ADOLESCENTS' EXPERIENCE OF ADJUSTMENT TO DIVORCE: RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS WITHIN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Science (Counselling Psychology) in the School of Applied Human Sciences, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal

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March 2017

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation: *Adolescents' experience of adjustment to divorce: Risk and protective factors within a South African context,* is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. This dissertation is being submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Science (Counselling Psychology) in the School of Applied Human Sciences, College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.

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As the candidates supervisor I have approved this thesis for submission.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the following:

My Heavenly Father for His unfailing love, guidance and comfort throughout this research project. I am truly blessed.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Carol Mitchell, for her guidance and support throughout this research project.

I would like to thank Tamaryn Nicholson for her guidance and support throughout this research project.

I would like to thank Linda Nel for arranging the interviews and for her support of this project.

I would like to thank the Department of Education, the school where this research was conducted and the participants who contributed to the research.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Amanda Penney and my son Daniel Penney for all their support and sacrifices throughout my studies.

This dissertation is also dedicated to Anastacia and Jethro whose difficulties ignited my passion for this topic.

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore adolescents' experience of divorce in order to determine the adjustment and associated risk and protective factors from their perspective within a South African context. The study adopted a qualitative interpretive design and the sample consisted of eleven adolescents who had experienced parental divorce. The participants were interviewed at a high school in Pietermaritzburg. The main adjustment factors found were coping skills, parental conflict, parental cooperation, parental transparency, parent-child relationships, parenting quality, lifestyle, extended family support and external social support. The main risk factors found were unhealthy coping skills, ongoing parental conflict, uncooperative parenting, lack of parental transparency, paternal emotional disconnect, abusive stepfathers, unsupportive mothers immediately after divorce, controlling, permissive and uninvolved parenting and lifestyle changes. The main protective factors found were healthy coping skills, close relationships with mothers, involved and caring parenting, supportive grandparents and close friends. Limitations of the study were the small sample size and the lack of triangulation with other sources of adolescent information. The implications for practice are the need for parent training and support, access to therapy, free and accessible information and school intervention. The main contributions of this study relate to cultural findings: isiZulu adolescent girls' experienced significant emotional disconnect due to paternal focus on ancestral lineage continuity; isiZulu adolescents in particular experienced inter-parental physical conflict and a sense of helplessness related to the cultural practice that children are not included in adult matters; cultural complexities surrounding accommodation of divorce also appears to be significant.

Key words: adolescents' experience of divorce, adjustment factors, risk and protective factors, South African context, isiZulu, ancestral lineage, cultural practice

Definition of terms

Adolescence:

Describes the teenage years between 13 and 19 and can be considered the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood.

Divorce:

This study only includes civil divorce, which is a court decree that terminates a marriage.

Experience:

Experience is the knowledge or mastery of an event or subject gained through involvement in or exposure to it.

Parent:

A parent refers to the lawful and natural father or mother of a person.

Stepfather:

Stepfather refers to the man who is married to one's mother after the divorce of one's parents.

Ancestor:

The ancestors are the 'living dead' members of the family and clan who have died, but continue to live as 'shades' brooding over the lives of their descendants. There is a human, "alive" relationship between the individual and their ancestors. (Berg, 2003)

Ancestral lineage:

Zulu ancestral lineage in this context refers to all isiZulu persons, living or dead, who descend from a common ancestor. An individual is linked through his or her clan to the ancestors (Berg, 2003).

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1 Introduction

1.1 Problem area

Divorce is a worldwide epidemic affecting millions of children each year. In the United States of America (USA) alone more than one million children experience the divorce of their parents each year (Bing, Nelson, & Wesolowski, 2009; Thomas & Woodside, 2011). In the USA about 40% of all children will experience their parents' divorce (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003), and it is estimated that half of all divorces involve a child under 18 years of age (Potter, 2010).

In South Africa during 2014, 22,218 children were affected by the divorce of their parents, on average one child per divorce (Statistics-SA, 2014). Just over a half of all civil divorces involved families with children younger than 18 years of age. The population group breakdown for these children of divorce was 39.1% black African, 24.9% mixed race, 23.3% white and 5.6% Indian/Asian (Statistics-SA, 2014). Single-parent households are the norm in South Africa where 48% of children under 18 years of age have absent living fathers (Holborn & Eddy, 2011).

Thus, the number of children and adolescents affected by divorce is significant. The increasing global trend in the number of parents who divorce is raising concerns about the long-term consequences on child and adolescent well-being (Clark, 2013). The large number of children experiencing divorce in South Africa is concerning (Botha, 2014).

In the USA, nearly half of all first marriages end in divorce (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Meltzer, 2011; Potter, 2010). In South Africa a third of marriages end in divorce (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Botha, 2014). Hence the incidence of divorce in South Africa is nearly on par with the USA. In 2014 there were 24,689 civil divorces in South Africa, mainly from first marriages, and the marriage-divorce ratio was 164 divorces per 1000 marriages. The year 2014 saw a 3.4% increase in the number of divorces compared to 2013. However, the divorce rate has fluctuated over the period 2003 to 2014, with the highest number in 2005 (32,484) and the lowest in 2011 (20,980). Generally during this period there was an increase in the proportion of divorces for black Africans and a decline for the white population group, the remaining population groups remained constant (Statistics-SA, 2014). This increase in marital instability amongst black Africans is linked to changes in family life, including rising

numbers of extra-marital births and increases in the proportion of female-headed households (Hosegood, McGrath, & Moultrie, 2009).

The current study area was Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, where the total population is 223,447 made up of 52% female and 48% male. The breakdown by population group is 69.99% black African, 14.24% white, 8.35% Indian/Asian, 6.91% mixed race and 0.5% other. The prevalence of female-headed households is 42.7% and 1.6% of the total population are divorced (Statistics-SA, 2011).

1.2 Previous research

1.2.1 South African research

A review of existing research in South Africa on this topic yielded mostly post graduate studies, with seven out of nine studies being either masters or doctorate theses and the remaining two articles (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Botha, 2014; Ernest, 2003; Lefson, 1997; Mundalamo, 2016; Nhlangulela, 2011; Nortje, 2012; Theron & Dunn, 2010; Watson, 2003). Most of these studies were highly relevant to the current study in that they utilised interviews as the main data collection method and were conducted in areas with similar population demographics to the current study.

1.2.2 Adjustment factors

An extensive review of global and South African research regarding child and adolescent adjustment to divorce yielded the following adjustment factors: parental conflict, parental cooperation, parental transparency, parent-child relationships, parenting quality, family functioning and stability, lifestyle, home environment, external social support systems, individual characteristics, adolescent coping skills and remarriage. These adjustment factors, together with their related risk and protective factors are discussed in detail in chapter two.

1.3 Methodology

This was a qualitative study that adopted an interpretive paradigm. The sample consisted of eleven adolescents, who had experienced parental divorce. Data collection took place at a high school in Pietermaritzburg and the method of collection was semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was employed in the interpretation of interview data. Researcher reflexivity was engaged in throughout the data collection period in order to improve further interviews.

1.4 Study aims

The aim of the study was to understand more fully adolescents' perspectives on their experiences of parental divorce within a South African context. In addition, it aimed to establish adjustment factors from their perspective, and in what way these factors either helped them to adjust to divorce or made it difficult for them to adjust. The study also aimed to add social value by assisting with the selection and development of culturally relevant intervention programs, and to be informative to parents in helping their children adjust optimally to divorce.

To this end the study had the following objectives:

1.5 Objectives

- To explore adolescents' experiences of adjustment to divorce in a South African context.
- To determine the factors affecting adjustment to divorce from the adolescents' perspectives.
- To determine the risk and protective factors associated with the adjustment factors.
- To add to existing knowledge on this topic in order to assist with reducing the stress experienced by adolescents and to optimise their adjustment throughout the divorce process.
- To assist with development of culturally relevant intervention programs.
- To be informative to parents in order for them to assist their children with positive adjustment.

1.6 Research questions

The research questions were therefore:

1. How do adolescents experience adjustment to divorce in a South African context?
2. What do adolescents experience as risk factors associated with divorce in a South African context?
3. What do adolescents experience as protective factors associated with divorce in a South African context?

1.7 Outline of the study

The study begins by discussing existing literature on the topic in chapter two. The aim and rationale for the study is then presented in chapter 3. Following this, chapter four describes

the methodological procedures of the study and in chapter five the results of the study are presented. This is followed by a discussion and interpretation of the results in chapter six in which an attempt is made to answer the research questions. Finally, conclusions and implications for practice are presented in chapter seven.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on adjustment to divorce spanning from childhood to adolescence. It begins by presenting background information on adolescent adjustment to divorce. Following this, divorce as a process requiring multiple stages of adjustment is discussed. The consequences of divorce are then discussed, followed by the factors impacting adolescent adjustment to divorce. South African research on the topic is then discussed and finally conclusions are drawn.

2.2 Background

It is difficult to predict children and adolescents' divorce outcomes as there are so many interpersonal and intrapersonal variables at play. They bring different personal histories, demographic characteristics, coping skills, family interaction experience and developmental maturity to the divorce process (Theron & Dunn, 2010). There is not a single model, pattern or explanation to account for the impact of divorce on children and adolescents. This makes the topic of divorce so vast and complex (Nortje, 2012).

This diversity is highly evident in South Africa where the demographic landscape is characterised by racial, ethnic and cultural diversity and by varied socio-economic statuses. It is those adolescents who suffer sustained developmental delays or disruptions due to the divorce process that this study sought to assist.

It is thus important for this study to further understand what adolescents experience as adjustment factors in this complex domain with variable outcomes, in order to reduce negative outcomes. The more adolescents themselves are invited to talk about how they perceive and experience divorce, the more it is possible to detect alternative positions that they themselves may actively adopt (Smart, 2006).

There is relatively little published research in South Africa on this topic. Lefson (1997) and Watson (2003) also found that relatively little research exists in South Africa on adolescent experience of adjustment to divorce. Given the prevalence of divorce, the potentially negative consequences and the limited research on adolescents experiencing parental divorce in South Africa, there is a need to better understand their perspectives on the matter.

With divorce "parents and children are thrust into a situation with which they probably have little or no prior experience, and all must work together to create a context that will meet both

individual and family needs in the midst of loss, disruption and change" (Becvar & Becvar, 2009, p.117). This divorce situation should be thought of as a process rather than an event.

2.3 Divorce as a process

Divorce is a process, not an isolated event (Mundalamo, 2016). Adjustment involves multiple stages, hence children and adolescents need to adjust at different times within the process (Clark, 2013). It is important to consider post-divorce adjustment over time, including adjustment to multiple transitions and reorganisations within the family (Nortje, 2012). This highlights the importance of considering divorce experiences from childhood through to adolescence.

On average it is estimated that divorce adjustment could take between one and two years, but more longitudinal data is needed (Bing et al., 2009). Longitudinal studies are key to understanding the cause of negative outcomes (Isaacs, 2002). For instance Cheng, Dunn, O'Connor, and Golding (2006) measured child behaviour and emotional problems at four years and again at seven years, and were able to determine that divorce led to a significant increase in related problems. These related problems are discussed next.

2.4 Consequences of divorce

On average children of divorce do not experience serious outcomes (Clark, 2013). The vast majority are resilient and cope with or even benefit from the change (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). Adjustment improves over time and on average there is no significant effect on child or adolescent well-being (Amato & Keith, 1991). Within a South African context findings are similar, Nortje (2012) found that adolescents had accepted the divorce and were well adjusted and Watson (2003) found that divorce was not significantly problematic for adolescents. Although on average these children and adolescents' wellbeing is worse off than those from intact families, the difference is small (Hughes, 2005). A study exploring behavioural problems found that 10% of children from intact families exhibited problems, compared to 26% of children from divorced families (Hetherington, 1993).

It is the significant variability of adjustment to divorce and the negative outcomes that is striking (Clark, 2013; Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). Children and adolescents vary greatly in their reactions to divorce (Amato, 2000). Some show remarkable resilience and in the long run their functioning may be enhanced by coping with divorce. Others suffer sustained developmental delays or disruptions and still others adapt well in the early stages, but with

delayed effects emerging at a later stage, particularly during adolescence (Amato, 2000; Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan, & Anderson, 1989). Understanding the source of why divorce leads to these diverse outcomes is paramount (Cheng et al., 2006).

