then we went to find a cosy little spot to make out. One thing led to another … we stopped short of sleeping together."* This incident is confirmed in an interview with the researcher.
- She meets Mark on another occasion a few days later and describes their outing, and outlines the fact that he may not be a prospective long term partner: *"We smoked all the weed I bought on Friday, then we took a drive to the beach. Mark and I ended up doing the deed (we used condoms). We went back to his place and ended up doing it again. I didn't particularly enjoy myself, he's rather selfish in bed – but I pretended I did anyway. I'm not sure I even enjoy his company."*
- She speaks of another incident where they indulged in smoking marijuana which ended up in a casual sexual encounter: *"We smoked and smoked and laughed and talked all night long … Ed (pseudonym) and I started to make out after a while. I liked it … what an awesome day!"*
- She further writes about her experiences of exploring sexuality: *"... we stopped to purchase some alcohol. Soon we were all a little drunk. Kevin (pseudonym) and Melanie (pseudonym) parked off, which left Ed and I alone…………... Hmmm… not a bad option! I tell you, it was the best sex I ever had! Eventually, we ended up having a foursome. Oh my gosh! It was the wildest, kinkiest thing I had ever done. I loved every second of it."*

From the above it can be concluded that due to being exposed to unstable relationships between their parents, the participants themselves experienced immense difficulties in establishing meaningful relationships in their lives. This may become a crucial variable at a later stage in their lives for it is stated in Amato (1993) that a

longitudinal study conducted on adults who experienced their parents' divorces in their youth, showed poor psychological adjustment and greater marital instability with regards to sexual intimacy compared to those from continuously intact families of origin.

### 5.3.2.4. Delinquent behaviour displayed by participants

It is stated in Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.4) that children of divorce exhibit signs of early disengagement from school, show increasing incidences of truancy and more negative attitudes towards school and much of this is attributed to less monitoring of school work and social activities by both parents. Stearns (2005) further places emphasis on the fact that having a single parent around results in less attention being paid to the child due to the many responsibilities that the single parent may have. In keeping with the above statements, it was also noted that some of the participants displayed a tendency to indulge in delinquent behaviour during school hours.

Cathy writes about her numerous experiences:
- *"I got goofed with my friends and we got kicked out of class."*
- On the following day she records: *"We bunked class to go and smoke."*
- During her interview with the researcher she speaks of incidences of delinquent behaviour at school: *"We were smoking on the grounds and the coach was there playing volleyball."*
- These incidences continued until she was caught smoking at school and her parent was called in. She explains in her interview with the researcher: *"I was caught smoking in the toilet and everything has been so chaotic ever since."* She gives details pertaining to the incident in detail in her narrative diary entry: *"I went into the girl's toilet to smoke and 4 other girls followed me. There were about 6 girls in the toilet. We smoked. I was standing on the toilet pan, looking out the small hole on the top of the wall… we were then taken to the office."*
- Cathy further explains how her educator criticized her regarding the incident; to which she claims to have replied in a sarcastic tone: *"She asked me if the toilets were clean or if we couldn't see anything because of the smoke. I told her that they should put locks on the doors so that the cleaning staff could not get in while we were smoking…."*

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Saron writes about her experiences of delinquent behaviour at school:

- *"Today I got caught smoking at school. Luckily, it wasn't marijuana. Being a prefect this has huge repercussions. My reputation will go down the drain."*

- She also writes about an incident pertaining to bunking school: *" School was closing early today (11:30am) so Jimmy and I decided to bunk. I carried clothes to change into to minimize the chances of getting caught."*

From the above it can be concluded that the participants' delinquent behaviour could be attributed to lack of parental control and supervision. Stearns (2005) notes that the more quality time spent with parents the less likely the adolescents were to get into deviant behaviour.

## 5.3.2.5. Reasons for indulging in delinquent behaviour

The participants who indulged in the various acts of delinquent behaviour attributed it to the following reasons:

Saron explains her actions during the interviews with the researcher: *"… like when things get a bit too much to handle… I just go and relax myself – so I go and smoke and drink and do stuff."*

Cathy justifies taking to smoking marijuana as: *"I smoked 2 spliffs myself. The spliff makes me numb and I don't feel anything. I forget all my problems."* She further explains in an interview when asked to justify her smoking: *"… there was a problem at home and uh … I wanted a way to get back at my parents and that seemed to be the only way…. I wanted it to get back at my parents … it will also help me get their attention."*

Cathy ultimately believes that engaging in delinquent behaviour will prove to be advantageous to her, which she reveals in an interview with the researcher: *"…now my mother knows that it's not okay, that I am not fine…"* She admits that her actions are a ploy :      *" Researcher: ….do you feel that by doing this he is (her father) is going to come back to South Africa?*

*Cathy: "Yes he will"*

The researcher concluded that the participants mentioned above were seeking attention from their parents due to the parental separation and divorce. Cohen (2002, p.1020) justifies their actions and states that children may try to play one parent against the other because they need to feel in control, test rules and limits.

### 5.3.3. The impact of parental separation and divorce

Broadly the parental separation and divorce left some profound effect on the participants which the researcher felt crucial to document although their themes varied.

### 5.3.3.1. Unstable home environment

Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.3) explains that some of the immediate effects of marital disruption include aspects pertaining to household routines which are frequently interrupted which results in additional stress. The common variable among all the participants were that they experienced a great deal of instability in their home environments.

Tania explains her situation: *"My uncle picked me up in the morning … I stay over almost every weekend because it's so quiet at home and I get lonely."* Another reason for her constantly moving is explained in an interview with the researcher:
*" …during the last week, I went to stay with my aunt because I was learning for the examinations. I was not at home because mummy does cooking at home and it was very rowdy, with a lot of people helping her out. You can't learn in such an environment so we had an argument…"*

Kimona describes her unstable home environment: *"…things at home are starting to get a little restless because of my dad's aunt. She's like the wind, when she's good with one of us, she's bad with the rest and vice versa."*
She outlines the impact this has on her: *" Things were going fine at home, but then my dad's aunt just started taking off with all of us…I went to school crying because of her… but the problems at home is all that I could think about today."*

Cathy experiences unfavourable living conditions when her granny comes to live with them due to her mum having to leave home earlier. She writes: *"…I told my mother that we should move out of the outbuilding because it is a bit cramped….because my granny's staying with us now."*

The situations experienced by the above-mentioned participants pertaining to their home environments, whereby their custodial parents sought assistance from members of their extended families are justified by Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.3) whereby they state that many custodial parents are distressed and overburdened due to the sudden changes in their home environments.

Saron divulges information about her unstable home environment to the researcher during her interviews: *"We have… (long pause) but we have (heavy sigh)… its good sometimes and then there are rough patches. Things are never consistent.".*
She goes on to explain about a fight between her dad and brother: *"My dad and brother were fighting because of my father … and also my brother caused an accident with my dad's car, he knocked into another vehicle and that owner came to our house and he pulled out a gun and everything…"*
She explains further about her home environment: *"we have moved in with my dad, I think that was then because my father was able to provide us with a much more sound life."*

Taking the above into account, the researcher concluded that parental separation and divorce results in instability pertaining to the home environment and this impacted on the participants unfavourably. Amato (1993, p.30) further places emphasis on the fact that an unhappy home environment is less than optimal for the development of children.

### 5.3.3.2. Relationship with custodial parent

Pett (1982) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) as cited in McConnell and Sim (1999) postulates that the child's relationship with the custodial parent is a significant and important variable in the child's post-divorce adjustment. All the participants experienced a fairly good relationship with their custodial parent.

Tania describes the relationship she shares with her mum as: *"She's being strict with me and telling me what to do and what not to do."* Though her concern for Tania does not go unnoticed. Tania describes her mum's reaction to her taking ill: *"Mum's worried about me because it's been so long since I have fallen sick...."*

Kimona places emphasis on her relationship with her father. She tells the researcher that: *"...my mum told my sisters everything they needed to know – like stuff that a mum should be telling her daughters. With me – it was my dad – he was there for me....I tell my father everything."*
However, she further writes about how her dad disciplines them: *"...when I went home my dad tells me I'm not doing enough homework."*

Saron too describes the relationship with her custodial parent as a good one: *"With my father, things are pretty good – he provides us with everything that we need. Basically he is my primary caregiver and sole provider."* Her father goes one step further when she takes ill: *"the flu's just gotten worse...Dad's around making sure that everything's okay."* In an interview with the researcher, she goes further to describe the support given to her by her dad: *"...he's been very supportive through everything and he's made sure that he has delivered everything on his part that he had promised he was going to do."*

She further explains her feelings: *"I am able to overlook the stereotypes that we have about men – that they don't care, that they are only there in life to provide finance. I think that by living with him, I have come to realize that he is a very patient and loving and caring and nurturing man and none of those stereotypes are true."*
Cathy on the other hand, describes her relationship with her mother as being rather turbulent at first: *"My mother and I fight a lot...I am set like my father. My mother and father used to fight all the time. I feel like I took my father's place."*

With regards to the marital conflict witnessed by Cathy, Cohen (2002, pp.1019-1023) explains that it often leads to children internalizing and externalizing problems. This view is reinforced by Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.2) who states that the effects of marital disruption on children vary according to the level of marital conflict whereby

high conflict has been found to produce effects that are similar to and as strong as those associated with the marital disruption.

However, as the research study progressed, their relationship drastically improved: *"My mother and I are trying to work out our relationship. We are trying to maintain a better relationship and I think it's kind of working out. We are bonding."*

The setback experienced initially by Cathy with regards to her relationship with her mother is not uncommon. Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, p.5) state that poor relationships with parents, particularly true of mother-daughter relationships, are striking during the young adulthood of children from divorced families.