One important indicator of negative outcomes is heightened stress level. Hetherington et al. (1989), Hetherington and Elmore (2003) and Hughes (2005) found that children and adolescents of divorce face more stresses, especially in the initial years after divorce or remarriage. They confront stressors specific to different stages of the divorce process, for example relocation immediately after divorce and remarriage at a later stage. It is the exposure to, and the accumulation of multiple stressors that adversely effects adjustment (Hetherington et al., 1989; Hughes, 2005). Theron and Dunn (2010) refer to the slow but harmful effects of divorce.

In terms of possible negative outcomes, which are closely linked to heightened stress levels, behavioural problems are common (Cheng et al., 2006; Hughes, 2005), including increased externalising or acting-out behaviours (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). Decreased academic performance is also commonly found (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Meltzer, 2011), as well as psychological difficulties (Clark, 2013), including depression (Meltzer, 2011), emotional problems (Cheng et al., 2006), including anger and guilt (Hetherington et al., 1989) and self-esteem difficulties (Hughes, 2005). Social problems, including decreased social responsibility (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003), trust issues (Meltzer, 2011), problems with peers (Hughes, 2005) and difficulties with general social well-being (Clark, 2013) were found. Family relationships also suffer (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003), including parental relationship problems (Hughes, 2005). Personal development (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003) and physical well-being (Clark, 2013) are also adversely effected.

However, some outcomes are positive. For instance, divorce can remove an adolescent from a conflicted, stressful home environment (Hetherington et al., 1989). Commonly divorce provides adolescents with a positive perspective on future family life, whereby they may realise the importance of an intact family and caring for their children (Nhlangulela, 2011).

Multiple risk and protective factors interact and influence individual adaptation to stressful events, such as divorce (Leon, 2003). It is therefore important to understand these positive or negative outcomes over time and the risk and protective factors that affect stress levels. It has been shown that risk and protective factors vary in prominence at different points in time

within the divorce process, and it is important to consider the balance of these factors that an individual is exposed to and their applicability to circumstances (Isaacs, 2002).

2.5 Adjustment factors

Before looking at adjustment factors, it is useful to define successful adjustment as a yardstick. "Successful adjustment occurs to the extent that adolescents experience few divorce related symptoms and are able to function well in their life roles, including family and school. In addition their developed identity and lifestyle are no longer tied to the pre-divorce era" (Amato, 2000, p.1271).

In order to limit negative outcomes and assist with successful adjustment it is important to be aware of the factors affecting adolescent adjustment to divorce, as well as the related risk and protective factors. There have been many global studies, and some in South Africa, that have explored different adjustment factors. Findings from these studies are discussed in detail below, and following this findings are summarised in Table 1.

2.5.1 Parental conflict

Inter-parental conflict is one of the most important factors to consider when exploring adolescents' adjustment to divorce (Nortje, 2012). Parental conflict is strongly linked to adjustment problems (Amato & Keith, 1991; Bing et al., 2009; Leon, 2003) and protection from inter-parental conflict assists with adjustment (Clark, 2013; Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Parental conflict increases children's vulnerability to a range of psychological problems by undermining their emotional security in the relationship between their parents (Davies & Martin, 2014).

Hughes (2005) found that conflict before and during divorce is a risk factor, but that post-divorce conflict strongly influences adjustment. Post-divorce stability, including no parental conflict, was found to be protective, allowing for positive adjustment (Nortje, 2012). This suggests that post-divorce conflict is a key variable in the ability of adolescents to adjust to divorce.

2.5.1.1 Ongoing parental conflict

Ongoing parental conflict can lead to stress and the onset of mental health problems (Clark, 2013), and it is commonly predictive of poor adjustment (Morris & West, 2000). Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) described ongoing conflict as emotionally devastating. Divorce may bring temporary relief from parental conflict, but often parental conflict and uncooperative

parenting continues (Theron & Dunn, 2010). Stress is not mostly due to divorce, but to ongoing parental conflict before, during and after divorce (Lefson, 1997).

Ongoing parental conflict negatively affects a child's self-esteem. Fighting parents make children feel humiliated, with the result that they are likely to view themselves in overly negative and hostile ways. Parental conflict is a judgement on the children, which affects how they react (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

2.5.1.2 Level and type of conflict

The level of parental conflict before and after divorce also impacts a child's adjustment, whereby the child's stress response system is negatively impacted (Davidson, O'Hara, & Beck, 2014). It makes sense that the lower the amount and intensity of parental conflict, the lower the resultant stress and the better the adjustment.

The type of parental conflict is an important adjustment variable. Reports of physical abuse between parents were commonly found in South African studies. In a study conducted at the University of Zululand on the meaning attributed to the divorce of one's parents, Nhlangulela (2011) found that the father commonly emotionally and physically abused the mother, which was experienced as traumatic by adolescents, impacting their psychological well-being. Lefson (1997) found that an adolescent who had experienced her mother being physically abused, felt relieved when their parents divorced. This indicates that the type of parental conflict plays a significant role in the acceptance of, and adjustment to divorce.

A child's (persons under the age of 18 years) right to be protected from any physical or psychological harm is actively legislated and protected in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2005). This right includes protection from exposure to maltreatment, abuse, degradation, ill-treatment, violence or harmful behaviour towards another person. It is suggested that sadly, many children and adolescents in South Africa are exposed to this type of behaviour through inter-parental conflict, likely causing them psychological harm.

2.5.1.3 Well-being enhanced by separation from conflict

Commonly children and adolescents prefer not to live in conflicted homes and are better off away from the conflict. Amato and Keith (1991) found that children from divorced families experience a higher level of well-being than children from conflicted intact families. Mitchell (1983) agreed finding that children adapt better in broken rather than unhappy homes.

Adolescents would prefer to live in a one-parent home than in a conflicted two-parent home (Mcloughlin & Whitfield, 1984).

2.5.1.4 Reactions to divorce

Adolescents exposed to ongoing conflict are significantly more accepting of divorce (Watson, 2003). These adolescents may experience relief at divorce, however if children or adolescents perceive little conflict this makes the divorce unexpected, and painful emotions such as sadness, confusion, fear of abandonment, anger, guilt, grief and loyalty conflicts are made worse after separation (Clark, 2013). Sadness can be compounded by bewilderment at an unexpected divorce (Mitchell, 1983).

Even though children are aware of conflict, they do not often contemplate that this would lead to divorce, rather the divorce is unexpected resulting in disbelief, shock, confusion, sadness, anger, loss, betrayal, rejection, abandonment and humiliation (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Mundalamo (2016) and Lefson (1997) found that adolescents who were not exposed to ongoing parental conflict had a negative emotional response to the news of their parents' divorce, and it was perceived as a crisis adding to any existing stress that is commonly found in this developmental period. Additional stress also results from concern for parents' feelings after the divorce (Mitchell, 1983). As previously mentioned, high levels of stress are closely related to poor adjustment.

In conclusion, it is indicated that inter-parental conflict is closely linked to poor adjustment. Although some adolescents feel relief from the conflict, ongoing post-divorce conflict limits an adolescent's ability to adjust. Physical abuse between parents was more commonly found in South African research (Lefson, 1997; Nhlangulela, 2011), suggesting a need for further research on adolescents exposed to this type of environment.

2.5.2 Parental cooperation

Cooperative parenting can be defined as active consultation between a mother and a non-resident father on parenting decisions (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009). Cooperative parenting was found to be a protective factor for adolescent adjustment to divorce (Clark, 2013; Mundalamo, 2016; Papalia et al., 2009).

Adolescents' ability to cope and adjust to divorce is linked to cooperative parenting. Adolescents have age-specific coping strengths or cognitive ability to help their adjustment, but parental cooperation is important as to whether they can utilise these coping strengths

(Mcloughlin & Whitfield, 1984). Positive and supportive co-parenting leads to positive child coping (Bing et al., 2009), including low inter-parental conflict and mutual concern for the child's well-being (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003) and open lines of communication between parents (Papalia et al., 2009). It leads to more frequent contact between the father and child, which in turn results in better father-child relationships and more responsive fathering (Papalia et al., 2009).

Uncooperative parenting is a risk factor, often leading to anxiety and uncertainty for children and adolescents (Mcloughlin & Whitfield, 1984). In addition, contact with the non-custodial parent, usually the father, can be limited due to uncooperative parenting. Mitchell (1983) found that custodial parents did little to encourage access to the noncustodial parent and Lefson (1997) found that 60% of adolescents had very little post-divorce contact with their fathers due to uncooperative parents. Prokof'eva and Valetas (2003) agreed finding that the frequency of fathers' contact with their children after a divorce was affected by disagreements with ex-spouses.

Children and adolescents are often given additional roles and responsibilities due to uncooperative parenting. They become a mediator, communicator and confidante to parents, including comforting and taking care of their emotional needs (Nortje, 2012). Botha (2014) also found that children should not have to mediate, stating that parents should never involve their children in conflict. The result of uncooperative parenting is that stress is added to a child or adolescent's existing developmental stress, commonly causing them to feel burdened and making it more difficult for them to adjust (Nortje, 2012). Developmental stress pertains to the resultant stress of adolescents having to deal with multiple changes during this transitional period including puberty, identity formation, individuation and sexuality.

2.5.3 Parental transparency

Children of divorce are damaged not so much by the divorce, but by parents failing to consider the best interests of the child during the divorce process (Smart, 2006). Lefson (1997) found that adolescents felt strongly that both parents should have told all their children together, in a family meeting, in a straight and honest manner. However, none were told by both parents together, and only a few were told separately by both parents.

Commonly, parents are not open with their children about the divorce. Less than 20% of children reported that both of their parents spoke to them about the divorce (Dunn, Davies, O'Connor, & Sturgess, 2001). In a study on divorce within a community settlement, Ernest

(2003) found that only 15% of parents communicated with their children about the impending divorce. The study explained that this was in line with traditional black African culture within KwaZulu-Natal, that discussion of family matters is the concern of adults alone and not children.

Parents should give reasons for the divorce. Children need information as well as support and understanding. A lack of explanations to children about reasons for divorce was found by Mitchell (1983). Lefson (1997) also found that the majority of adolescents wanted to know more about the reasons for the divorce. This suggests that inadequate reasons were given. In studying the needs of adolescents in divorced families, Botha (2014) had a similar finding that parents did not adequately explain the reasons for the divorce. Most of the adolescents indicated that they blamed themselves for their parents' divorce, and needed reassurance that they were not to blame (Botha, 2014).

Parents need to keep their adolescent children informed about their intentions, including post-divorce co-parenting and re-partnering (Mcloughlin & Whitfield, 1984). Open and honest communication by parents about the divorce situation is important (Botha, 2014). Thus, there is evidence that information needs to be given to adolescents by parents throughout the divorce process. They need to know what is expected of them, especially with regards to the non-custodial parent, such as visitation details.

In a review of existing research on the effects of divorce on children, Hughes (2005) emphasised the importance of parental transparency for child adjustment, citing it as empowerment versus helplessness. Children need to be a part of their parents' divorce process. This empowers them and shows respect to them as members of the family with a voice (Mundalamo, 2016). In line with empowerment there is some evidence that children need the opportunity to voice their opinions. Children had more positive feelings and less painful memories of household transitions when given the chance to voice their opinion about visiting or living arrangements (Dunn et al., 2001). Lefson (1997) also found that adolescents needed to be involved in decision making, such as choosing which parent to live with.

In developmentally appropriate ways, children (persons under the age of 18 years) must be informed of any action or decision taken in a matter concerning them, which significantly affects them. In addition these children's viewpoints must be obtained in these matters. This right is actively legislated and protected in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2005). This right may often be denied to children and adolescents in South Africa by them not being

informed of their parents' impending divorce and not being offered the opportunity to participate in the process.

In conclusion, global and South African researchers agree that parental transparency or openness about divorce is important for adjustment, including providing reasons and empowering adolescents to voice their opinions. African cultural practices, that do not allow children to be involved in adult matters such as divorce, have been identified as an area for further research in a South African context.

2.5.4 Parent-child relationships

The importance of healthy parent-child relationships is discussed first, followed by a discussion of the mother-child relationship and then the father-child relationship.

2.5.4.1 Healthy parent-child relationships

Young people who have supportive connections with parents, school and community tend to develop in a positive, healthy way. Perceptions of connectedness to others, both at home and at school positively affect adolescents' health and well-being in all domains (physical, cognitive, emotional and social). (Papalia et al., 2009)

Caring parenting post-divorce is related to positive adjustment, where a warm relationship with the mother or father after divorce positively effects adjustment, even when there is inter-parental conflict (Sandler, Miles, Cookston, & Braver, 2008). Healthy parent-child relationships are protective (Clark, 2013; Pedro-Carroll, 2005), specifically parental acceptance and warmth (Cohen, 2002). A good relationship with *both* parents is very important as the child or adolescent needs to feel cared for (Botha, 2014). Whereas impaired parent-child relationships (Clark, 2013), including rejection by parents (Cohen, 2002) are considered a risk factor for poor adjustment to divorce.

Adolescents in particular need to be cared for by their parents, since they are at a sensitive period in their developmental process, when they may already be erratic, emotional, unstable and unpredictable. Added stress and confusion resulting from the divorce may exacerbate their existing negative emotions and put them at risk. Overall, parents are vitally important to the post-divorce development of their children (Mundalamo, 2016).

Emotional as well as physical safety was found to be important for positive adjustment. Adolescents need to feel safe with *both* parents even if they are divorced (Mundalamo, 2016). A child's sense of vulnerability relating to divorce is a risk factor for poor adjustment

(Cohen, 2002). Adolescents look to parents for a secure base from which they can attempt independence. The most secure adolescents have strong, supportive relationships with parents who are attuned to the way the adolescent sees themselves, who permit and encourage their striving for independence, and who provide a safe haven in times of emotional stress (Papalia et al., 2009). Hence, it is important for parents to ensure that their children feel safe and secure throughout the divorce process.

Parents' spending time with and being available to their adolescent children is important. Adolescents who are getting emotional support at home and are well-adjusted at school have the best chance of avoiding the health risks of adolescence (Papalia et al., 2009).

2.5.4.2 Mother-child relationship

It is common for children and adolescents to develop close post-divorce relationships with their mothers (Thomas & Woodside, 2011). A high quality mother-child relationship is beneficial to a child's adjustment to divorce, through building children's sense of efficacy in their ability to do something in response to stressful events known as active coping (Velez, Wolchik, Tein, & Sandler, 2011). Nortje (2012) found that the post-divorce mother-child relationship was experienced more positively than the father-child relationship. Mundalamo (2016) had a similar finding that adolescents generally preferred to stay with their mothers.

a. Mother's adjustment to divorce

It is important for a mother to be able to meet her child's post-divorce needs. Children and adolescents are better able to accept the stress and adapt to the changes associated with divorce, when the resident parent (usually the mother) handles these stresses and changes in a responsible manner (Becvar & Becvar, 2009).

Unfortunately, mothers are commonly not able to meet their children's post-divorce needs, during or immediately after the divorce. Lefson (1997) found diminished maternal parenting and support at the time of divorce. Adolescents have specific post-divorce needs, especially during the first year, and mothers dealing with their own trauma may not have the capacity to assist their children with their needs. This results in adolescents being unable to focus on developmental tasks and the mother-child relationship may be negatively impacted (Botha, 2014).

Divorce can be one of the most stressful life events and poor maternal adjustment to divorce causes children to fair worse (Hughes, 2005). Mothers commonly experience psychological

difficulties (Clark, 2013; Cohen, 2002; Pedro-Carroll, 2005) and emotional difficulties (Clark, 2013; Leon, 2003). Custodial mothers under stress (financial, social isolation, conflict with ex-spouse) during and following divorce may experience psychological difficulties, becoming more self-involved, uncommunicative and unsupportive towards their children (Mundalamo, 2016; Tein, Sandler, & Zautra, 2000). Hetherington et al. (1989) found that mothers became anxious and dissatisfied. In addition due to reduced economic resources, mothers may return to work, leaving their children feeling abandoned (Hetherington et al., 1989). Watson (2003) found that if a mother adjusts well, the adolescent models this as learnt behaviour, but only if the adolescent relates well to the mother in a stable, positive relationship. This emphasises the importance of maternal adjustment.

However, a mother's psychological and emotional well-being may not be as compromised by divorce as previously thought. Brenner and Hyde (2006) found that mother-child interaction (emotional and social support) is not affected by divorce, as evidenced by no significant difference in emotional provision and social scaffolding between divorced mothers and mothers from intact marriages. Nortje (2012) also found that there were no signs of reduction in maternal parenting (communication, monitoring or discipline) and that children were provided for emotionally and physically.

2.5.4.3 Father-child relationship

The impact of the father-child relationship on adolescent post-divorce adjustment is frequently researched. The reason for this appears to be twofold firstly the father is usually the non-custodial parent and secondly the father leaving the house is generally a significant change to the home environment, whether positive or negative.

a. Regular contact

Regular paternal contact is important (Leon, 2003), as well as a warm paternal relationship (Storksen, Roysamb, Moum, & Tambs, 2005). Prokof'eva and Valetas (2003) found that fathers do not play a big enough part in their child's post-divorce upbringing. Importantly, emotional availability and involvement of the father in a child's life are most important, not mere presence (Holborn & Eddy, 2011).

Children felt rejected because of their fathers' failure to maintain contact and show any interest in them (Mitchell, 1983). The frequency of father-child contact is an important factor in adolescent adjustment to divorce as it provides the opportunity for fathers to guide their children and show them affection. Low father-child contact, especially immediately

following divorce, tends to result in adolescents having distant and obligatory relationships with their fathers (Thomas & Woodside, 2011). Regular inter-parental post-divorce contact is important for achieving regular father-child contact (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008).

Lefson (1997) found that adolescents who had better pre-divorce relationships with their fathers than with their mothers still had better relationships with their fathers post-divorce. This indicates that a good pre-divorce father-child relationship may carry forward to post-divorce.

b. Absent fathers

Children and adolescents growing up with an absent father are at a significant disadvantage (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). The involvement of the father can contribute to cognitive development, intellectual functioning and school achievement. The father-child relationship directly influences educational achievement, self-confidence, especially among girls, as well as adjustment and behaviour control among boys (Holborn & Eddy, 2011).

Paternal absence, or non-residency, is a risk factor in adjustment to divorce for children and adolescents, particularly on development of negative emotions (Storksen et al., 2005). Growing up without a father may lead to emotional disturbance and depression (Holborn & Eddy, 2011).

Nortje (2012) found that the fathers of the four adolescent boys studied were uninvolved after the divorce and missed a large part of their children's childhood. These adolescents felt annoyed and angry about this lost earlier relationship. Nhlangulela (2011) found that in response to the father's absence, especially during the initial period after divorce, children and adolescents became untrusting and withdrawn. Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) had a similar finding that all participants were unhappy about the absence of their father.

Although they agree that an absent father lowers a child's well-being, Amato and Keith (1991) found that the quality of the father-child relationship and contact with the father does not significantly improve adjustment. In a similar way, Watson (2003) found that, based on learning theory, the role of the father in adjustment to divorce is unimportant. Most of the adolescents studied were brought up by their mothers while their fathers worked. Less contact with the father resulted in an adolescent being less likely to see him as a model and thus less affected by his level of adjustment. Overall though, it seems that losses in the father-child bond are at least partly responsible for negative child outcomes (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008).

c. Absent fathers in South Africa

According to a research paper by the South African Institute of Race Relations into the state of South African families and youth, absent living fathers in South Africa increased from 42% in 1996 to 48% in 2009. In 2009 only 30% of black African fathers were present, 53% mixed race, 83% white and 85% Indian. (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Thus the number of absent fathers, particularly for black African children, is concerning.

> *Both the number and the proportion of children with absent, living fathers are increasing in post-apartheid South Africa, particularly among black Africans, when one would assume that they would decrease as a result of the end of the migrant labour system...attitudes to parental responsibility and attitudes to monogamy and commitment to relationships need to be publicly discussed and addressed by broader society. Why do parents, particularly fathers, fail to acknowledge their children? What values are passed on to children?* (Holborn & Eddy, 2011, pp. 5-6)

The high value placed on ancestral lineage by some isiZulu men, for whom these beliefs are important, may partly answer the questions posed by Holborn and Eddy (2011). Specific features of the Zulu marriage and childbearing tradition may cause these marital unions to be more vulnerable to divorce than any other population and language groups in South Africa (Hosegood et al., 2009).

According to Berg (2003), the ancestors are the living dead members of the family who have died, but a relationship continues. Ancestors act as guides, mentors and protectors and their presence is the most important factor in maintaining good health. Together the living and the dead form one big family (Nel, 2007). The importance of ancestors to the Zulu is indicated in the following quotation:

> *The continuity of family crosses generations, and includes past and future generations. Family oneness carries the Zulu forward in time, into the future. For the Zulu this makes having offspring extremely important. In his children he sees the continuation of the life which he carries in himself, hence the great calamity of not being able to bear children. It is the same as death, mortalisation of the being, the end of life.* (Nel, 2007, pp.58-59)

In line with continuity, the idea of ancestors going back many generations is felt as a resource and a source of strength (Nduna, 2014). In striving for this continuity, Nduna (2014) indicates that the Zulu surname is very important. The same surname creates a spiritual connection to

ancestors based on paternal lineage and is important to fathers and children. Failure to use the paternal surname means loss of ancestral protection, and it is believed that paternal ancestral blessings predetermine success in life. Face cutting signals the clan surname, once a child's face is cut, the mother cannot easily change the child's surname. Generally, the father wants his child to continue in his ancestral lineage and continue with his traditions such as ancestral practices.

The suggested link between ancestral lineage and the questions posed by Holborn and Eddy (2011) is that the desire for having numerous children to ensure ancestral lineage continuity amongst some isiZulu men, for whom these beliefs are important, may be a higher priority than the importance of regular contact and a keen interest in their child's well-being. This is confirmed by Hosegood et al. (2009) finding that it is the value placed on childbearing and its precedence over marriage that has had the most influence in shaping contemporary Zulu family life.

In a study on adolescents of divorced parents in the Limpopo province, where 96% of the population is black African, Mundalamo (2016) found that fathers commonly had unpleasant relationships with their children, even pre-divorce. Nhlangulela (2011), whose study was conducted at the University of Zululand, had a similar finding that participants felt emotionally disconnected from their fathers and yearned for their father's love. One of the participants reported "I learnt that polygamy is not a good thing" (Nhlangulela, 2011, p.66).

d. Gender differences in response to father's absence

With regards to gender differences, male and female adolescents seem to react and adjust differently to their father's absence. Not living with their father was more distressing for boys due to the loss of a male role-model who taught them valuable life lessons (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Storksen et al., 2005). In addition, if a father was present, he may have been able to assist with difficult male developmental problems (Nhlangulela, 2011). Boys may find it difficult to initiate and maintain a close relationship with an absent father (Storksen et al., 2005). Boys without a father tend to display exaggeration of typical male behaviour such as aggression (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Boys generally wanted closer relationships with their fathers, although their fathers became more involved from the onset of adolescence due to shared recreational activities such as sport (Nortje, 2012).

Adolescent girls may struggle to find common ground with their fathers due to limited shared interests. However girls are not significantly affected by their father's non-residence,

indicating that a close father-child relationship for girls does not depend on their fathers' physical residence but more on an emotional bond (Storksen et al., 2005). Girls learn from fathers to develop good, trusting relationships with men (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). When the father is present girls generally have higher self-esteem, lower levels of risky sexual behaviour and less problems forming and maintaining romantic relationships (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). One researcher reported a gender difference based on perceived father roles, where boys missed a role model, girls felt that their mother had been deprived of someone to do male jobs in the house (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

e. Reasons for limited contact

In defence of absent fathers, Sanford and Griffin (2000) found that a father's lack of post-divorce contact is a reaction to difficult circumstances, as opposed to intentional harm to the child. Fathers may withdraw due to a sensed loss of paternal authority in the post-divorce family. They may also withdraw due to a breakdown in relations with their ex-spouse, who may disapprove of her children spending time with their father (Prokof'eva & Valetas, 2003). Fathers' close relationships with children are positively related to consistent maintenance payment (Prokof'eva & Valetas, 2003). Peters and Ehrenberg (2008) explain that fathers who remain financially committed to their children are perceived by ex-spouses in a more favourable light and in turn ex-spouses are more supportive of the father-child relationship.

In conclusion, global and South African researchers agree on the vital importance of parent-child relationships for positive adolescent adjustment. It is clearly important to reduce the negative effects of mothers' maladjustment to divorce and absent fathers on the parent-child relationships. Linked to absent fathers, the role of cultural or traditional beliefs regarding ancestral lineage seems to influence the father-child relationship.