### 5.3.3.3. Yearning for absent parent

According to McConnell and Sim (1999, p.78) the loss of the quality of contact with parents by children of divorce has a direct impact on their socialization and adjustment. Although all the participants maintained a fairly good relationship with their custodial parent, they displayed varying degrees of loyalty towards the absent parent figure. This was indicative of the fact that they yearned for the presence of the absent figure in their lives which ultimately resulted in them yearning for a normal family life.

Cathy writes in her narrative diary entries: *"I miss my dad now more than ever..."* She constantly compares herself to her dad: *"I don't like been woken up from a deep sleep. Just like my dad…"* and does things to make him happy: *"I hate the subjects I chose in Grade 10. The only reason I took it was so that I can make my father proud."*

In her interviews, Cathy describes in detail how she and her father used to constantly spend father-daughter quality time together while her parents were married. She yearns for that family life again: *"I would like for mum to come over to New Zealand and live with us later on."*

Tania also shows a longing for the absent father. She expresses her sense of loss in interviews with the researcher: *" … for most of my birthdays and even my graduation for dancing and some of my achievements at school, my father was not there… now*

*that really hurt me a lot. I would like for him to see me achieve these things and he is not there.”*

She further expresses excitement at the prospect of seeing her dad: *“I am so excited I'm going to be seeing my dad after so long. I think it's been like about 4 years …”* On meeting him, she writes: *“Yesterday was so amazing, I actually saw my dad after 4 years … he greeted me and hugged me. I can not even explain the way I felt…”* The aftermath of this encounter with her dad leaves her yearning for even more: *“Anyway I was thinking about my dad from the time I saw him, he keeps popping up in my mind. I wish we could have a closer relationship…”* She too expresses a longing for a normal family life*: “…if it's father's day or my birthday, I miss him a lot and I would get emotional about everything.”*

She further writes in her narrative diary entries: *“…. Today was very strange, the only thing that has been on my mind is my father. I mean I miss him a lot and I still wonder how life would be with him living with us, maybe it wouldn't be so stressful.”*

Research carried out on the topic of divorce and parental separation by Amato (1993) and McConnell and Sim (1999) explain the loss of the father figure as experienced by Tania and Cathy. It is stated that the loss of the relationship with one parent (the father) is a potential factor in the difficulties of children.

Kimona and Saron, living with their dads, yearn for a proper relationship with their mums. Kimona writes in her narrative diary entries about how she looks forward to seeing her mum: *“I can't wait for the weekend because I might go and see mummy …”* She expresses discomfort on attending family get-togethers and ultimately shows loyalty towards her mother: *“the only bad thing about the get-together was that my mum couldn't be there. At family functions all my aunts ever do is gossip about my mum. I know that she has flaws, lots and lots and lots of flaws, but she is a good person and I hate for them being so mean….”*

She further writes about how her mum's financial problems have a bearing on her life: *"Things are rough in our house at the moment. Dad is taking serious strain because mum is having financial problems and he can't do anything to help ...I am so worried about her."*

Saron, however, begins by experiencing feelings of guilt towards her mum. She writes: *"I think about my mum and my heart pangs – with guilt (for not keeping in contact with her) and yearning (haven't seen her since the beginning of December)"* *.... "I miss mum a lot."*. She further expresses her loyalty towards her mum although she abandoned her: *"...and then I'm sad because I feel abandoned and sad because I know it's her only option. Well, whatever happens, I love her."*

She expresses her loyalty towards her mum when she writes: *"I feel bad because she doesn't do it intentionally. She can't help the way her life has turned out."*
She further adds in an interview: *"...my mum has sacrificed a lot during her life ...like in terms of making up stuff and being a single parent ...I don't like the decisions of her life, those that she has made, she's like – a product of society."*

On spending time with a friend and her friend's family, Saron writes how she yearns for a normal family life: *"It felt great to feel like part of a family ( a <u>whole</u> family, that is)."*

She further expresses her feelings in an interview with the researcher on the events surrounding her prom night: *"Once I heard that she was back, I was so excited about it, I thought that we would work on it together, and that it would be like a family thing ......."*

Taking the above into account, the researcher concluded that the participants yearned for a normal family life with both parents. This is in keeping with a study conducted by Ahrons (2007, p.56) where it is stated that the children all wanted to have relationships with both parents.

### 5.3.3.4. Ascribing the missing parent figure

Kimona felt that she had to look to other females to fill the void of her mother. She explains in an interview: *"So my big sister had to look after me and my father, as being a single parent, raising 4 daughters is very hard."*

Tania and her brother also have members of their family filling in the void left by their father: *"My mum was so emotional today because she felt sorry for my brother. He was writing his learners and my father is not even here to guide him. My uncle and cousin helped him to learn ...."* She further reveals in an interview with the researcher: *"My mum's brother is like our dad".*

Saron explains how she dealt with life's little hurdles without her mother: *"Puberty was awkward without mum, and so I looked to my elder sister as a mother figure. My sister was my mother figure and a role model to me."*

From the actions of the above-mentioned participants, the researcher concluded that it was essential for these participants to fill the void left by the absent parent, for it gave them some feeling of stability.

### 5.3.3.5. Moving house

The participants also had to constantly move from one home environment to another. Kimona in explaining the problems she experienced indicates: *"At a point in our lives we had to move back to our mum, after like being with dad for 3 years. Once dad was able to sort out his problems, we came back to live with him."*
Kimona further explains in an interview why she and her siblings preferred living with her dad: *"...we used to feel that she has an addiction or something...she doesn't have this adult responsibility thing – you know when you have children, you have to look after them, you got to fend for them. She just wanted her free life."*

Saron shares the same sentiments. On living with her mum she writes: *"My mother was still very much attached to her 'youthful ways' and went partying regularly; and kept many male friends."* As a result, Saron and her brother had to move in with their dad. She further explains: *"My father took custody of us because of the better quality of life that he could provide us with."*

From the above excerpts relayed by the participants, the researcher concluded that parental separation and divorce results in some aspects of instability in the home environment.

### 5.3.3.6. Relationships with siblings

Another consequence suffered by the participants was not being able to maintain healthy relationships with their siblings.

Kimona explains the situation that she and her siblings found themselves in: *"I am the youngest and I have 3 elder sisters. My eldest sister lives with my mum because my father does not approve of her boyfriend. My two other sisters live with my dad and I."*

She explains how, due to the split family unit, those special days are strained. Kimona writes: *"On my sister's birthday, my dad called to wish her but she was at her boyfriend's house …. I don't think that we will be seeing her today."*
She goes on to explain the situation for her birthday: *"My third sister – I was surprised that she didn't call to wish me. My first sister did not call me too."*
Saron's family unit was also split up after the divorce. She writes: *"Joint custody was granted to my parents and my mother took the 3 minors, whilst my eldest sister continued to live with my dad."* She explains: *"We don't get the closeness that you are supposed to have with your siblings – like that on a day to day basis – the interacting with them and taking the little things in life for granted – it's not like that – seeing them now is like an occasion as well."*

Tania talks about how she and her brother were separated: *"My mother got in contact with my father and asked if my brother could live with him and start his high school life years with him because it was too much for her… so my brother went to live with my father for 3 years and my father did everything for him… I was living with my mum at that time… I used to only see him on weekends."*

By focusing on the above, the researcher concluded that parental separation and divorce indeed strained the relationships among siblings. Cohen (2002, p.1021)

supports this finding and explains that an adolescent's sense of loss is ongoing and may increase, especially on holidays, birthdays and special school events.

**5.3.3.7. Additional responsibilities**

Many of the participants spoke and wrote about their additional responsibilities that they were forced to undertake owing to the situations in which they found themselves.

Tania writes about the constant additional household chores that she had to cover to assist her single parent: *"Mum went to the hospital today for her check up so I had to help with all the housework."* Due to the fact that her mum had to work, she writes: *"My brother and I did all the household chores because mum was gone to do her deliveries."*

She further explains in an interview: *"…. She expects too much from us. Because at home my brother and I have to do the chores – we have to help her with her cooking – that's when she gets cooking jobs."* This is done on a regular basis in addition to fulfilling her responsibilities towards academic life in school. Out of frustration she writes: *"It's annoying when we come home. We have so much of responsibilities…mum forgets that we also have our lives."*

Kimona, too, outlines her contributions towards her household: *"When I get home, I help out with the housework and sometimes cook. I wash my uniform too…. But my dad's aunt is never satisfied with what I do."*

Cathy also writes of her contributions: *"I cooked and cleaned and then did my homework before my mum came from work."* She expresses frustration and writes on another day: *"… I came home; cooked and cleaned. I helped my sister and brother with their homework. It was about 5:30 pm when mum got home and I sat to do my homework. As soon as she came home she started shouting at me. She thought that the house was not cleaned. My brother was playing with his friends and didn't help me out at all."*

Saron speaks of her responsibilities in an interview: *"I feel pressurized at times. I feel that I have to fill the space of a mother at home….. like in terms of housework and cooking and things like that …."* These sentiments are reiterated in her diary entries:

*"I'm beginning to feel pressurized because I feel that I should be responsible for filling the place of a mother in our household and this being my matric year…"*

Taking the above into consideration, it can be noted that the additional responsibilities shouldered by the participants due to the parental separation and divorce resulted in additional stress on the participants.

### 5.3.3.8. Coping strategies

The participants in the study all employed various coping mechanisms to deal with their situations. Tania chose to distant herself from the stressful home environment: *"At home it's like you have a lot of responsibilities… but when you go to my aunt's house, I can just sit and relax . The only thing I have to do is my homework."*

Kimona experienced difficulties coping: *"I don't really cope, I have a short temper. When someone tells me something, I get angry. If I don't get angry, I get sad and start crying."*

Cathy took to the unsavoury habit of smoking, as a coping strategy: *"And we had a big argument in the morning, so I started smoking on that day."*

Saron, however, chose to express herself using poetry as a medium: *"This is the part where I thank my parents for my dark mind, without it I would never be able to write the stuff I do."* She writes about another coping mechanism that she uses: *"At the same time I need to preserve my heart. I've done it all my life. Anyone who hurts me emotionally must be shut out, cast to the other side of the barrier."*

### 5.3.4. Divorce versus financial and economic factors

Many of the participants experienced a turbulent home environment due to financial constraints they experienced after the parental separation and divorce.