2.5.5 Parenting quality

2.5.5.1 Importance of parenting quality

Parenting quality is a factor influencing child adjustment to divorce (Leon, 2003). In a study on the views of social service providers on the use of parenting plans for adolescents of divorced parents, Mundalamo (2016) refers to the importance of increasing knowledge about parenting as an intervention strategy for divorcing families with adolescents.

Other authors have found that a close relationship to an authoritative parent is protective over positive adjustment to divorce (Clark, 2013; Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Pedro-Carroll,

2005). Another important aspect of parenting practice that affects adjustment is discipline, where consistent discipline was found to be a protective factor, and inconsistent discipline a risk factor (Cohen, 2002).

2.5.5.2 Diminished parenting quality

Parenting practices may be affected by various transitions related to divorce. Diminished practices are commonly experienced immediately following divorce (Hughes, 2005). This is often due to the parent being preoccupied with his or her own adjustment. It commonly occurs immediately after divorce that the custodial parent, usually the mother, is dealing with her own adjustment and neglects to monitor her adolescent's activities (permissive parenting) and becomes more punitive (authoritarian). This places the child or adolescent at risk for poor adjustment (Clark, 2013; Hetherington et al., 1989). In addition, absent or uninvolved fathers lower a child's well-being (Amato & Keith, 1991). This is likely due to the adolescent's perceived lack of care and guidance by their father.

2.5.5.3 Disparity in parenting practices between parents

In divorced families a disparity in parenting practices causes confusion due to the different methods of upbringing and discipline (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

In a study on parenting in single and two-parent families in South Africa, Roman (2011) found that single mother parenting practices were perceived by children as involved and supportive of autonomy. In addition, no differences in parenting practices between single and married mothers were found. Hence, marital status did not account for parenting practices for mothers.

2.5.6 Family functioning and stability

Stability in post-divorce family functioning is considered a protective factor. Stable family functioning and routine is protective (Clark, 2013; Cohen, 2002; Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Whereas chaotic, unstable family functioning has been found to be a risk factor, including a lack of routine and multiple family transitions such as moving house and remarriage (Clark, 2013).

These transitions and reorganisations within the family impact child adjustment (Nortje, 2012). The non-custodial parent leaving the home often disrupts family functioning and stability. Adolescents experienced a sense of loss of the presence of one parent, with most finding the initial period after divorce very difficult (Lefson, 1997). The instability of moving

between parents, usually on weekends, was also found as unsettling (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

2.5.7 Lifestyle

Divorce may cause poverty (Cohen, 2002) or a decline in household income, which may result in multiple changes involving home, school and friends (Clark, 2013). These multiple changes may cause the child to be at risk of adjustment problems (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Hughes, 2005). Moving house causes instability and disruption in friendships and routines (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009) and changing school places the child or adolescent at risk of a poor education (Cohen, 2002). In some cases mothers have to start a new job or work longer hours in their current jobs, resulting in less contact with their children following divorce (Hughes, 2005). An adolescent may even have to find a job. Nhlangulela (2011) found that one participant who felt responsible to assist her resident family with finances due to her father not paying maintenance, even considered stopping her studies to begin working.

These multiple unsettling transitions and losses on top of divorce cause additional stress and place the child or adolescent at risk of adjustment problems, adding to their vulnerability and sense of insecurity.

Financial stability is protective (Clark, 2013; Pedro-Carroll, 2005), as a child does not have to face multiple unsettling and stressful transitions. Adolescents from affluent families who experienced limited lifestyle changes due to financial stability adjusted well (Watson, 2003). It seems that limiting lifestyle changes is protective of positive adjustment. Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) found that adequate parental provision limits lifestyle change and is protective. Adolescents needed reassurance that the resident parent was financially secure in terms of the basic physical needs of food, clothing and shelter. Although adolescents had to make some lifestyle changes, the basics were most important (Botha, 2014).

In their meta-analysis on parental divorce and child well-being during the 1980's, Amato and Keith (1991) found that financial difficulties were a minor cause of adjustment problems. In a further meta-analysis a decade later, Amato (2001) found that the gap in financial well-being between children from divorced and intact families had increased. This suggests that financial difficulties are becoming a more prominent factor in adjustment problems.

In conclusion, there is an indication that the extent of lifestyle changes is proportional to related adjustment problems. It is argued that financial instability related to divorce is more common in a South African context. This may be why adolescents feel obliged to help their

family financially and children are concerned over whether their primary needs will be met. Although research from the USA reveals that financial instability may not be significant for positive adjustment, no such finding has been made in South Africa. Thus, adjustment problems related to financial difficulties may be more prominent in South Africa and further research is needed.

2.5.8 Home environment

The home environment concerns the support received by adolescents from siblings and extended family. Supportive siblings and increased closeness to siblings were reported as protective for positive adjustment (Clark, 2013; Nortje, 2012; Thomas & Woodside, 2011). Lefson (1997) found that the majority of adolescents had supportive siblings, and that older siblings were the most supportive.

In terms of extended family support, supportive extended family relationships are protective for children and adolescents dealing with divorce (Amato, 2000; Botha, 2014; Clark, 2013; Lefson, 1997; Nortje, 2012; Thomas & Woodside, 2011). Thomas and Woodside (2011) are of the view that extended family are important for emotional and practical needs.

Grandparents were found to be especially supportive. Lefson (1997) was of the view that grandparents are very supportive emotionally and financially, as the majority of adolescent girls from her study temporarily moved in with their grandparents. Nortje (2012) found that grandmothers were supportive and that grandfathers became a role model for adolescent boys. In a study on adolescents within a military context, Botha (2014) found huge emotional and physical support from extended family, especially grandparents. Aunts (Lefson, 1997) and uncles (Lefson, 1997; Nortje, 2012) were also found as supportive. Thus extended family seems to play a very important role, not only for emotional support, but also financially.

2.5.9 External Social Support

External social support concerns support from individuals and organisations outside of the immediate and extended family. External social support is viewed as a protective factor for adolescent adjustment to divorce (Leon, 2003; Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

Good relationships with friends are an important source of support (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Thomas & Woodside, 2011). Botha (2014) found that adolescents related better with friends than teachers or other professional personnel from school. Adolescents were commonly able to share their feelings with supportive friends who were understanding and

trustworthy (Botha, 2014), usually a particular friend (Lefson, 1997). Friends coming from divorced families were most supportive, being able to relate experiences (Nortje, 2012). Adolescent girls were most comfortable confiding in a friend, where a friend was commonly the first person told about the divorce, for some their boyfriend provided the most support (Lefson, 1997). However, adolescent boys tended not to speak about their divorce experiences with friends (Nortje, 2012). This indicates that adolescent boys find it more difficult expressing their emotions to friends and thus find it difficult to tap into this support resource.

Good relationships with teachers are an important source of support (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). Lefson (1997) found however, that although the majority of teachers knew about the divorce, few adolescents felt that teachers were supportive. Access to, and support from therapeutic interventions is an important source of support and a protective factor (Amato, 2000). Therapy, including psycho-education and psycho-therapy on how to adjust positively, was found as protective (Nhlangulela, 2011). However, access to therapeutic support in South Africa may be more limited than global access. Ernest (2003) studied the effects of divorce in a South African community and found that counselling support for children of divorced families is needed. Lefson (1997) also found that the majority of adolescents were not able to access therapy even though they would have liked therapeutic support. This suggests further research into the availability of counselling for children and adolescents in South Africa.

Pedro-Carroll (2005) found that the community was supportive. In this regard, it is suggested that neighbourhood relationships, local youth groups etc. are valuable sources of support. Within a South African context it is also suggested that local communities may be an important source of support for children and adolescents experiencing divorce.

2.5.10 Individual characteristics

The following individual characteristics were found to influence adjustment to divorce: developmental level, attitude, resilience, temperament and locus of control.

2.5.10.1 Developmental level

Developmental level is one of the most extensively researched characteristics of children and adolescents in relation to adjustment to divorce (Isaacs, 2002). Adjustment to divorce varies with developmental level (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Hetherington et al., 1989). It is thus important to understand the developmental level in order to understand how a child or

adolescent may be affected by divorce. Developmental level influences perceptions of, and responses to experiences (Leon, 2003). In this regard, cognitive and physical development is discussed below.

a. Cognitive development

Children at a younger age are typically cognitively immature and protected by not being able to make sense of, or remember the time of divorce (Nortje, 2012). Children under three years of age were not affected by their parents' divorce, and could not remember how they felt (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Even so, children at a younger age may still face long-term vulnerability as feelings about the divorce or lack of a parent may surface at a later point in life (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Feelings around the divorce may also be repressed at a young age causing these feelings to remain in the unconscious mind (Nortje, 2012).

Children's limited-cognitive ability may also result in severe short-term reactions due to their limited ability to understand (Dreman, 2000). For children aged four to five short-term reactions include nightmares, self-blame, clingy behaviour, acting out, fear of humiliation by peers and fear of abandonment. Older children aged 6-12 may have temper tantrums, become moody, preoccupied or aggressive, feel rejected and deceived by the absent parent and agonise about divided loyalties (Cohen, 2002; Nhlangulela, 2011). Cheng et al. (2006) found that young children experience no emotional relief from their parents' divorce, including those exposed to inter-parental conflict.

However, in their study on perspectives on divorce from young children, Ebling, Pruett, and Pruett (2009) found that young children aged between 3.5 and 7.5 years understand more about divorce than is commonly assumed and they are actively coping with divorce related changes, for example fantasising about parental reunion, as well as holding realistic attitudes about divorce.

Adolescence refers to the developmental transition between childhood and adulthood entailing major physical, cognitive and psychosocial changes (Papalia et al., 2009). Dramatic changes in brain structures involved in emotions, judgement, organisation of behaviour and self-control takes place between puberty and young adulthood (Papalia et al., 2009). According to Piaget's cognitive maturation stage of formal operations, adolescents develop the capacity for abstract thought (Papalia et al., 2009).

Adolescents experience considerable initial emotional pain, but are better able to assign responsibility for the divorce, to resolve loyalty conflicts and assess and cope with additional

stresses like financial difficulties (Hetherington et al., 1989). Adolescents have an increased ability to engage in complex processes involved in the meaning-making of past events.

However, initial emotional pain puts the adolescent at risk due to an immature ability to deal with negative feelings without support (Cohen, 2002). During early adolescence, adolescents may not have the cognitive ability to deal with more than one abstraction related to the self, resulting in distress or reduced well-being when sorting through disruptive events such as parental divorce (Nortje, 2012). The adolescence period carries risks as young people may have trouble handling so many changes at once and may need help. Risky behaviours may reflect immaturity of the adolescent brain. Immature brain development may permit emotions to override reason and may keep some adolescents from noticing warnings that seem logical and persuasive to adults (Papalia et al., 2009). This may lead to problems such as substance abuse and inappropriate sexual behaviour (Nortje, 2012).

According to Erikson a coherent conception of the self, made up of goals, values, and beliefs to which the person is solidly committed, comes into focus during adolescence due to their newly formed abstract ability (Papalia et al., 2009). Adolescents' cognitive development now enables them to construct a theory of the self. Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development becomes prominent, namely identity versus role confusion, in which an adolescent seeks to develop a coherent sense of self. According to Erikson, the prime danger of this stage is role confusion relating to painful self-consciousness, and accounts for the chaotic nature of much adolescent behaviour. Adolescents also struggle for individuation relating to autonomy and differentiation, or personal identity. (Papalia et al., 2009)

Many adolescents have a premature adulthood thrust upon them, as may happen with parental divorce. They lack the time or opportunity for a psychosocial moratorium, the protected time and period necessary to build a stable, inner-directed self. (Papalia et al., 2009)

b. Physical development

Puberty results from the heightened production of sex-related hormones beginning usually during early adolescence. Heightened emotionality and moodiness of early adolescence are attributable to these hormonal changes. Negative emotions such as distress and hostility, as well as symptoms of depression in girls tend to rise as puberty progresses. By late adolescence, emotionality tends to become more stable. (Papalia et al., 2009)

Overall younger children at time of divorce showed poorer long-term adjustment than older children and adolescents. However, longitudinal studies showed that adjustment to divorce in

all age groups improved over time when their well-being was compared to children from intact families at different intervals (Dreman, 2000). Much depends on how children and adolescents resolve and interpret the experience of parental divorce (Papalia et al., 2009).