Saron writes in her narrative diary entries: *"I had an argument with dad this morning. I asked for a small amount of cash and he just sort of exploded. He says that he is*

*tired of all the expenses and my mum doesn't care. He says that one day he is just going to pack up and leave.*" Pertaining to another incident, she adds: "*When I got home, dad and my brother were fighting – like really going at it. As usual, the main reason was money.*"

On the commemoration of a special occasion: "*...my dad and I had a fight today – money is the issue as usual. My birthday is coming up on Friday and he refuses to buy me any clothing.*"

Tania too writes about the financial problems she experiences: "*I asked my mother to buy the required stationery for school. She got so stressed and she was screaming and said that there is only so much that she can do.*"

Furthermore Tania, speaks about the financial burden in an interview: "*It's hard at some stages, like with financial things… mum takes on cooking jobs and my brother works on weekends to pay for his tuitions. We are very close to my aunt and uncle – they help us a lot with money things.*"

However with Kimona , it was her mum who experienced financial difficulties and this had an adverse effect on her: "*Mum is having problems because her company closed down…*" She adds on at a later stage: "*...things are rough at our house at the moment. Dad is taking serious strain, because mum, Rachel (pseudonym) and gran are having problems with their rent and he can't do anything to help. We've got no space or money to help them get a new house. I am so worried about them.*"

From the above it can be emphasized that the financial situation the family finds itself in after the divorce has a great impact on the lives of the children.

**5.3.5. The impact on children's academic performance**

Parental separation and divorce also had an impact on some of the learners' academic and school life. Tania and Saron showed capabilities of excelling in academics. Tania explains in an interview: "*My last photograph is that of my awards day in school. I got an award for Maths. Mum couldn't attend because she has to do her deliveries. …. I have also done my Bharata Natayam dancing (Classical Indian*

*Dance) and I am ready to graduate. It is sad because I can't share these things with my father; my achievements and stuff."*

Saron has shown a history of academic excellence. She writes in her narrative essay: *"In Grade 8, I was enrolled at Grosvenor Girls High. I had been granted a scholarship due to my results."* She writes about the parent's meeting held at her current school, which was attended by her dad: *"Everyone believes in me, and are so absolute positive that I can achieve A's this year. My form teacher says he thinks I will be the Dux awardee."* She writes about her Term 1 results: *"…we received our Maths Paper I results: I got 72% and I passed my English test with 99,75%. Am I gloating."*

Kimona, however, speaks about how her home environment affected her adversely: *"It was during the exam period and with all the nonsense, I couldn't learn. I'm not making excuses for myself but I did badly in a few papers because of all the nonsense."* She further explains in another interview: *"I even lost 1 year of school because of moving from one parent to another. I would have been in Grade 11 this year… my sisters were all going to school and for that whole year I was just sitting at home which is normally things which people would fail would do. It was hard to go back to a new school – to Grade 6, I had to make new friends and it wasn't nice."*

Rodriguez and Arnold (1998, pp.2-4) assert that that an increase in residential mobility is associated with lower school achievement as children who move do not receive specialized educational services or individual attention which they may need in order to identify gaps in their knowledge. Children from divorced families are about twice as likely to drop out of school as children from two parent families.

From the above it can be noted that the impact that the parental separation or divorce has on the academic and school life of the participants varied and depended on each individual.

**5.4. Conclusion**

This chapter focused mainly on the results pertaining to the research study. Thematic analysis was used indicating the extent of the impact of parental separation and divorce on the lives of the adolescents. Chapter six will focus on the recommendations identified in this chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX
## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter will outline the findings of the research study and discuss the recommendations linked to the various themes identified during the data analysis process. Furthermore, the researcher will outline the limitations encountered during the study and suggest further recommendations for future research on this topic.

### 6.2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research study was to explore the effects of parental separation and divorce on the psychological well-being of secondary school learners at a school in the Durban South Region. The plethora of research literature reviewed leans towards the fact that all children are different and respond differently to divorce and parental separation. Depending on the characteristics of the children, their age, emotional maturity, happiness, resiliency to trauma – the more easier or more difficult it will be for children to weather a divorce.

The aim of the research study was to attempt to answer the following research questions:

a) To what extent does parental separation and divorce affect a learner's psychological well-being?
b) What role can the school play in ameliorating these effects?

### 6.3. Summary of findings and recommendations

When looking to the conclusions for answers, it is important to take cognizance of the fact that "the effects of parental separation and divorce has on children will vary with reference to the individual child and the particular situation" (Cox & Desforges, 1987, p.29).

The findings of the study and the answers to the proposed research questions will be discussed under the following sub-headings:

**6.3.1. The impact of the parental separation and divorce on learners**
Parental separation and divorce affects learners in many ways. These are the main effects of parental separation and divorce of learners.

**6.3.1.1. Divorce and the psychological well-being of the learner**
The end result of the data analysis process indicated that all of the participants in the research study expressed varying degrees of emotional stress pertaining to their parents separation and divorce. In relation to these findings, Walper and Beckh (2006, p.252) have noted that the increasing disadvantage in the well-being among the youth from separated and divorced families was largely brought on by increased family instability during; and subsequent to the parental separation and divorce.

Moreover Amato (2006) explains that what compounds the problems for learners especially at secondary school level is the fact that during late adolescence and early adult years, youth develop their identities, clarify their values, become self-reliant and form plans for their futures. Dealing with a parental divorce may interfere with young people's progress towards independence and may lead them to focus on the parents' problems rather than their own social development.

Herein the researcher discusses the various emotional problems experienced by the participants within the research study and outlines recommendations for them

**a) Feelings of sadness and distress**
The results revealed that the participants experienced feelings of sadness and distress to a large extent. When examining the feelings of sadness and distress experienced by the participants, the researcher noted that these feelings were deep-rooted within each participant. The participants attributed these feelings to the actions of their parents and the lack of involvement from the non-custodial parent.

In attributing reasons for these feelings, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980, as cited in Mitchell,1985, p.94) indicates that parents had not appreciated just how upset their

children had been as a result of the marital breakdown due to the fact that they were too preoccupied with their own lives.

**b) Feelings of abandonment**

The results also revealed that some of the participants felt abandoned. The feelings of abandonment experienced by the participants stemmed from the lack of contact with the non-custodial parent and the selfish motives displayed by the parent.

In justifying the feelings of abandonment experienced by the participants, Weiss (1975, pp. 48-49) explains that they are marked by focusing attention on the lost figure, together with the intense discomfort because of the figure's inaccessibility, likely to be unhappiness stemming from feelings of desolation.

Flanagan, Elander and Flanagan (2000, p.30) adds that when adolescents experience the desire to stay connected with the other parent it is natural. In addition to this, Hughes (2005) states that when children lose contact with one parent, they also lose the knowledge, skills and resources of that parent. Moreover, Flanagan et al. (2000, p.230) explains that one factor that helps children to be quite resilient and resourceful is the feeling of security and the knowledge that they are loved.

**c) Feelings of anger**

The results of the study indicated that some of the participants experienced feelings of anger at varying degrees. The feelings of anger expressed by the participants during data collection were as a result of the situations they found themselves in.

Mitchell (1985) cites Bowlby's development of the theory of attachment and loss (1973) which substantiates reasons for their anger and further explains that anger is a common reaction to a child's separation from a parent. To a much larger extent Weiss (1979, as cited in Mitchell, 1985), took this theory further whereby he describes the ambivalence of separated spouses who, although angry with each other continued to feel an attachment. In applying this theory to the research study, one can see that the participants are angry with their parents whom they love and with whom they want to be reunited.

In justifying the participant's feelings, Weiss (1975, p.215) explains that adolescents may have special reasons for anger with their parents as their parents have made their growing up more difficult by disrupting their homes.

**d) Feelings of helplessness**

During the data analysis process, the researcher also noted that many of the participants experienced feelings of being helpless. The feelings of anger explained in the previous section eventually culminated in the participants feeling helpless.
This was due to their inability to control situations which were based on the instability of their parents. Both participants (Kimona and Saron) who noted experiencing these feelings of helplessness, was due to the fact that they were denied visitation with their non-custodial parent.

Mitchell (1985, p.116) places emphasis on the need for children from divorced families to have a continuing relationship with both parents. In explaining the repercussions of not being able to maintain a relationship with both parents, Hughes (2005) states that adolescents will experience feelings of helplessness which may well continue into young adulthood.

Flanagan et al. (2000, p.114) explains that the in-and-out nature of contact with one parent will take a toll on the children and does not build a true parent-child relationship. At best, it keeps the parent from being a complete stranger and, at worst; it sets the child up for disappointment over and over again. In addition to this, Mitchell (1985, p.142) explains that if a child loses touch with one parent, he/she is probably also cut off from other relatives on that side of the family whereby he can lose half of his family background through no fault of his/her own.
It is the opinion of the researcher, bearing the above consequences in mind, that regular contact be maintained with the non-custodial parent.

**e) Feelings of stress**

The results also indicated that the participants experienced feelings of stress regarding the family situations that they found themselves in. This resulted in them experiencing turbulent relationships with their custodial parents and siblings.

The feelings of stress experienced by the participants is substantiated by Clarke-Stewart and Brentano (2006, p.166) whereby they explain that children's adjustment to their parent's divorce is also affected by how much stress the divorce brings with it. In addition to this Cox and Desforges (1987, p.29) also notes that how the individual child copes depends on how many other stressors are impinging on him or her and how the child has coped with previous stressful experiences.

It is further brought to our attention by Collins and Roisman (2006) that the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship also moderates the impact of stressors experienced outside of the family.

**f) Thoughts of suicide**

During the data analysis process, the researcher noted that the majority of the participants were preoccupied with thoughts of suicide. The preoccupation with the thoughts of suicide stemmed from the participant's unstable home environments and their turbulent relationships with their custodial parents.

According to Weiss (1975, p.53) the preoccupation with thoughts of suicide by the participants is due to the fact that their worlds may be without social support which allow them to give into a state of depression. The preoccupation with suicidal fantasies is a way of cajoling themselves through a miserable present.

Furthermore, Weitoft et al. (2003 as cited in Clarke-Stewart & Bretano, 2006, p.121) claim that children of single-parent families were more than twice as likely to suffer from depression or to kill themselves. This view is further supported by Vlez-Cohen (1998, as cited in Bilotta, 2007).

In addition to this, Eleoff (2003) explains that adolescents are prone to responding to their parent's divorce with acute depression, suicidal ideation and sometimes violent act out episodes. A note of concern is revealed in Bilotta (2007) where emphasis is placed on the fact that children from broken homes are more likely to attempt suicide than those who do not come from broken homes.

### 6.3.1.2. The relationship between parental separation, divorce and behavioural problems.

The results of the research study indicated that children from divorced families exhibit problems pertaining to their behaviour. It is stated in Melamed and Corcoran (1997) that children from divorced families will often act out their own and their parent's anger. In addition to this, Mitchell (1985, p.5) states that the behavioural problems in children from divorced families tended to be worse during the first few years after the divorce. Herein the researcher discusses the behavioural problems displayed by the participants within the research study and outlines recommendations pertaining to these problems.

### a) Smoking and drug usage

The results of the research study revealed that some of the participants turned to smoking and drug usage. The participants indicated that they turned to these unsavoury habits as a coping mechanism for the problems that they experienced. Hawkins, Catalano and Miller (1992, p.84, as cited in Dodge, Malone, Landsford, Miller-Johnson, Petite and Bakes, 2006, p.112) state that the social adjustment of a child is an important factor in predicting later drug use and abuse. Dodge et al. (2006, p.117) further state that adolescents from divorced families, may feel abandoned, anxious and depressed (as in the case of the participants in the research study) which may lead to an increase in their use of drugs and alcohol. This can lead to a range of psychological problems including conduct disorders. These problems compound the stress that they are already experiencing; as adolescents are also preoccupied with issues of their own trying to redefine themselves.

The participants in the research study indicated that the reasons that they engaged in smoking and drug usage was due to the stress that they experienced in their everyday life situations. Clarke-Stewart and Bretano (2006, p.166) state that children's adjustment to their parent's divorce is also affected by how much stress the divorce brings with it. The more disruption and change, the less stability in their lives, the harder it is for children.

**b) Alcohol use**

The researcher found that some of the participants in the research study also indulged in alcohol usage. The findings indicated that the participants resorted to such unsavoury habits as a means to 'get back' at their parents.

According to Dodge et al. (2006, p.117) older adolescents may not experience their parents' divorce to be as earth shattering as it is for younger ones because their egos are more mature. They are more involved in their own activities and are more independent of their parents. Nevertheless, it is also noted that even these older adolescents often have strong reactions when their parents divorce. They may feel abandoned, anxious and depressed which may result in an increase of drugs and alcohol.

This view is further supported by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (2003, as cited in Dodge et al., 2006, p.107) who collated data from the National Household Survey on alcohol and drug abuse which indicated an increase in alcohol initiation among early adolescent girls from divorced families.

**c) Relationships with members of the opposite sex**

Some of the participants in the research study engaged in casual sexual relationships with members of the opposite sex. From the findings, it was noted that being privy to the unsuccessful relationships of their parents, the participants themselves experienced immense difficulties in establishing meaningful relationships in their own lives.

In support of the dilemma experienced by some of the participants, Walper and Beckh (2006, p.241), deduce that one of the major developmental tasks of adolescents and early adulthood is to cope with the challenges of romantic relationships. Having experienced instability in their parents' marriages, individuals from divorced families may not only enter their romantic relationships with stronger needs for affection and support, but more negative expectations and lower interpersonal skills than their peers from nuclear families.

Research in support of this is further indicated in Foulkes-Jamison (2001) who states that girls from divorced families become sexually active earlier than girls from intact families. The ARA (2005) substantiates this behaviour by explaining that adolescents may feel anger and blame towards their parents and are also uncertain about their own ability to stay in a relationship.

Furthermore, Wood (1997) explains that children of divorced parents are less optimistic about their relationships; report less trust of their future spouses and share negative attributes that could hurt an intimate relationship. They display distrust in their partners and perceive their own relationships as being of a high risk.

In addition to this, Psychpage (2008) claims that problems resulting from divorce last into adulthood and often lead to poorer romantic relationships. This may be attributed to: a) the stress of the relationships of children with their divorced parents; b) the expectation that marriages can easily end in divorce; c) the loss of a close and confiding relationship with two parents and d) the expectation of two parents who have a successful marriage.

From the above-mentioned literature, one can conclude that these feelings of insecurities stem from pessimistic behaviour and attitudes acquired from living in a family of high parental conflict and from living in broken homes.

**d) Delinquent behaviour displayed by participants**
It was noted during the duration of the research study that some of the participants displayed a tendency to indulge in delinquent behaviour. The analysis of data also revealed that the participant's delinquent behaviour was attributed to lack of parental control and supervision and a means to gain the attention of both the custodial and non-custodial parent.

Research that supports the behaviour of the participants is indicated in Hetherington (2006, p.203), where it is stated that children and adolescents living in contentious homes or divorced or remarried families, in comparison with those in harmonious non-divorced families are higher in externalizing behaviour problems like antisocial behaviour, aggression and non-compliance.

In correlation to this, Wood (1997) explains that children of divorce experience an enormous sense of loss, often show mild depressive symptoms and are more likely to engage in delinquent and anti-social activities. In further attempting to explain these acts of delinquency, Mitchell (1985, p.75) states that some children may play truant, while some may feel isolated at school as no one knows that they are upset about their family breaking up.

### 6.3.1.3. Additional areas of concern noted

From a more holistic perspective, the impact of the parental separation and divorce left a profound impact on the lives of the participants. The researcher felt it essential to document these effects for it contributed largely to the outcome of the research results. In support of this, Mitchell (1985, p.13) notes that the impact of divorce is profound. It affects a large number of children, not only in their own families but indirectly in the families of their friends and relations.

On a more specific note, Walper and Beckh (2006, p.252) state that adolescents from separated and divorced families reported being more explosive than those children from nuclear families. With reference to the long term effects, Amato (2006, p.179) cites studies conducted by Adams, Bouckoms and Streiner (1982), Kessler and Magee (1993) and Overall, Henry and Woodward (1974) which indicated that adults who recall frequent conflict between their parents, during and after the divorce, while growing up, reported a disproportionately large number of psychological and marital problems in their own lives.

Herein the researcher outlines recommendations for specific problems experienced by the participants in the research study due to the impact of the parental separation and divorce.

### a) Unstable home environment

The participants within the research study experienced a great deal of instability in their home environments due to the parental separation and divorce. The problems experienced mainly by the participants in this regard led to them having to seek a more favourable home environment. Some were forced to move in with their non-

custodial parent, while others had to seek assistance from their extended family members.

In justifying the actions of the participants in the research study, Jay Lebow (1998), claims that high frequency of conflict among parents from divorced and separated families resulted in a number of negative consequences for adolescents. Furthermore, in keeping with the findings of this study, Hughes (2005) state that children's difficulties are due to conflict between parents prior to, during and after the divorce and this results in the children having a lower well-being. It is also noted that children in high conflict families fare worse than children in low conflict families.

**b) Relationship with custodial parent**

All participants in the research study maintained a fairly good relationship with their custodial parent. The participants also indicated the positive impact that these relationships had in their lives.

According to McCombs and Forehand (1989, as cited in McCurdy and Scherman, 1996) a positive relationship with the custodial parent serves as a protective factor against adverse effects on early adolescents. In correlation to the above-mentioned researchers, Hughes (2005) claims that there is overwhelming research evidence that indicates that parenting skills and the types of relationships between the parent and child are strong influences on how well children are doing.

**c) Yearning for absent parent**

The results of the research study indicated that all the participants maintained a fairly good relationship with their custodial parent, they yearned for their absent parent and also displayed varying degrees of loyalty towards this parent. This ultimately resulted in them yearning for a normal family life. In support of the feelings of the participants, Mitchell (1985, p.6) states that children who yearned for their absent parent showed an intensity of feelings ranging from grief through to embarrassment, anxiety and anger.

It is further explained in Melamed and Corcoran (1997), that a child's continued involvement with both parents allow for a realization of balanced future relationships.

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A secure relationship with their parents will help them adapt well to various time-sharing schedules, experience security which allows for them to fulfil intimate relationships in adulthood.

In clarifying the situations experienced by Tania and Cathy, McCurdy and Scherman (1996) explain that adolescents who have experienced parental divorce and mother-custody arrangements, are at a risk of lower self-esteem, than are their intact counterparts. This is due to the apparent quality of emotional relationships with their fathers. In addition to this, it is also noted that they experience greater conflictual independence which limits their overall sense of well-being.

The father-daughter relationship seems to be particularly important to young adult women. Schwarz and Zuroff (1979) and Amato and Booth (1991), as cited in McCurdy and Scherman (1996), corroborately state that the perceived inconsistency of the father's love has been found to be associated with depression.