2.5.10.2 Attitude

In terms of attitude, an optimistic or hopeful view of the post-divorce future is protective and related to positive child and adolescent adjustment (Cohen, 2002; Nhlangulela, 2011; Nortje, 2012; Pedro-Carroll, 2005). It assists children and adolescents to remain hopeful (Nhlangulela, 2011). Those adolescents with a positive attitude did not blame themselves for the divorce (Nhlangulela, 2011; Nortje, 2012), but were able to accurately attribute blame (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). An optimistic view enabled children and adolescents to remain level headed and realistic (Nhlangulela, 2011). Whereas a negative attitude towards divorce resulted in despair or hopelessness (Nhlangulela, 2011). A sense of humour or the ability to not take things too seriously is also protective (Nortje, 2012).

However, the influence of attitude on adjustment to divorce may be less than has been suggested. Watson (2003) found that no significant relationship exists between an adolescent's attitude to divorce and adjustment.

2.5.10.3 Resilience

Resilience refers to the capacity to maintain effective psychological and behavioural adjustment in the face of factors that normally put individuals at risk for poor adjustment (Reber, Allen, & Reber, 2009).

Resilience was found to be a protective factor, Hetherington et al. (1989), specifically autonomy, competence (including success, growth and self-efficacy) and relatedness to others. A key to resilience is self-determination, a combination of an individual's attitudes and abilities, which act on the post-divorce environment (Thomas & Woodside, 2011).

It seems that resilience can be built. Intrapersonal resources, specifically a positive attitude and the ability to express issues and interpersonal resources, specifically extended family and external social support help to build resilience (Theron & Dunn, 2010). Through divorce experiences adolescents learnt to be responsible, mature and independent as well as understanding themselves and the realities of life better (Nhlangulela, 2011). Nortje (2012) found that even though adolescents experienced problems and pains, resilience was the clear outcome.

One thinks of those children and adolescents who may face severe adversity due to divorce, and where resilience may be one of their only protective factors.

2.5.10.4 Temperament

Child and adolescent temperament is another factor affecting adjustment to divorce (Leon, 2003). Temperament refers to a person's characteristic disposition or style of approaching and reacting to situations and forms the core of the developing personality. Temperament is derived from a person's basic biological makeup and is relatively stable and enduring. Temperament affects the way children approach and react to the outside world and the way they regulate their mental, emotional and behavioural functioning. (Papalia et al., 2009)

In terms of temperament, children can be classified into three types: the easy child who quickly establishes regular routines, has regular biological rhythms, is generally cheerful, and adapts easily to new experiences (Berk, 2013; Papalia et al., 2009). An easy temperament is protective, relating to positive adjustment (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). These children are predictable, calm and approach most new experiences in a positive way (Cohen, 2002).

The opposite can be said of temperamentally difficult children. The difficult child has an irritable temperament tending to react negatively and intensely, has irregular daily routines and biological rhythms, and is slow to accept new experiences (Berk, 2013; Papalia et al., 2009). Temperamentally difficult children are less adaptable to change and are vulnerable to adversity (Hetherington et al., 1989). Leon (2003) found that for these individuals increased stress resulted in less adaptability, even when high levels of support were available.

The slow-to-warm-up-child has a mild temperament and shows inactive or low-key reactions to environmental stimuli, is negative in mood, adjusts slowly and is hesitant about accepting new experiences (Berk, 2013; Papalia et al., 2009).

A child's ability to adapt is related to self-esteem, where being able to adapt increases self-esteem and visa-versa (Hetherington et al., 1989). Hence temperament appears to be an important factor in adjustment and subsequent levels of self-esteem. Children with an easy temperament are best able to adjust to a new experience such as divorce.

2.5.10.5 Locus of control

Locus of control refers to the perceived source of control over one's behaviour (Reber et al., 2009). An internal locus of control is protective and relates to positive adjustment (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Hetherington et al., 1989). An external locus of control

relates to seeing control as residing external to oneself and attributing success or failure to outside forces (Reber et al., 2009).

2.5.11 Coping skills

Increased stress due to divorce experiences reduces coping skills and increases behaviour problems (Hetherington et al., 1989). If a child or adolescent cannot cope with divorce, then problems adjusting are common. Adolescents with a childhood experience of divorce developed negative emotions, a negative sense of well-being, low self-esteem and scholastic problems (Storksen et al., 2005). Nhlangulela (2011) found that depression was common due to divorce experience. Depression further increased stress levels, affecting academic performance and social interaction. These overwhelming negative emotions led to despair. Some adolescents drank alcohol and stole to ease their pain and cope.

Verbal expression of emotions and other experiences pertaining to divorce is important, otherwise negative emotional wounds grow (Nhlangulela, 2011). Lefson (1997) found that more than one year after the divorce most adolescents had not spoken to anyone and still showed signs of negative emotions (crying, restless, withdrawn), requiring intervention to help them cope. Adolescent girls wanted to talk about their feelings and experiences.

These problems seldom rebate without intervention, in fact parental divorce affects children years later and the distress increases with age during adolescence (Storksen et al., 2005). This indicates the importance of promoting and supporting coping skills, especially early in the divorce process in order to assist children and adolescents deal with the mounting stress. Whatever reinforces child coping skills is key (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). This is important as the use of active coping skills is protective (Amato, 2000), such as problem solving and positive thinking (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Although early post-divorce intervention is important, denial at onset may help alleviate anxiety and assist with day-to-day functioning. Removing defences against massive divorce-related stress may contribute to maladjustment. Expression is however encouraged after initial high stress-levels subside. (Dreman, 2000)

In terms of gender differences, preadolescent boys (10-13 years of age) are more vulnerable to divorce than preadolescent girls and do not adjust as well (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Nhlangulela, 2011). Adolescent boys with problems coping developed behaviour and scholastic difficulties, whereas adolescent girls developed negative emotions of anxiety and depression (Storksen et al., 2005).

2.5.11.1 Religion

One coping avenue is religion. Religious communities promote supportive relationships conducive to a positive adjustment to divorce. However, affiliation with religious communities is strongly affected by divorce, whereby children of divorce struggle to experience spirituality and exercise their faith due to trust issues. As a result, children of divorce often feel less religious and participate less in religious communities. (Meltzer, 2011)

In contrast to the global literature, religion was a strong source of coping in the South African context. In a study on adolescents of divorce within a military context, Botha (2014) found that spiritual support was very important and that it was important to have a trustworthy person from their spiritual organisation to talk to. It is possible that religion in this study was pronounced due to the military context. Lefson (1997) also found that many adolescent relied heavily on religion, which was a great source of comfort. Few were angry with God about the divorce.

2.5.12 Remarriage

An important transition in the divorce process is remarriage of parents. Half of divorced adults remarry within four years and it is estimated that one third of children will become members of a step-family (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). In general, remarriage does not improve adjustment; in fact some adolescents may be worse off. Nhlangulela (2011) found that adolescents reported to being emotionally and physically abused by their stepmother. In addition, the stepfather abused their mother and emotionally abused the adolescent. The mother stayed on in the marriage for financial reasons. This again suggests that financial difficulties may have a significant impact on adolescent adjustment to divorce in a South African context. In addition remarriage does not solve the problem generated by an absent parent, although boys may benefit from a male role model in their stepfather (Amato & Keith, 1991). Parents must discuss new relationship intentions with adolescents and after remarriage parents conduct or behaviour in their new relationship is important (Mcloughlin & Whitfield, 1984).

Factors that predict how well children and adolescents react to their stepfamily include the new family process, individual risk and vulnerability and ecological variables. In terms of the new family process, disruptive family relationships are a risk factor, whereas low conflict and authoritative parenting are protective. In terms of individual risk and vulnerability, adolescents may have particular difficulty adjusting, with early adolescence being the most

difficult time. The added stress exacerbates their normal developmental issues such as autonomy and sexuality that must also be dealt with. This again shows that stress levels are vital to understanding adjustment. However, an easy temperament, social maturity and cognitive competence are protective. In terms of ecological variables in the larger social environment, peers and school play an important part in adjustment. (Isaacs, 2002).

2.5.12.1 Gender differences

Preadolescent girls are more vulnerable to remarriage of their parents than preadolescent boys (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Isaacs, 2002). Early adolescent girls show more negative reaction to remarriage of their parents, particularly custodial mother's remarriage, as they have more difficulty or reduced quality interaction with their mother (Isaacs, 2002). Mitchell (1983) concurred that step-parents are not always good due to adolescents receiving a smaller share of their parents love. For boys their mother's relationship with their step-father caused jealousy and resentment (Isaacs, 2002), as did her relationships with their step-siblings (Nortje, 2012). However, for boys a close relationship with their stepfather was also found as protective (Amato & Keith, 1991; Isaacs, 2002), as they see men as role models (Nortje, 2012). A shared reaction across genders to a stepfather is that children may act out repressed negative feelings for their father towards the stepfather (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009).

In contradiction to Isaacs (2002)'s finding that girls showed negative reactions to their mother's remarriage, Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) found that girls were ambivalent about the remarriage of their mother. However, they did not like their father remarrying as they may have to compete with their stepmother for their father's attention and time. However boys had good relationships with their stepmothers (Nortje, 2012).

Table 1: Summary of adjustment factors and related risk and protective factors

Adjustment factors	Risk factors	Protective factors
Parental conflict	On-going inter-parental conflict; self-esteem negatively affected; exposure to inter-parental physical and emotional abuse	Protection from inter-parental conflict
Parental cooperation	Uncooperative parenting	Cooperative parenting
Parental transparency	Parents not open; inadequate or no reasons given; sense of guilt and helplessness; not informed post-divorce	Parents open; reasons given; ensured not to blame; empowered; informed post-divorce

Parent-child relationships	Impaired parent-child relationships (vulnerability, rejection); poor maternal adjustment; irregular paternal contact; absent fathers; high value placed on ancestral lineage rather than child well-being	Healthy parent-child relationships (warm, caring, accepting, safe), close maternal relationship; positive maternal adjustment; regular paternal contact
Parenting quality	Poor quality parenting; inconsistent discipline; authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved parenting; disparity in parents' parenting practices	Authoritative parenting; consistent discipline; keeping a normal routine
Family functioning and stability	Multiple family transitions; chaotic/unstable household; moving between parents	Stable household and routines
Lifestyle	Financial difficulties; lifestyle changes; poor education; relocation; loss of friends	Financial stability; continuity of lifestyle, friendships and standard of education
Home environment	Disruptive home environment	Supportive sibling relationships; supportive extended family relationships (particularly grandparents)
External social support systems	Isolation from social support	Friends; teachers; therapeutic interventions; community support
Individual characteristics	Developmental level (younger children show poorer long-term adjustment; adolescents are negatively affected by divorce due to additional developmental stress); negative attitude; difficult temperament; external locus of control	Developmental level (older children can rationalise and make sense of the divorce); positive attitude; resilient; easy temperament; internal locus of control
Coping skills	Maladaptive coping skills; difficulty exercising faith due to trust issues	Active coping skills; expression of emotions; religion
Remarriage	Disruptive relationships; competition for attention with step-siblings; adolescence	Boys benefit from a male role model (step-father); low conflict; authoritative parenting

2.6 South African research

South African research on adolescents' experiences of divorce seems to have mainly been the focus of post graduate research, with seven out of nine studies being either masters or doctorate theses and the remaining two articles. There is thus relatively little published research in South Africa on this topic. Lefson (1997) and Watson (2003) also found that relatively little research exists in South Africa on adolescent experience of adjustment to divorce.

In reviewing the studies, it was apparent that seven studies involved adolescent participants, one involved social workers and one involved adults from a community. In terms of the data collection method six utilised interviews, one mixed methods and two questionnaires. Four of the studies were conducted in Kwazulu-Natal or Limpopo, areas with similar population demographics to Pietermaritzburg, in that the majority of the population are isiZulu black Africans. Of the remaining studies, three were from Gauteng and two from the Western Cape. Hence, research on adolescents' experiences of divorce has been conducted in different parts of the country. Three of the studies were conducted at high or senior primary schools,

comparable to the current study which was done at a high school. Of the remaining studies, two were from universities, one involved social workers, one was from a community settlement, one was from military families and one was unspecified. Seven of the studies did not specify a limitation on the number of years since divorce. Please refer to Table 2 below.