**d) Ascribing the missing parent figure**

The participants in the research study, in the absence of one parent figure, looked to other significant family members to fill this gap. Each participant looked to a significant figure, either an elder sibling or a member of their extended family, for support. The researcher noted that these actions carried out by the participants helped them gain and maintain some form of stability in their lives.

In explaining the consequences of this, Marsden (1969, as cited in Mitchell, 1985, p.77) found that either father-presence or father-absence could lead to a child's poor performance.

**e) Moving house**

The results of the research study were indicative of the fact that all the participants had to move from one house to another due to their situations at home. The move from one house to another had an impact on all spheres of their lives.

Ancer (2009) explains that for an adult moving is stressful; and for a child it can be a world-shaker. Moving house results in the loss of the children's friends and school,

combined with the loss of parental attention, (as indicated by many of the participants in the research study), which ultimately leads to intense suffering.

In addition to this, Hughes (2005) explains that divorce often results in many children's living situations changing. This results in children often making adjustments to changes in their relationships with their friends and extended family members which create a more stressful environment for the child.

Moreover, on a more serious note, Crowder and Teachman (2004, as cited in Hughes, 2005) state that the more often that children in single-parent families moved, the more likely they were to drop out of school, or become pregnant during their teen years. Conclusively, it is also noted that the more stressful experiences that children encountered during divorce, the more difficulties they experienced.

**f) Relationships with siblings**

The results also revealed that the participants in the research study were not able to maintain healthy relationships with their siblings. This was due to the fact that the siblings were all split up after the parental separation and divorce. Hetherington (2006, p.233) states that it is essential that siblings from divorced families maintain healthy relationships with each other. This helps in strengthening and promoting positive family relationships, diminishing conflict and improving parenting which is the many settings where children develop laudable goals.

**g) Additional responsibilities**

Many of the participants in the research study spoke and wrote about their additional responsibilities that they were forced to undertake due to their situations. It was noted from the data analysis that in conjunction with the change in the family-home environment came change in routine. These additional responsibilities resulted in additional stress for the participants.

In support of the above-mentioned findings, Mitchell (1985, p.45) explains that parents in divorced situations have to give new responsibilities to their children, while their children, too, have to take on these additional responsibilities. In addition to this, Hetherington (2006, p.210) claims that children of divorced families, especially daughters, are more likely to be assigned the responsibility of household chores and

the care of younger siblings, as well as to provide emotional support for the depressed or emotionally needy parent. Furthermore, Weiss (1975; 1979, as cited in Mitchell, 1985, p.47) claims that children undertaking additional responsibilities often become prematurely mature (as in the cases of Cathy and Tania).

### 6.3.1.4. Financial and economic factors

Many of the participants' family units experienced financial difficulties after the parental separation and divorce. This had a direct impact on the lives of the participants. Some of the participants felt neglected and got into arguments with their custodial parent when they were unable to provide for their financial needs. Concurrently other participants were stressed and worried because their non-custodial parents were experiencing financial problems.

According to Weiss (1975, p.68) "separation often produces financial stress" and "poverty seems to attach itself to people trying to raise children alone" (Berner, 1992, p.3). In further support of justifying the participants' experiences, Robbins (2007) states that the financial effects of divorce on a child is going to have an impact on them both emotionally and physically. The physical impact makes reference to the quality and quantity of resources the child has at their disposal. Resources pertaining to the quality of life refer to the quality and availability of food, clothes, shelter and higher education. It is further noted in Robbins (2007) that emotional problems develop when parents experience financial difficulties and have to work more and spend less time with their children.

Furthermore, Mahony (2005) adds that the income and parental time available to children of divorced parents drops. With reference to the quantity of resources, Hughes (2005) notes that children living in divorced families are less likely to have as many economic resources as children living in intact families.

A common problem for custodial parents (mostly mothers) generally has to do with the lower income than most two-parent families. According to Hughes (2005) many of the difficulties experienced by these children are a result of the economic difficulties experienced in the families. Lower income impacts on children and often leads to more problems through disruptions that result from less money.

On a slightly positive note, Psychpage (2008) indicates that children from divorced families from higher socio-economic societies show better adjustment as there is adequate financial support which serves as a buffer effect. However, in contrast to this, families from lower socio-economic societies experience additional stress due to the lack of financial resources.

**6.3.1.5. The impact of divorce on academic life**

The results revealed that parental separation and divorce impacted both positively and negatively on the participants in the research study. Some of the participants indicated academic excellence, whereas others showed an adverse effect.

Mahony (2005) states that children from divorced families have trouble in school as they struggle with intense feelings of anger and sorrow. In support of this view, Amato and Keith (1991, as cited in Hughes, 2005) explain that children of divorced families are somewhat worse off than children who live in intact families, as they experience difficulties in school. They show more behavioural problems, more negative self-concepts, more problems with their peers which ultimately results in more trouble getting along with their parents. Cox and Desforges (1987, p.50) further add that delinquent or rebellious behaviour can have long term effects as it may lead to these children dropping out of school.

On reviewing the cases of Saron and Tania who indicated academic excellence, Cox and Desforges (1987, p.53) explain that some children benefit positively from their parents' divorce. These children indicated that they were free to concentrate on school work once the situation at home had been resolved by the divorce.

According to Berner (1992, p.55), divorce in a family can also lead to children becoming underachievers. In substantiating for the poor academic results and dropping out of school (as in the cases of Cathy and Kimona), Cox and Desforges (1987, p.113) state that many schools require pupils to work out of school hours and assume that in every home there is a quiet place where study can take place and adult help is available when needed. For children whose homes are being divided around them, homework and studying can become impossible.

**6.3.2. The role of the school**

**6.3.2.1. Parental separation and divorce in relation to the emotional well-being of the child**

**a) Feelings of abandonment**

On explaining the role the school can play in assisting children, Mitchell (1985, p.181) states that teachers are the only professionals who are in touch with school-age children, and therefore have a special responsibility towards children of separated or divorced families. It is explained that they are in a unique situation whereby they can observe any changes in behaviour that might be caused by unhappiness in the family and thereafter offer some kind of support.

It is further elaborated in Cox and Desforges (1987, p.139), that schools can help pupils whose parents are separating by providing individual attention and counselling for them. They can also examine their curriculum to ensure that a knowledge of family diversity leads children to understand that many of their peers will have undergone similar experiences.

Conclusively, on advising educators on mechanisms to assist children of divorce, Mitchell (1985) states that educators should let children know that they are available for any who need to talk and that they can make time to listen. Education is based on relationships between teachers and children, who should see each other as people. Children are better understood when their home circumstances are known to the teacher.

**b) Feelings of stress**

It is noted in Cox and Desforges (1987, p.9) that teachers are in contact with pupils daily and can observe them objectively; can assess reactions to stress and eventually decide on a referral to an outside agency, like an educational psychologist if they judge it necessary. As an ongoing process to assist learners, an educational psychologist can provide a supportive and consultative role, which will allow a pupil to be helped directly by an adult (the educator) whom they already know (Cox and Desforges, 1987, p.107).

**c) Thoughts of suicide**

In helping children deal with suicide ideation, the school can play a vital role. According to Cox and Desforges (1987) educators possess considerable expertise in dealing with such situations. They know the range of behaviour to expect in a certain age group, and the knowledge they have of children enables them to be aware of changes in an individual's behaviour. Moreover, Cox and Desforges (1987, p.6) explains that children of divorced families should be referred to educational psychologists for problems associated with social, emotional and cognitive development that affect their education in some way.

**6.3.2.2. The relationship between behavioural problems and parental separation and divorce**

**a) Alcohol use**

It is the perception of the researcher that the school, as an institute, and educators can play a vital role in curbing this problem. Many of these learners experiencing these problems abscond from school to part take in these 'drinking parties'. The South African Schools Act of 1996 awards educators the responsibility of informing parents if they suspect their children of indulging in such activities. On clarification of the dynamics of the problem, the educator then has the task to investigate the nature of the problem and involve the learner in disciplinary proceedings. In many instances, counselling is recommended prior to further steps being taken.

**b) Delinquent behaviour displayed by participants**

In highlighting the role that the school, as an organization, can play in assisting these learners, Mitchell (1985, pp.91-92) cites incidences where children from divorced families, truanted from school, displayed aggressive behaviour and became withdrawn or clingy. These children had not sought any professional help neither had their parents informed the school of their situations. In relation to these children's cases, it was noted that those parents who had informed the school of their marital breakdown or separation found that educators were able to deal with the problem child adequately. Taking the above-mentioned information into consideration, the researcher advises parents that it may be in the best interest of the child to inform the school of the family situation.

Conclusively, Wolff (1969, as cited in Mitchell, 1985, p.185) notes that social workers in child guidance clinics see many children of separated or divorced parents. Part of their task is to help these children to work through their feelings of anger, loss, rejection and their acts of delinquency. The researcher found that if children of divorce are not comfortable about informing their educators about their situation, seeking help from a social worker may be the next option.

### 6.3.2.3. The impact of divorce on academic life

In highlighting the role that the school as an organization can play in assisting learners from divorced families, Cox and Desforges (1987, p.139) explain that schools can ensure that their organization offers help and support to children and their families, particularly at the time of the parental separation and also when new families are created. To a much further extent, Cox and Desforges (1987, p.114) states that school clubs and activities which engage the attention of these children can be a welcoming diversion from home worries and can keep children doing the things appropriate to their age rather than ceasing to develop.

In addition to this, Mitchell (1985, p.182) places emphasis on the fact that secondary schools normally have educators designated to pastoral care, who make a point of letting children and parents know that they are happy to be sought out for private discussions. Children are better understood when their home circumstances are known to the educator. Some words of comfort and an arm around the child's shoulders could break down barriers and release tears or anger – generally the source of problems.

Conclusively, Mitchell (1985, p.80) adds that children from divorced families at secondary school level are more likely to find other children in similar circumstances and draw comfort from this knowledge. Bearing this in mind, the researcher advises parents to encourage such friendships as they are beneficial to the adolescent.

### 6.3.3. Recommendations

### 6.3.3.1. Parental separation and divorce in relation to the emotional well-being of the child

**a) Feelings of sadness and distress**

In assisting children deal with these problems and feelings, Berry (1971, p.321, as cited in Mitchell, 1985) advises parents that they should take responsibility and play an active role in helping their children deal with these feelings. Children should be told that their feelings of sadness, anger and anxiety will probably improve at a later stage. In doing so the parents will help their children work through these feelings.

It is important to note that in order for parents to accomplish the above, they have to be in the correct state of mind. Furthermore, on advising parents, Ancer (2009) notes that divorce is a painful, prolonged and complicated process and divorcing parents have to summon all their courage to be one main thing – the adult. In addition to this, Ancer (2009) advises parents that it is essential for them to look after themselves so that they can help their children.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [AACAP] (2008) further places emphasis on the fact that the parents' ongoing commitment to the child's well being is vital. If a child shows signs of distress the family doctor or pediatrician can refer the parents to a child and adolescent psychiatrist for evaluation and treatment.

**b) Feelings of abandonment**

Bearing the above in mind, the researcher concludes that the non-custodial parent should try and play an active role in the lives of their children. In further explaining parents on how to help children of divorce overcome these feelings of abandonment, Weiss (1975, p.230) places emphasis on the fact that children gain if the non-custody parent remains in the picture. He also explains that the father needs to continue playing a vital role in his children's lives even though he is no longer a member of their household. Furthermore, it is desirable that a consistent pattern of contact is established with the non-custodial parent as this allows the child a form of stability.

According to Hughes (2005), parents are important resources for children as they provide emotional support and practical assistance as well as serve as role models.

## c) Feelings of anger

In advising parents on how to help children deal with the anger they experience, Weiss (1975, p.229) states that if the child's sadness, anger and bitterness continues by the end of the first year (as in the case of all the participants in the study), the parent together with the child, needs to assess the situation and consider potential useful modifications. They should consider moving the child to the other parent's home. If this persists, it is further suggested that consultation with a professional therapist should be sought.

## d) Feelings of helplessness

In keeping with this, Mitchell (1985, p.141) advises divorced parents that the sooner and the more frequently children have access to the other parent (non-custodial parent), the more likely they are to continue keeping in touch with the absent parent. This would also prevent the child from fantasizing about an absent parent and have continuity of mothering and fathering, although in a new context.

## e) Feelings of stress

In advising the custodial parent on dealing with their children, Van Zyl (1997, p.55) explains that children also benefit from confiding in someone other than the parent. This significant other could be the grandparent, sibling or a friend. The custodial parent is therefore encouraged to allow their children to maintain such relationships.

Clarke-Stewart and Bretano (2006, p.167) further caution parents that children should avoid any form of disruption and change as the less stability they have in their lives, the harder it is for children to adjust and get back into a routine.

## f) Thoughts of suicide

In informing concerned stakeholders, Nair (2009) sheds light on some of the warning signs of suicide. Some of the signs include teenagers becoming depressed, being sad, anxious or 'empty' mood swings, deteriorating school performance, loss of pleasure or interest in social and sport activities, sleeping too little or too much and a change in

weight or appetite. Further concern is noted by Nair (2009) where she describes the suicide of a secondary school learner who came from a divorced family, where the learner ended her life by jumping in front of a moving train.

After consulting with psychologists, suicide analysts and counselors, Nair (2009) advises that suicides and suicide attempts could be prevented if family and friends recognized early warning signs and sought professional help for their children. Nair (2009) further advises parents on the following three steps that they can take if they suspect suicidal behaviour in their children. Firstly, they should seek professional help from a medical or mental health professional. Secondly, it is essential that they offer support, i.e. listen, avoid undue criticism and remain connected. And finally, she explains that it is crucial that they themselves become informed. They can obtain information from libraries, local support groups and the internet.

### 6.3.3.2. The relationship between parental separation, divorce and behavioural problems.

**a) Smoking and drug usage**

In advising parents on how to deal with such problems, Victor (2000) explains that it is incumbent that parents firstly understand the needs of their children. It is also stated that parents need to create a nurturing and safe environment so that their children can deal with the divorce and feel good about themselves. Furthermore, The AACAP (2008) states it is essential that both parents need to play an active role in their children's lives as research shows that children do best when parents can co-operate on their behalf.

It is the firm belief of the researcher that educators too hold the key in identifying if learners are indulging in such activities. They interact with learners on a daily basis and possess considerable expertise to help learners experiencing these problems.

**b) Alcohol use**

In advising parents on dealing with such problems, it is noted in Hetherington (2006, p.212) that when pre-divorce levels of parents and child adjustment and parenting are

controlled, it greatly diminishes the size of problem behaviours (e.g. alcohol and drug use) attributed to divorce.

### c)  Relationships with members of the opposite sex

On advising parents in helping their adolescent children cope with a problem of this nature, it is explained in Wood (1997) that they should find good role models so that their levels of trust are raised. In addition to this, Amato (2006, p.199) states that if parents in disengaged marriages wish to minimize the risks to their children, then their best option is to attempt to strengthen their relationship and help their children deal with the situation through counselling and therapy.

Conclusively, it is the view of the researcher that parents can try their best to maintain a civil relationship with their ex-spouses. In doing so, they make their children aware that although their marriages may not have been successful; they are able to maintain a fairly good relationship with their children's father or mother.

### d) Delinquent behaviour displayed by participants

In advising parents on how to deal with situations, Cox and Desforges (1987) states that it is essential that parents take note of the feelings and opinions of their children on whether or not they want their teachers to be told about their home environments.

However, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980, p.266, as cited in Mitchell, 1985, p.79) contradicts this view and emphasizes the point that it is essential for teachers to be told. It is essential that at a time in our society, when parents hold the school responsible for their child's well-being, that these parents provide some of the important tools for the teachers' effective functioning.

### 6.3.3.3. Additional areas of concern noted

### a) Unstable home environment

In advising parents Cummings and Davies (1930, as cited in Psychpage, 2008) note that if children from divorced families view their parents resolving problems and disagreements, it may be helpful to their development. However, it may be most harmful if the conflicted exchanges do not lead to any form of resolution.

**b) Relationship with custodial parent**

In maintaining a relationship with parents, The AACAP (2008) advises that it is essential that both parents play an active role in their children's lives. In addition to this, Whiteside and Becker (2000, as cited in Psychpage, 2008) recommend an appropriate parenting style for parents. It is explained that the authoritative parenting style is a good one. This parenting style allows for parents to provide structure for their children but still remain flexible; they allow children to make some decisions on their own while they maintain parental control over the situation. Furthermore, it is noted that this kind of parenting is marked by good flexibility and consistency which is coupled by emotional warmth.

On advising parents how to aid children in their developmental milestones, Bray and Kelly (1993, as cited in Psychpage, 2008), states that they need to allow their children to move between the custodial and non-custodial residential parent's home without guilt as it will help them establish and maintain good, stable relationships.

**c) Yearning for absent parent**

When advising parents on helping their children deal with their feelings of yearning for their absent parent, Brown, Portes and Christensen (1989, as cited in McCurdy and Scherman, 1996), state that regular contact with the non-custodial parent is related to higher levels of adjustment.

This advice is further confirmed by Foulkes-Jamison (2001) who state that children from divorced families do best when visits from the non-custodial parent are regular, predictable and occur in a conflict-free settings. However adversely it is also explained that, if frequent contact occurs in undesirable circumstances, the child is likely to have adjustment problems.

In addition to the above advice, Jay-Lebow (1998) explains that adolescents who live alternately with each parent do particularly well if the parents who share this arrangement co-operate with each other and this is likely to benefit the adolescent. Hughes (2005) advises parents that as children benefit from continued relationships with the non-residential parent, the quality of the relationship and good parenting by the non-custodial parents matter.

**d) Ascribing the missing parent figure**

In advising parents on dealing with this situation, Hetherington (2006, p.204) explains that although divorce may lead to an increase in stressful events, it may also be associated with escape from conflict. The building of new more harmonious relationships allow for personal growth and individuation which ultimately leads to the positive development of the child.

Furthermore, Mitchell (1985, p.80) explains that other adults in the lives of children from divorced families are of great importance in their ability to provide information and comfort. In addition to this Mitchell (1981, as cited in Mitchell, 1985, p.181) states that from past experience, divorced men and women found that emotional support from the extended family and friends have been more important than professional help.

Moreover, Berner (1992, p.36) notes that substitute parents can also provide the love and parental nurturing that a child needs. Aunts, uncles, school teachers, adult friends and institutions in the community, all can function in positive ways in the life of a child of divorce.

**e) Moving house**

In advising parents on dealing with this, Mitchell (1985, p.69) explains that research done on children from divorced families indicated that children sounded more enthusiastic about their ability to talk to other people. This confirmed Weiss's suggestion (1975) that children need as many regions of safety as possible, such as home, school and friends. The chief source of help, other than parents, had been in order of preference : grandparents, siblings, school friends, other relatives and social workers. In keeping with the above-mentioned information, the researcher advises parents that while experiencing the divorce, they should try, for their children, to maintain these relationships. However, if circumstances demand that they move, the custodial parent should try to keep it in the same town or city, no matter how difficult it may be for him or her.

**f) Relationships with siblings**

In advising parents, Mitchell (1985, p.70) explains that, on the whole, support from siblings is essential as it will allow them to mull over events together, pool knowledge and try to make sense of their parent's separation. Keeping this in mind the researcher encourages parents to try to keep the children together as much as possible. Conclusively, Stock (1981, as cited in Van Zyl, 1997, p.67) states that it is universally acknowledged that, all other factors being equal, siblings should preferably be kept together to give them some sense of continuity and stability at the time of change and trauma in their lives.