Table 2: South African research studies comparative to the current study

Source	Study year	Geographic Area	Population	Quantity	Age	Years since divorce	Gender	Data collection method	Research Aim
Thesis	1997	Gauteng	High school learners	10	13-17	1-2	10-F	Interviews	Adolescent adjustment to divorce
Thesis	2003	Kwazulu-Natal	African community	50	21-44	n/a	n/a	Questionnaires	Effects of divorce in a South African community
Thesis	2003	Western Cape	University of first year students	293	17-22	n/a	n/a	Questionnaires	Adolescent adjustment to divorce
Article	2009	Kwazulu-Natal	Primary school learners	10	13-15	n/a	5-M, 5-F	Interviews	Adolescent adjustment to divorce
Article	2010	Mpumalanga, Vaal Triangle	High school learners	10	14-18	n/a	5-M, 5-F	Mixed method	Adolescent post-divorce resilience
Thesis	2011	Kwazulu-Natal	University students	10	19-30	n/a	5-M, 5-F	Interviews	Adolescent adjustment to divorce
Thesis	2012	Gauteng	Adolescents	4	15-20	Very young age	4-M	Interviews	Adolescent adjustment to divorce
Thesis	2014	Western Cape	Military families	9	11-18	n/a	4-M, 5-F	Interviews	Adolescent adjustment to divorce
Thesis	2016	Limpopo province	Social workers	20	n/a	n/a	n/a	Interviews	Adolescent adjustment to divorce

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented relevant global and South African literature, related to adolescents' experience of adjustment to divorce.

The most salient findings are as follows: Parental conflict is a key factor in adolescent adjustment. In particular ongoing post-divorce conflict limits an adolescents' ability to adjust and physical conflict may be more common in South Africa than globally. Uncooperative parenting is particularly detrimental to the father-child relationship. Parental divorce transparency is poor and cultural practices in South Africa that do not allow children to be involved in adult matters, is off concern. Healthy parent-child relationships are paramount for positive adjustment to divorce. Diminished maternal parenting at the time of divorce and paternal absence negatively affects adjustment. The high value placed on ancestral lineage continuity by some isiZulu men, for whom these beliefs are important, may supersede a keen interest in their child's well-being. In terms of developmental level and specifically cognitive ability, much depends on how children and adolescents resolve and interpret the experience of parental divorce. An easy temperament is protective whereas a difficult temperament is a

risk factor. It is important to promote and support coping skills, especially early in the divorce process, in order to assist children and adolescents deal with the mounting stress. Remarriage is an important transition in the divorce process. In general, remarriage does not improve adjustment to divorce, but rather some adolescents may be worse off.

The next chapter presents the aim and rationale of the study.

3 Aim and rationale

3.1 Background of the study

3.1.1 The research problem

As was discussed in chapter two, the incidence and prevalence of divorce globally and within South Africa is concerning. Of concern is the number of children and adolescents exposed to this situation and the possible negative outcomes related primarily to the accumulation of stress that adversely effects their adjustment.

3.1.2 Motivation

As was discussed in chapter two, research shows that there is significant variability in divorce outcomes and that limited research on this topic exists in South Africa. In order to protect against potential negative outcomes this study is motivated by adding to existing research, with the ultimate goal of assisting to reduce the related stress and resultant maladjustment experienced by adolescents of divorce. It is hoped that this study will add to the existing knowledge on the topic of child and adolescent divorce experience, in order to promote public awareness and assistance for their positive adjustment.

3.2 Insights from initial review of related literature

The literature review has demonstrated the extent of divorce, and the significant number of children and adolescents affected globally and within South Africa. It revealed that divorce should not be considered as a once of event, but rather that children and adolescents need to adjust at different times within the divorce process and during different phases of their development.

The literature review looked at the consequences of the divorce on various aspects of adolescents' overall development, finding that it is the significant variability of adjustment that is concerning, even though on average adolescent well-being is not significantly affected. It also found that heightened stress level is an important indicator of negative outcomes. Potential negative as well as positive outcomes were then presented. In order to understand what may cause or protect against this stress, the chapter discussed factors that affect adjustment, including related risk and protective factors. Existing South African research on this topic was reviewed in order to locate this study in the local context.

3.3 Study aims

The aim of the study was to understand more fully adolescents' perspectives on their experiences of parental divorce within a South African context. In addition, it aimed to establish adjustment factors from their perspective and in what way these factors either helped them to adjust to divorce or made it difficult for them to adjust.

The study also aimed to add social value by assisting with the selection and development of culturally relevant intervention programs, and to be informative to parents in helping their children adjust optimally to divorce.

To this end the study had the following objectives:

3.4 Objectives

- To explore adolescents' experiences of adjustment to divorce in a South African context.
- To determine the factors affecting adjustment to divorce from the adolescents' perspectives.
- To determine the risk and protective factors associated with the adjustment factors.
- To add to existing knowledge on this topic in order to assist with reducing the stress experienced by adolescents and to optimise their adjustment throughout the divorce process.
- To assist with development of culturally relevant intervention programs.
- To be informative to parents in order for them to assist their children with positive adjustment.

3.5 Research questions

The research questions were therefore:

1. How do adolescents experience adjustment to divorce in a South African context?
2. What do adolescents experience as risk factors associated with divorce in a South African context?
3. What do adolescents experience as protective factors associated with divorce in a South African context?

The next chapter outlines the research design and methodology used by the researcher to collect the research data.

4 Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed relevant literature to understand the concepts of the study under investigation. This chapter discusses the research methods utilised by the researcher to collect and analyse the data.

4.2 Research design

In qualitative research the researcher attempts to understand people in terms of their own definition of their world (Mouton & Marais, 1990) and allows the researcher to grasp the "richness of the subjects' subjective life-worlds" (Schurink, de Jongh van Arkel, & Roos, 1992, p. 15). Therefore, a qualitative research design was well suited to extract participant experiences and meaning attributed to parental divorce. Qualitative methods enabled the participant accounts to be studied in depth and detail, allowing the researcher to address this complex and personal topic, not amenable to quantification.

In addition, the exploratory or discovery-oriented nature of this study suited a qualitative design. Data collection was not constrained by pre-existing hypotheses, rather hypothesis generation permitted a more flexible approach, allowing the researcher to modify questioning mid-stream and to provide the participant with more freedom of expression. (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliot, 1995)

4.2.1 Interpretive paradigm

The interpretive perspective focuses on the subjective understandings and experiences of the research participants. Participants are treated as though they are the origin of their thoughts, feelings and experiences. This approach to research assumes that different participants are likely to have different perspectives, and that understanding these perspectives is key (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006).

An interpretive paradigm was thus chosen as ideal for this study. It facilitated an in-depth study that relayed the perspectives and experiences of the participants, namely the adolescent and their experience of adjustment to divorce (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This approach guided the data collection and analysis, placing emphasis on lived realities and subjective experiences.

Divorce experience was likely perceived differently by each adolescent interviewed for this study, and was likely more important to them than facts or physical events surrounding the divorce. In addition, each of these perspectives on divorce experience was equally valid and of interest to this study.

4.3 Sampling

4.3.1 Research site

The study took place during 2015 at a public coeducational high school in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The school caters for approximately 1000 learners, comprising diverse backgrounds, where participants meeting the inclusion criteria were found.

4.3.2 Sampling method

Participants were recruited based on the following criteria:

- The participant age must range between 13 and 19 years (inclusive).
- Participants' parents must have been divorced in a civil court.
- Participants must have been willing and capable of relating experiences associated with the sensitive topic of parental divorce.
- Adolescents going through parental divorce at the time of the study were excluded, due to being at risk in terms of sensitivity and vulnerability at that time.

Since a qualitative methodology was used, a small sample size was appropriate (Willig, 2008). The emphasis was on selecting and understanding information-rich cases, which would not necessarily have been achieved by including great numbers (Durrheim, 1999). The sample size was set at ten adolescents, but the size was largely dependent on data saturation, including whether participants with diverse demographics and varied backgrounds were interviewed. This happened by the eleventh participant.

As commented on in the literature review, little research in South Africa on adolescents' experience of divorce was found. Thus, in order to add knowledge to this topic, adolescents were chosen as the participants for this study.

In addition to the inclusion criteria, a variation of participant demographics, including gender, race, culture, socio-economic status, current age and age-at-divorce offered variety. The average age of participants at time of study was sixteen, and the average age at time of divorce was seven. Hence, the average number of years since divorce was nine, a relatively

long period of time. Six female and five male participants were interviewed, with a racial breakdown of five mixed race, three black African and three white. Twelve participants were interviewed, but one participant was subsequently excluded due to his parents never being married. They had separated, but not divorced.

Purposive sampling, maximum variation, was used to select participants meeting the inclusion criteria. Some of the participants were drawn from candidates previously seen by the school counsellor for divorce related counselling, and some of the participants were selected based on the information from their school files. This enabled the school counsellor to purposefully select candidates with diverse backgrounds, demographics and experiences of divorce. Thus sampling depended not only on learners availability and willingness to participate, but also that cases typical of the population, adolescents from Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, were selected (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Purposeful sampling was necessary in this study as the participants needed to fit certain inclusion criteria (Maree & Pietersen, 2007).

4.3.3 Recruitment

Permission for the study was received from the Department of Education (DoE) (Appendix A), the University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN) Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSREC) (Appendix B) and the High School Principal (Appendix C). The UKZN HSREC ethics reference number is HSS/0802/015M.

Following this, an email was sent to the school counsellor requesting a meeting. The recruitment procedure was discussed at this meeting and the interview venue, the school counselling room, was agreed upon. It was decided that the school counsellor would select participants based on the inclusion criteria. It was further agreed that interviews would be scheduled for Tuesday or Thursday afternoons at 13h00 during lunch break, to minimise disruption to participant learning. If necessary, the interviews could have been extended into the lesson after break. In this event the school counsellor provided an absenteeism note for the participant to be given to the relevant teacher.

Adolescents who agreed to partake in the study were given parent consent forms (Appendix D) and participant assent forms (Appendix E) by the school counsellor, which were taken home and discussed with the custodial parent or legal guardian. Participants then handed in the signed parental consent and assent forms to the school counsellor, who liaised with the researcher pertaining available interview dates.

4.4 Data collection

4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviewing is a common method used in existing research on child outcomes of parental divorce (Leon, 2003). Individual semi-structured interviews were used in this study to explore adolescents' experience of divorce. Open-ended questions were used as a means to collect experiential data.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), an individual interview allows the participant to speak for themselves, rather than providing answers to a battery of predetermined hypothesis-based questions. Interviews are a valuable means of data collection because they are a direct way of accessing individuals' feelings, beliefs and personal meanings about certain topics (Smith, 1995).

Semi-structured interviews are useful for topics that are complex and personal, such as divorce experience. The semi-structured approach also allowed for the discovery of new aspects of the divorce experience by exploring in detail the explanations supplied by participants (Bles & Higson-Smith, 2000).

Active listening and reflection of content and feelings, was an essential aspect of the interview process (Smith, 1995). This researcher had to listen carefully, clarify and empathically reflect content to the participants. These counselling skills assisted with rapport and trust building and helped to understand participants' divorce experience. The researcher attempted to draw out the participants' meaning and depth of coverage, rather than leading them through a range of organised questions (Chopra & Coveney, 2008). The interviews lasted for approximately one hour each and were recorded.

4.4.2 Interview schedule

An interview schedule (Appendix F) with topic headings and follow-up questions was composed. This guided the interview so that the proposed research questions could be addressed (Willig, 2008). Issues covered in the interview schedule are those frequently mentioned in relevant parenting and divorce literature. The researcher designed the interview schedule on this basis after conducting a thorough literature review.

Themes and topics addressed included: pre-divorce home life, the divorce event, post-divorce coping, family functioning, support, quality of parenting, parent-child relationships, lifestyle, current functioning and self-concept.

Open-ended questions were designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer using the participants' own knowledge, perception and feelings. The participants were given the opportunity to discuss issues beyond the confines of the questions (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Whyte (1984) claims that the semi-structured interview is not fixed by rigid, pre-determined questions as in a questionnaire, but rather it is designed to allow the participant to introduce material that was not anticipated by the researcher.

Follow-up questions were included in the interview schedule to prompt participants should they not cover certain issues, to explore initial responses further or to provide clarity on the question. The follow-up questions proved particularly useful in the current study due to its sensitive nature, which helped to draw the participants out. These follow-up questions assisted this novice researcher to conduct the interview. For example, the question "How did you experience the time when your parents got divorced?" was followed-up by the question "How do you feel about the way your parents handled the divorce?"

The interview schedule acted as a framework, which helped the researcher pursue topical information. It was a useful guide which helped to guide conversations back to relevant topics. The schedule was adapted, as relevant information arose in previous interviews, not covered by existing questions. An audit trail of all versions of the interview schedule has been kept.

4.5 Data treatment

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed conversations and interview notes make up the data set.

Recorded and transcribed interviews allowed for the text to be studied reliably word for word, as it was spoken (Ödman, 2007). Paton (in Mouton & Marais, 1990, p. 214) points to the necessity in qualitative interviewing of "capturing the actual words of the participant, there being no substitute for the raw data of actual quotations spoken by participants." Descriptive data was captured in the participants' own words (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Verbatim quotations from the transcripts are provided in the results section as examples of identified themes or patterns within the data (Smith, 1995).

4.6 Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Thematic analysis offers an accessible and theoretically-flexible approach to analysing

qualitative data. It is a useful research tool that provides "a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 5). This approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97).

Thematic analysis was selected due to the qualitative nature of this study, ideal for a thorough interpretation of participants' divorce experience. It proved useful for this research for the following reasons: The technique was accessible with a clear step-by-step guide and word processing program readily available. The process was relatively easy to follow for this novice researcher, and it helped to determine and summarise key themes in the data and generate unexpected insights.

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe the following six phases of thematic analysis: familiarising yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

The researcher immersed himself in the transcripts to become familiar with the data. Transcribing the recorded interviews helped in this regard. Initial coding ideas and names for recurring experiences were generated utilising terms found in existing divorce literature. These initial standardised codes were then applied across the entire data set, utilising printed transcripts. The researcher attempted to include relevant contextual information in the coded extracts, so that meanings were not lost and gave a voice to exceptions or minority experiences.

Themes were generated by utilising a thematic map, where some codes became themes, others became sub-themes and others were discarded. Coded extracts were then collated within the generated themes and sub-themes, and checked for coherence. A theme list was created with clear definitions and names for each theme. The overall story the themes told was then checked to ensure a logical and unified whole.

Harvey (1994) claims that interpretations are not justified by the accumulation of facts but by an active and involved understanding and representation of the social world that is presented by the participants to the researcher. "It remains incumbent on the qualitative researcher to stand back from their subject and the data and to sociologically interpret their viewpoints" (Mouton & Marais, 1990, p. 217).

Being a novice researcher was a limitation to the analysis. This limitation was overcome by reading and re-reading, re-analysing and utilising the supervisor's perspective, to ensure that an accurate and succinct interpretation of participants experience was provided.

4.7 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness and consistency of the study is discussed in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Shenton, 2004).

4.7.1 Credibility

This refers to how congruent the findings are with reality (Shenton, 2004), and the degree to which research findings are convincing and believable (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999).

Credibility depends on the ability and efforts of the researcher (Golafshani, 2003), and is established while the research is being undertaken. The researcher searches for discrepancies as a means of producing a rich and credible account (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The researcher attempted to give an accurate interpretive voice to participants' experiences. The researcher continued interviews with participants until no new or relevant information emerged, which occurred by the eleventh participant. This included additional short interviews with two of the participants to obtain further information. The findings were discussed with the supervisor, ensuring investigator triangulation. This helped to create a rich picture of adolescent divorce experience.

To encourage open and honest responses, the researcher ensured confidentiality. Probing questions provided for a better and deeper understanding of reality (Shenton, 2004; Simon & Goes, 2014). A well-established interpretive research method (thematic analysis) was used, and finally the researcher presented progress of the study to colleagues and to his supervisor, ensuring peer review.

4.7.2 Transferability

This refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to other situations. Since the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a particular environment and a small number of individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings are applicable to other situations and populations (Malterud, 2001). However, if researchers believe their situations to be similar to that described in the study, they may relate the findings to their own positions (Shenton, 2004).

It is important that a thick description of the method and phenomenon under investigation is provided, to allow researchers to have a proper understanding of it, in order to compare or replicate the study. Similar studies on divorce experience, employing the same methods but

conducted in different environments, could be of great value enabling a more inclusive overall picture (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability has been addressed by an accurate description of the research process and a detailed "thick description" of the research situation and context. The diversity of the sample may make the findings relevant to other areas of South Africa. Variation in participant selection was achieved by utilising a purposive (multi-variation) sampling method (Shenton, 2004; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Cases typical of the population, adolescents residing in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, were selected.

4.7.3 Dependability

Refers to the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings occurred as reported by the researcher (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999). The methodology within the study should be explained in detail to ensure that proper research practices were followed and to enable the study to be reliably repeated (Shenton, 2004).

According to Shenton (2004) and Simon and Goes (2014), the dependability of the study is ensured by keeping a thorough collection of documentation on research design and implementation, operational details of data gathering and a reflective appraisal of the project through evaluating the effectiveness of the research process regarding all aspects of how the research was conducted.

Dependability of research implementation and data gathering was ensured by keeping reflective appraisals of interviews, copies of all correspondence between the researcher and the school counsellor, all documentation provided to participants and an audit trail of all versions of the interview schedule. A summary of the researcher's reflections on the data gathering process is presented below under researcher reflexivity. In addition, documents at each stage of the thematic analysis process from interview transcripts to findings have been stored.

4.7.4 Confirmability

Refers to the researcher being aware of his own assumptions, where it is important to ensure that the findings are the result of the experiences of the participants and not the subjective preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).

This was established by attempting to remain aware of personal assumptions throughout the data collection, analysis and report writing processes. The researcher attempted to remain

reflective of the interview sessions and remain outside of the subject matter, by limiting his effect at every step of the research process. The thematic analysis process was meticulously adhered to as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Hence a rigorous analytical process (Shenton, 2004; Simon & Goes, 2014), was followed to ensure that valid and substantiated conclusions were drawn. All relevant findings were included and ambiguity in the findings were reported as such, with arguments for and against an interpretation considered (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Schwandt, 2003; Ödman, 2007).

Potentially controversial findings were included, as this was considered an accurate reflection of the data set, and needed to be reflected as such. Finally, findings were assessed by the researcher's supervisor, ensuring investigator triangulation.

4.8 Researcher reflexivity

Reflexivity is an active process a researcher takes to critically engage in a self-reflection of how their own social background, assumptions, and positioning can impact on the research process (Ritchie, Amos, & Martin, 2009). Cotterill and Letherby (1994) agree that the researcher in qualitative research should endeavour to be openly subjective and reflexive of themselves and the research process. After each interview, the researcher wrote a reflection in order to remain aware of his involvement, and to improve further interviews.

4.8.1 Trust and rapport

The first concern of any researcher is to build rapport with the participant. Mouton and Marais (1990) believe that the advantage of a sound interpersonal relationship between the researcher and the participant being interviewed is that it acts to neutralise initial distrust. If the participant trusts the interviewer, they may feel safe to be open and honest.

During the introduction to the interview I firstly attempted to create a safe space. The participant was thanked for participating, then the reason and purpose for the study was relayed, followed by verbal assent and the offer of counselling referral points for distress resulting from the interview. I sensed that this introduction set the tone for the rest of the interview, in terms of the participant feeling safe to open up about their experiences of parental divorce.

According to Cotterill and Letherby (1994) it is important for the researcher to develop a "non-hierarchical" relationship with the participant, and to pay much attention to what they express in order to explore and build on emerging themes.

Three variable differences between myself and the participants - age, race and gender - may have resulted in different participant accounts. Age and race differences may have resulted in connection or comfortability issues. In terms of gender, participants with broken paternal relationships and possible trust difficulties may have felt uncomfortable with a male interviewer. These hierarchical or perceived unequivocal barriers may have prevented certain participants from feeling totally safe and free to open up and share their experiences.

Despite some of the inevitable barriers faced, I attempted to build rapport by encouraging participants to feel comfortable through giving them the space to talk about what they felt was relevant to the questions. This was achieved by listening attentively and tracking their experiential topics closely, and showing an interest in all topics, including unanticipated issues such as cultural aspects.

For some of the participants, this was the first time that they had spoken in such depth or detail about their experiences. A few of the participants became emotional and cried during their interviews. I gave them time to settle and only continued when they reassured me that they were ready. At those times, and at the end of the interviews, I should have reminded these participants about the offer for counselling. I was, however, able to empathise when the participant appeared emotional.

Finally, it should be noted that these were, for the most part, once-off interviews, and so at most, superficial or limited rapport could be established.

4.8.2 Researcher as instrument

The interviewer was the main tool of data collection (Bles & Higson-Smith, 2000) and attempted to create an environment of openness and trust within which the adolescent was able to express authentically about their experience of parental divorce.

In order to provide a containing environment, I was always on time for the interview and made sure that the room was setup before the participant arrived. I made an effort to be respectful and warm towards the participant, and maintained a keen interest in their story throughout the interview.

Four of the participants were three years of age or younger at the time of divorce, and hence had limited recollection of the divorce event and the first few years after the divorce. In the first such interview, I was somewhat taken by surprise, as many of the questions from the interview schedule focused around that time. This affected my rapport with the participant.

When listening to the recording of the first interview, I felt that I should have been more assertive in terms of questioning, pronouncing my words and thoughts clearly. Thus my own anxiety in the first interview affected my assertiveness and confidence, and hence rapport building. Reflecting on the interviews assisted me with an improved interviewing style, which tended to improve rapport, as well as participant openness and trust.

4.8.3 Awareness of self

Qualitative research advocates an approach to examining the empirical world, which requires the researcher to interpret the real world from the perspective of the participant (Mouton & Marais, 1990).

I attempted to use open-ended or neutral probing questions, rather than leading questions. However, during reflection of the first interview, I realised that I had asked too many leading questions. This may have prevented the participant from being totally honest about their answers, as they may have felt obliged to agree with the leading question. In addition, at times I tried to be a psychologist, analysing participants' answers rather than allowing the phenomenon to "just be". Reflection, led to an improved interviewing style.

Barker et al. (1995) encourage the researcher to bear in mind that the task is to discover the meaning of divorce experience, not to invent it, and that any questions or anything which encourages the participant to speculate on causes or reasons may hinder the focus on concrete experience. The researcher should avoid evaluative terms such as "good or bad" except where these are part of the experience itself. Reflections revealed that at times I had emphasised my agreement with the participant and being more aware of this tendency, helped me to avoid it.

In one of the interviews in particular, I felt that there was contradicting information given by the participant. He tended to downplay his parents' behaviour, saying something negative, followed immediately by something positive, perhaps out of respect for them. The majority of participants appeared to have worked through their experiences however it was apparent that differences in this regard may have resulted in differing levels of openness and comfort when discussing the topic. Therefore, openness of participants seemed to vary.

4.9 Ethical issues

4.9.1 Consent

Parents/guardians were provided with information sheets, which contained detailed information about the study, including its purpose, processes and ethical considerations. They

were asked to indicate their willingness for their children's participation by signing a consent form attached to the information sheet. Interviews were recorded, where permission for recording was received on the parental consent form.

Participants were provided with assent forms containing detailed information about the study, written in a way that was understandable. This included stating clearly that participation in the study was voluntary and that participants could have withdrawn at any point, and that doing so would not have, in any way whatsoever, impacted on the services that they received from the school. This ensured that no coercion to participate in the study took place. Verbal assent was obtained before the interviews began.

4.9.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality has been maintained by the researcher and his supervisor, whereby signed consent and assent forms have been stored, inaccessible to other persons. These forms will be kept for a period of five years in a locked drawer and will then be destroyed via a shredder.

The interviews were conducted in a private, undisturbed interview room at the high school. The recorded interviews have been transcribed and participant names have been replaced by pseudonyms. The transcripts are being kept in a secure location and no one has access to the raw data, apart from the researcher and his supervisor. The transcripts will be shredded and the digital recorded interview information will be deleted from the recording device after the five year period.

If the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences or used for further research, no information will be included that would reveal the participants' identity.

4.9.3 Emotional support

Due to the sensitive nature of this study, there was a risk that an adolescent may have become distressed when talking about their feelings and experiences of divorce. In anticipation of this, the school counsellor agreed to be the primary referral point should an adolescent need counselling. The Child and Family Centre (CFC) at UKZN, Pietermaritzburg, agreed to be the secondary referral point. A copy of the CFC confirmation letter is attached (Appendix G). Finally, the number for Childline, Pietermaritzburg was included in the information sheet. None of the participants requested counselling during or after the interview.