**g) Additional responsibilities**

In advising parents on dealing with this, Hetherington (2006, p.210) states that if a caring authoritative adult such as a grandparent, teacher, coach or a parent of a friend is actively involved in the adolescent's life for a sustained period, disengagement is sometimes a successful way of coping with an unhappy, contentious home life.

**h) Coping strategies**

The participants in the study all employed various coping mechanisms to deal with their situations. Herein, in addition to these, the researcher inserted additional coping strategies that may assist other children experiencing similar problems.

In maintaining relationships with friends, Mitchell (1985, p.71) explains that children who had confided in friends had gradually discovered two things. First, they were not alone in their predicament, and second, it was helpful to exchange views and experiences, when shared with others, their family breakdown was not quite so hard to bear.

In highlighting the role of the educator, Branele (1991, as cited in Van Zyl, 1997, p.56) states that when teachers had spoken to and counseled children experiencing divorce, both the children and their mothers expressed satisfaction about the emotional support given by the school.

On seeking help from social workers (as in the case of Saron), Mitchell (1985, p.73) cites incidences of two children aged 16 years who sought help from social work

support. This had helped them immensely and they were able to resolve all difficulties resulting from the breakdown. Keeping this in mind, consulting a social worker may be a favourable option.

Conclusively, in addition to this, on seeking professional help, Benians (1980, as cited in Mitchell, 1985, p.178) explains that the experience of consulting a child psychiatrist has been that successful management of access, is the single most important factor in reducing to a minimum the emotional upheavals for children.

### 6.3.3.4. Financial and economic factors

To alleviate the problem of finance, to a small extent, Cox and Desforges (1987) states that the custodial parent (usually the mother) has the right to claim maintenance for the child or children from the non-custodial parent as the South African government does not cater for a social grant for divorce parents.

According to Cox and Desforges (1987, p.86) "maintenance is the periodic payments a court order may require the parent who no longer lives with the child to make towards the child's upkeep." Although it may not be possible that the state ensures that the maintenance is paid, Van Zyl (1997, p.91) cites The South African Maintenance Act No 23 of 1963 as amended by The Maintenance Amendment Act No 2 of 1991 which has only recently been amended to ensure the enforcement of this ruling.

In advising single parents on coping with financial hurdles after a divorce, Kennedy and King (1994, p.93) suggest that the parent learn the basics of money management. It is stated that firstly they need to take care of essential monthly bills and then try to save and plan for the future which will help get beyond any insecure feelings that the parent may have. It is noted that saving adequately may have to wait, but single parents must make this a priority as soon as possible.

Other strategies noted in Kennedy and King (1994, pp.95-99) include reducing housing costs by avoiding to move in the first year after the divorce; cutting costs on all extravagant items and using coupons when shopping, minimizing child-care costs by applying for financial aid where possible; reducing the insurance premiums to suit

the family's current needs; using the option of car pooling or public transport to travel; requesting for credit-card issuers to change one's current contract to the one with lowest-available interest rates; cutting expenses for clothing and toys by bartering for bargains and, most importantly, keeping one self informed about the various money management strategies.

### 6.3.3.5. The impact of divorce on academic life

On advising parents in dealing with the possibility of children from divorced families dropping out of school, Cox and Desforges (1987, p.52) suggest that individuals may require counseling to help sort out the conflicts involved and arrive at a mutually satisfactory solution which allows growth to independence and maturity.

On further advising parents to assist children from divorced families who are under achievers, Santrock and Warshak (1979, as cited in Berner, 1992, p.55) state that the one developmental variable is the parenting approach of the custodial parent. An authoritative custodial parenting style typically produces children with higher levels of competent behaviour and positive social competence.

### 6.4. The children speak . . . . .

Here within this section are the opinions of the participants in the research study. The researcher thought it essential to include their advice, for they have experienced parental separation and divorce first hand.

### 6.4.1. Saron's view

> *"Parents wanting to divorce should try to keep it as civilized as possible without involving their children as much. As far as they can, if they have many children – try to keep the children together as a unit. And to put the needs of their children first before they consider any actions. Just try to keep things as civilized as possible – but don't fight in front of your kids – because the memories will be with them forever and they really don't want that. And always be perceptive towards your kids because they may be going through stuff and you don't want to turn a blind eye to that."*

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### 6.4.2. Kimona's view

*"Even though the husband and wife may be having personal problems between themselves, they should think about the children and stick it out for the sake of the children. But if it's an abusive relationship, then obviously you would have to go – but they should always see to their children and try to put them above everything else because if they want to get a divorce, if they didn't want to have children, they shouldn't have gotten married and have the children and make the children suffer the consequences of their actions which is not good."*

### 6.4.3 Cathy's view

*"Divorce affects children badly. If you want to get a divorce then nobody's stopping you, but you need to think of your children and make sure you explain everything to them properly, they should know why it is happening and don't make them feel that they are in the middle."*

### 6.4.4. Tania's view

*"Divorcing is a very serious issue because it doesn't only affect the two people that are getting divorced but the child as well. Parents need to be alert of what they are doing and what they are saying because the smallest thing can hurt a child. If parents getting divorced and don't know how to carry themselves out, it can cause danger to the child. It can be the cleverest child or the most intelligent child – they know a lot about divorce but, the feelings will always be there. So if the parents don't carry themselves out properly, then the child will have no control over their feelings. Children live with their parents from the time they are born. They are the two people you fall in love with before you worry about anyone else. You are very close to them so whatever they do affects you. So parents should not only think about themselves, they should also think about their children and their feelings as well."*

## 6.5. Limitations of the research study

Due to the fact that this research study was based on the topic of parental separation and divorce, which is sensitive in nature, the data collected from the participants were specific to their contexts; the findings are limited regarding transferability. These findings may not be able to be generalized to other learners experiencing the same problems. However, the recommendations given would be most useful to all stakeholders.

## 6.6. Recommendations for further study

Due to the lack of research, further research is recommended in the following areas:
- to explore the impact of parental separation and divorce on adolescent boys
- to explore the topic of parental separation and divorce on male and female adolescents, from the African and Coloured race groups in South Africa.

## 6.7. Conclusion

In this chapter the conclusions, limitations and suggestions for further research regarding the topic of parental separation and divorce were outlined. The recommendations outlined within this chapter can prove beneficial to all stakeholders within the education sector and parents from separated and divorced families or even those intending to separate or divorce.

Van Zyl (1997, p.35) emphasizes the fact that it is important for parents to note that they have a primary responsibility for the welfare of their children before and after the separation or divorce. In addition to this, Mitchell (1985, p.190) notes that parents are often unable to give their full attention to their children's needs and therefore should find alternative sources of support for their children either within the family or outside. Time is at a premium and should be used to its maximum to help establish post-separation and post-divorce relationships.

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**Appendix A – Parental Consent Form**

Mrs. M. Adam
Unit No 2- Cherry Lane Complex
129 Loon Road
Sherwood
4091
Date :

Dear Sir/Madam

Re : Permission to participate in research study

I, Mrs. M. Adam, am a student at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal, currently pursuing a Masters Degree in Education which includes a dissertation. The research for the dissertation is done under the supervision of Mr. Henry Muribwathoho. The aim of my research is to understand how separation and divorce affects the psychological well-being of secondary school learners.

I require the assistance of learners from Grades 8-12, whose parents are either separated or divorced. I humbly request your permission to allow your daughter/son to participate in my research study.

It is imperative that both parents and participants understand that participation is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves. All responses will be treated in a confidential manner and anonymity will be ensured where appropriate.

I sincerely thank you for your support.

_____

M. Adam (Mrs)

---

CONSENT

I, Mr/Mrs/Ms _____ parent of _____ hereby grant/do not grant permission to allow my daughter/son to participate in your research study.


_____                                    _____

Signature of Parent                                                    Date

## Appendix B – Letter to Department of Education

The Research Department
Department of Education
Province of KwaZulu-Natal

For: Attention Mr. Sibusiso Alwar


Mrs. M. Adam
Unit No 2- Cherry Lane Complex
129 Loon Road
Sherwood
4091
Date:

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Permission to conduct research study

I, Mrs. M. Adam, am a student at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal, am currently pursuing a Masters Degree in Education which includes a dissertation. The research for the dissertation is done under the supervision of Mr. Henry Muribwathoho. I am also currently serving in the capacity of a Level 1 educator at Ganges Secondary School. The aim of my research is to understand how separation and divorce affects the psychological well-being of secondary school learners.

I require the assistance of learners from Grades 8-12, whose parents are either separated or divorced. I humbly request the permission of the Department of Education to conduct my research and collect data at my school.

I have already gained consent of the custodial parents who are fully aware of the fact that participation is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves. All responses obtained from the participants will be treated confidentially and their identities will remain anonymous. All data collection will be done after school and during the school vacation. No tuition time will be used.

Your favourable consideration is anticipated and will be highly appreciated.

Yours for the betterment of education.

_____
M. Adam (Mrs)

**Appendix C – Principal Consent Form**

The Principal

_____

_____

_____

_____

Mrs. M. Adam
Unit No 2- Cherry Lane Complex
129 Loon Road
Sherwood
4091
Date :

Dear Sir

Re : Permission to conduct research study

I, Mrs. M. Adam, am a student at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal, currently pursuing a Masters Degree in Education which includes a dissertation. The research for the dissertation is done under the supervision of Mr. Henry Muribwathoho. The aim of my research is to understand how separation and divorce affects the psychological well-being of secondary school learners.

I require the assistance of learners from Grades 8-12, whose parents are either separated or divorced. I humbly request your permission to conduct my data collection at Ganges Secondary School.

I have already gained consent of the custodial parents who are fully aware of the fact that participation is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves. All responses obtained from the participants will be treated confidentially and their identities will remain anonymous. I wish to place on record that all data collection will be done after school, during lunch breaks and during the school vacation. No tuition time will be used.