4.9.4 Respect for participants

Participants were treated with respect during the study at all times and care was taken not to cause unnecessary distress. Respect for research participants entailed valuing and recognising their cultural beliefs, language, individual opinions and traditions and their privacy and confidentiality. A copy of the research report will be emailed to the school counsellor, who has agreed to distribute it to research participants and their parents/guardians.

A short feedback session will be offered after the study is completed, so as to communicate the main research findings to the participants, the custodial parent/guardian and the participating high school, should this be desired.

Overall, participants seemed willing and happy to talk about their parental divorce experiences, commonly expressing that they were glad to help other adolescents experiencing divorce. For some, it was the first time that they had spoken in such detail and depth about the divorce. Others had spoken to their family, but never to a stranger.

4.9.5 Risk / benefit ratio

It is envisaged that this study will benefit society by helping to inform interventions which help adolescents adjust optimally to divorce and to inform broader society. However, no direct benefit to the participants is anticipated.

Some may have enjoyed the opportunity to talk to a trained counsellor (the researcher) about their experiences or may have felt the process to be somewhat cathartic. One of the participants stated that he would, at a later stage, enjoy an opportunity to compare his experiences with his fellow participants. The possibility of a facilitated group or individual discussions amongst participants will be followed up with the school counsellor during the feedback session. Hence, participants could benefit from having the opportunity to further express their experiences.

Potential risks to the participants included subjective emotional distress experienced as a result of the content discussed during the interviews.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the research process or methodology that the study utilised in producing the results. The next chapter discusses the findings of the research.

5 Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis. The findings are data driven and are discussed, interpreted and contextualised in relation to the research questions. Five themes were found: relationship between parents, parental support, family functioning and stability, external social support and individual coping. Themes and subthemes are presented in Figure 1 below.

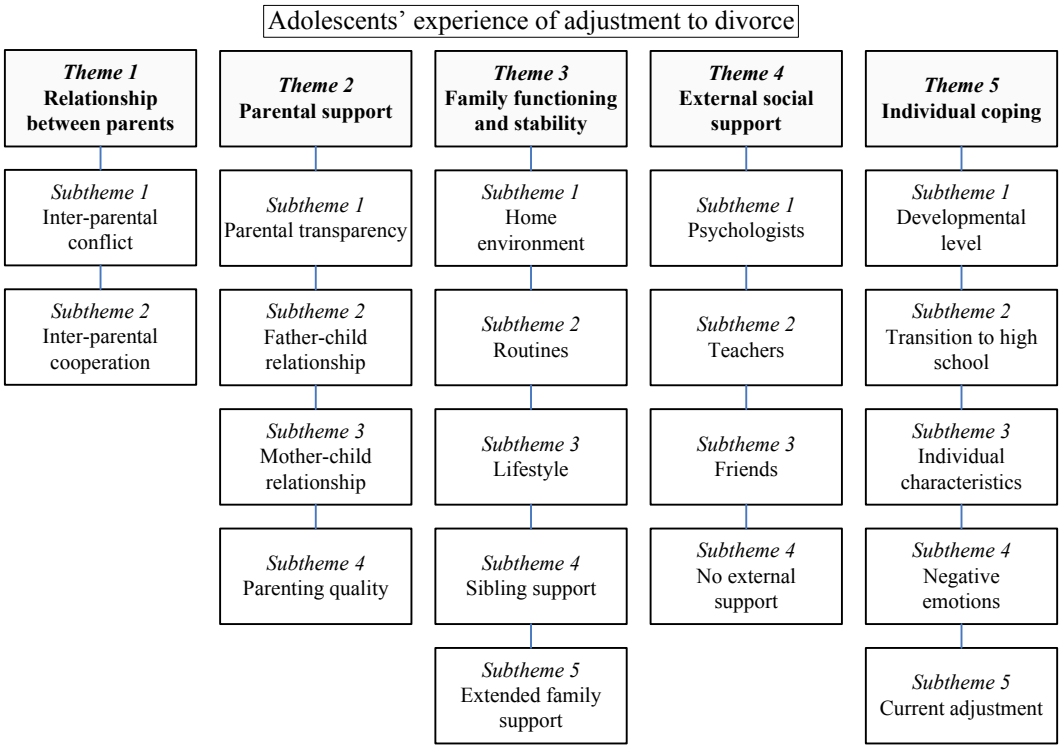

Figure 1: Themes and subthemes

5.2 Sample characteristics

In the study eleven adolescents from the same coeducational public high school in Pietermaritzburg were interviewed, six adolescent girls and five adolescent boys. Five of the participants were mixed race, three black African and three white. The average age at time of study was sixteen, the average age at divorce was seven, and the average number of years since the divorce was nine. The mother was the custodial parent for nine of the adolescents and the father for the remaining two. Please refer to Table 3 below.

Table 3: Sample characteristics

Participant no.	Gender	Age (years)	Age at divorce (years)	Years since divorce	Race	Custodial parent	Participants' perception of reason for divorce
P1	Female	16	1	15	White	Mother	Father drinking problem. Became violent.
P2	Female	13	3	10	Mixed	Mother	Father physically abused mother and child. Father infidelity.
P3	Female	16	8	8	African	Mother	Father physically abused mother. Mother infidelity.
P4	Female	15	8	7	African	Mother	Father physically abused mother. Father alcoholic. Father infidelity.
P5	Female	17	11	6	Mixed	Mother	Verbal disagreements. Father dependency issues.
P6	Female	17	13	4	African	Father	Father physically abused mother. Father infidelity.
P7	Male	17	0.5	16.5	White	Mother	Father became gay.
P8	Male	17	2	15	White	Mother	Both parents infidelity.
P9	Male	16	9	7	Mixed	Mother	Father alcoholic. Father infidelity.
P10	Male	15	10	5	Mixed	Father	Mother infidelity.
P11	Male	16	11	5	Mixed	Mother	Father infidelity.

5.3 Themes

5.3.1 Relationship between parents

This theme discusses the impact of the relationship between parents on adolescents' experiences of adjustment to divorce. The following subthemes were found: inter-parental conflict and inter-parental cooperation.

5.3.1.1 Parental conflict

This subtheme discusses adolescents' experiences of pre-and-post divorce parental conflict and how this affected their ability to adjust. Pre-divorce conflict is discussed first followed by post-divorce conflict.

a. Pre-divorce conflict

Seven of the eleven adolescents experienced pre-divorce parental conflict. The remaining four were either too young to remember, or did not witness parental conflict. Thus, parental conflict was a common experience. Age at divorce, conflict duration, type of conflict, target of conflict and participants' reactions to divorce are summarised below in Table 4. The last two columns relate to post-divorce conflict and are referenced in the post-divorce conflict section.

Table 4: Parental conflict and participant reaction to divorce

Participant		Pre-divorce conflict			Reaction to divorce	Post-divorce conflict	
No.	Age at divorce	Duration	Type	Target		Between parents	With step-parent
P1	1	Too young	Too young	Too young	Too young	No, do not talk	Yes
P2	3	Ongoing	Physical; verbal	Mother; self	Relieved	Yes	No
P3	8	Close to divorce	Physical; verbal	Mother	Surprised; sad	Yes	No
P4	8	Ongoing	Physical; verbal	Mother	Relieved for mother; missed father	No, do not talk	No
P5	11	Ongoing	Verbal	Mother	Shocked but not surprised	No, do not talk	No
P6	13	Ongoing	Physical; verbal	Mother	Relieved	Yes	No
P7	0.5	Too young	Too young	Too young	Too young	No, do not talk	Yes
P8	2	Too young	Too young	Too young	Too young	No, do not talk	Yes
P9	9	Ongoing	Verbal	Mother	Surprised	Yes	No
P10	10	Close to divorce	Verbal	Mother	Surprised	No, friends	No
P11	11	None	None	None	Surprised	No, do not talk	No

Exposure to ongoing, physical and verbal conflict between parents was the most stressful for participants, indicated by their relief or lack of surprise at the news of the divorce. Three participants experienced this type of conflict and their relief suggests that they were better off away from the conflict. P2 describes a violent home context prior to the divorce, commenting:

> *My mom and dad used to fight a lot. It got out of control and so they decided to get divorced. My mom and I were getting abused by my dad. He used to hit us with bricks, sticks and whatever he could find.*

This indicates that she was exposed to traumatic circumstances. She goes on to say *"He was very abusive and aggressive. I wasn't really close to my dad, it did hurt a bit, but not a lot, I was actually glad that he was gone."* Like two of the other participants, she was relieved that her parents divorced, perhaps even more so as part of the conflict was directed at her.

Ambivalent feelings were experienced by P4 who was relieved for her mother but sad to see her father leave. She commented:

> *He [father] used to drink a lot, so that's why he got abusive. Once he threw my mother onto the fridge and she hit her head and fell, [which made] me very*

> *sad. I was so happy [when we moved to my aunt] because I just could not take it anymore.*

This indicates that she was relieved to be away from the ongoing volatile situation, but even in this context of extreme violence, her relief was tempered by ambivalence about separation from her father, stating, *"I don't know, I was happy for my mother, but also sad as I wasn't going to live with my dad. I had to get over it I guess."* Perhaps some of the ambivalence is that she had a good relationship with her father, and he did not directly mistreat her. This indicates that a further variable may be at play, the father-child relationship, where a good father-child relationship may protect against the effects of conflict or even confuse the child at divorce.

The type of conflict also seems to temper reactions to ongoing divorce. Whereas the previous participants witnessed physical and verbal conflict, P5 only witnessed verbal conflict between her parents. Even though she was aware that her parents were not getting on, the news of the divorce was shocking but she was somewhat confused at her reaction commenting, *"It was a shock actually. I was shocked but some part of me was like you knew this. It was very confusing."*

b. Limited pre-divorce conflict

For other participants no conflict or conflict of any type (verbal or physical) beginning close to the divorce resulted in them feeling surprised or sad at the news of the divorce. Three participants fell into this category. This suggests that these participants were not as stressed as the former participants were and that the divorce was harder for them to accept.

P11 reported that his parents showed no signs of conflict. The news shocked him and he referred to it often during the interview. His parents' behaviour was not obviously understandable to him, reporting:

> *I was a bit shocked. I really was, it was Christmas time and my mom and dad seemed to be getting along. They hugged they kissed. Seemed normal and then all of a sudden they told us [they are getting divorced]. So it was shocking to me.*

Other participants only experienced conflict closer to the time of divorce and were also surprised or saddened by the news. When asked about the extent of conflict P3 commented:

> *Not much. My mother started hanging out with this person who we just did not know. We went to him every day. Somehow my dad found out. That was the cause of the divorce…he told [my cousins] to take us away. Then when we came back my mother was crying. I guess he beat her up.*

Given this physical abuse, she went on to say that she was surprised at the news *"I really was. I cried a lot. I prayed that my parents would get back together. It was quite sad. I wanted a normal family."* This response indicates that physical abuse that is not ongoing still results in surprise and sadness at the divorce.

Age at divorce also played a role. The three participants who were two years old or younger had no recollection of parental conflict. P2, who was three at the time, could remember her parents fighting, but was unable to make any sense of it. She said, *"This one day my parents were fighting, I don't know over what, I was too young to understand."*

c. Post-divorce conflict

In this sample, post-divorce inter-parental conflict was not as common as pre-divorce conflict, with a third reporting the former as opposed to two-thirds reporting the latter. This can partly be explained by the fact that over half of the parents are not in regular contact. Overall, only one participant reported that his parents got on well after the divorce (please refer to Table 4).

Four out five participants whose parents were in regular contact reported continued fighting, not necessarily face to face, but also through other means such as over the telephone or via the child, where the child was used as a means to get back at the ex-spouse. In all cases, adolescents fervently disliked the conflict using words such as *"terrible"* and *"hate"*, wishing that the fighting would stop. P2 commented, *"The way they speak to each other is terrible. They swear at each other over the phone, they shout, they scream in front of me, they get me caught in the middle of things."* When asked how she felt about it she said, *"They don't really consider me. When it comes to making decisions about me they are both very immature."* This response indicates that she felt frustrated, hurt and devalued by the way that her parents treated each other.

Two isiZulu adolescent girls were denied access to their mother due to her having an affair. They reported that in their isiZulu culture the mother must repay bride-wealth before her rights to the child are returned. P3 said that her father was so angry that *"He did not want me to have any contact with my mother."* Although it is not explicitly stated, it is possible that

not having access to their mother was a difficult experience for these adolescents, not being able to turn to her for support.

d