 I thank you sincerely for your support.
Your favourable consideration is anticipated and will be highly appreciated.

Yours for the betterment of education.

_____
M. Adam (Mrs)
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
CONSENT
I, _____, principal of _____, hereby grant/do not grant the above mentioned researcher permission to conduct data collection at my school.

_____                                    _____
SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL                                                          DATE

**Appendix D**

## <u>TEMPLATE GUIDELINE FOR NARRATIVE STORIES</u>

- ➤ Thank you for participating in the research study.

- ➤ Purpose of the research study : The purpose of the research study is to obtain information from you about your experiences from living in a family where your parents are separated or divorced. The aim here is look at how your family situation has affected you. As you are aware that I will be using different methods to obtain this information from you.

- ➤ The first method of collecting information is the NARRATIVE STORIES that you are about to write. The purpose of the narrative stories is for me to gain information about your life from as far back as you can remember.

Instructions to participants :

Write narrative stories using the following template :

Write a story about your life. This may include the following information :

Age

Sex

Grade

Whether or not you live with your parents

Describe your situation

Describe the nature of the problems you experience and it's intensity

What challenges are you faced with (both past and present) ?

What coping strategies do/did you use?

What type of assistance do you need/needed?

Is the situation affecting you academically, if so how ?

Are you seeking any professional help ?

Is that helping you ?

**Semi-structured Interview Schedule based on time line**

Good morning.
> Thank you for participating in this interview.

> Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the research study is to obtain information from you about your experiences from living in a family where your parents are separated or divorced. The aim here is look at how your family situation has affected you. As you are aware that I will be using different methods to obtain this information from you.

> The purpose of this interview is to discuss the time line that you have created depicting the journey of your life.

> Obtain permission to record interview using Dictaphone.

**Question 1**
Describe the journey indicated by the timeline that you have created.

**Question 2**
How would you describe the relationship with both your parents?

**Question 3**
Tell me about your experiences of coming from a family where your parents are separated/divorced.

**Question 4**
How is coming from a family where your parents are separated or divorced affecting you? Give reasons / Explain fully.

**Question 5**
What are some of the problems that you experience regarding the situation?

**Question 6**
What are some of the strategies you use to cope with the situation?

**Question 7**
What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of having parents who are separated or divorced?  EXPLAIN.

**Question 8**
Whom do you prefer living with and why ?

**Question 9**
What advise would you like to give to parents who are wanting to divorce ?

Ask participant for any other relevant information that he/she would like to add. Ask the participant's opinion on the interview schedule.

Thank you very much for your participation! ! !

**Appendix F**

## <u>Unstructured Interview Schedule based on participant's Narrative Diaries</u>

Good morning.
- ➢ Thank you for participating in this interview.

- ➢ Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the research study is to obtain information from you about your experiences from living in a family where your parents are separated or divorced. The aim here is look at how your family situation has affected you. As you are aware that I will be using different methods to obtain this information from you.

- ➢ The purpose of this interview is to discuss your narrative diary entries over the past two weeks.

- ➢ Obtain permission to record interview using Dictaphone.


The questions asked during this interview will be based on the contents of the narrative diaries and will vary from participant to participant. The following questions are merely a guideline.

**<u>Question 1</u>**
Did any significant incident happen during this two week period?

**<u>Question 2 (optional question)</u>**
Describe the incident.

**<u>Question 3 (optional question)</u>**
How do you feel about what happened?

**<u>Question 4 (optional question)</u>**
Do you feel to be at an advantage or disadvantage regarding this incident ?
Explain fully.

**<u>Question 5 (optional question)</u>**
How are you coping with this situation?

**<u>Question 6 (optional question)</u>**
What have you learnt from this experience?


Ask participant for any other relevant information that he/she would like to add.

Ask the participant's opinion on the interview schedule.

Thank you for your participation ! ! ! .

**Appendix G – Letter to participant**

Mrs. M. Adam
Unit No 2- Cherry Lane Complex
129 Loon Road
Sherwood
4091

Date:

Dear Participant

I, Mrs. M. Adam, and I am currently completing my Masters Degree in Education at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal, Edgewood Campus.
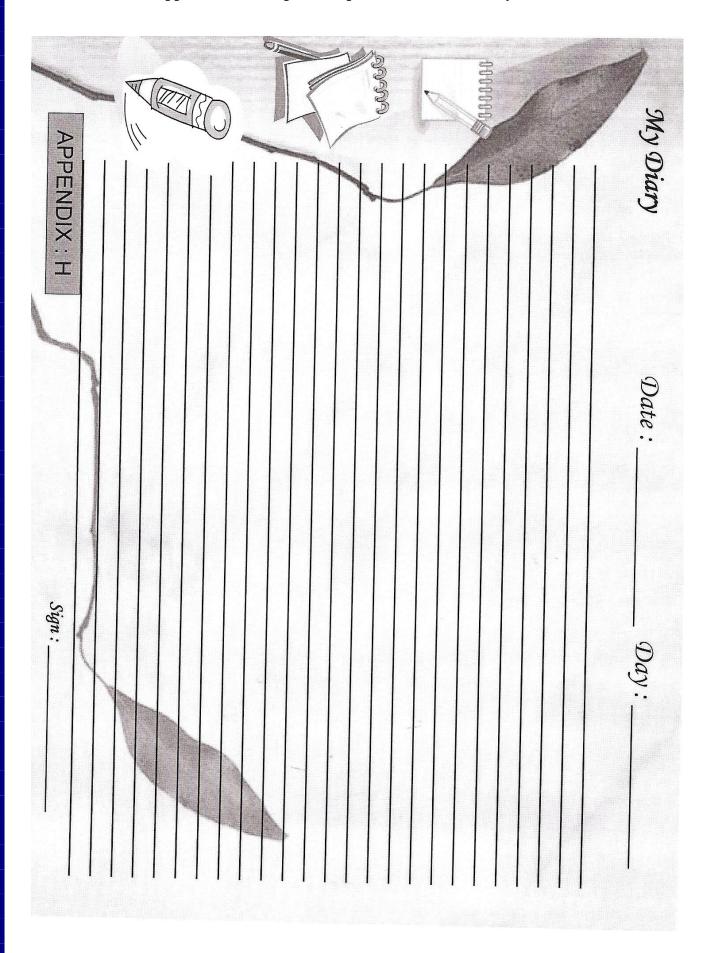
I would firstly like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The research for the dissertation is done under the supervision of Mr. Henry Muribwathoho. The purpose of my research study is to gain an understanding of how separation and divorce impacts on the psychological well-being of secondary school learners. I am particularly interested in looking at all the experiences you encounter as a learner within this category.

I will use narrative stories (a method where you write an account of your life stories), narrative diaries (a method where you make diary entries in a journal for a period of 2 months) , the creation of a timeline (photographs showing me the journey of your life) and interviews to collect the information for my study. These methods will ensure that I obtain in-depth information regarding your experiences. All responses will be treated in a confidential manner and your identity will remain anonymous. Participation within my research study is purely on a voluntary basis and you may feel free to withdraw from my study at any stage.

I look forward to working with you. I sincerely thank you for your participation and involvement.

_____
M. Adam (Mrs)

**Appendix H – Template for personal narrative diary entries**

APPENDIX :H

*My Diary*

*Date :* _____ *Day :* _____

*Sign :* _____

# Appendix I: Letter of clearance from Department of Education

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

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**
**UMNYANGO WEMFUNDO**

Tel: 033 341 8610
Fax: 033 341 8612
Private Bag X9137
Pietermaritzburg
3200

228 Pietermaritz Street
**PIETERMARITZBURG**

| INHLOKOHOVISI | PIETERMARITZBURG | HEAD OFFICE |
|---|---|---|
| **Imibuzo:**<br>**Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar** | **Reference:**<br>**Inkomba: 005/2009** | **Date:**<br>**Usuku: 06 February 2009** |

Mrs Muneera Adam
P.O Box 754
Verulam
4340

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL: THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL SEPARATION AND DIVORCE ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-GEING OF LEARNERS IN A SCHOOL IN THE DURBAN SOUTH REGION**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the attached list has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1.  Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.

2.  Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.

3.  You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.

4.  Educator programmes are not to be interrupted.

5.  The investigation is to be conducted from 09 February 2009 to 09 February 2010.

6.  Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s) please contact Mr Sibusiso Alwar at the contact numbers above.

7.  A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal of the school where the intended research is to be conducted.

8.  Your research will be limited to the schools submitted.

9.  A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Resource Planning.

---

**RESOURCES PLANNING DIRECTORATE: RESEARCH UNIT**
**Office No. G25, 188 Pietermaritz Street, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3201**

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10.    The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to

The Director: Resource Planning
Private Bag X9137
Pietermaritzburg
3200

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards

R. Cassius Lubisi (PhD)
Superintendent-General

## Appendix J : Ethical clearance

UNIVERSITY OF
**KWAZULU-NATAL**

*University of KwaZulu-Natal*
*Research Office*
*Govan Mbeki Centre*
*Westville Campus*
*University Road*
*Westville*
*4000*
*South Africa*
*Tel No: +27 31 260 3587*
*Fax No: +27 31 260 4609*

18 FEBRUARY 2010

Mrs. M Adam
School of Educational Psychology
EDGEWOOD CAMPUS

Dear Mrs. Adam

**ETHICAL APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0089/10M**
**PROJECT TITLE: "The effects of parental separation and divorce on the psychological well-being of learners in a school in the Durban South Region"**

In response to your application dated 15 February 2010, Student Number: **205524956** the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been given **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study.
PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Steve Collings (Chair)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc. Supervisor (Mr. H.N. Muribwathoho)
cc. Mrs. R Govender/Ms. T Khumalo

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ▭ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville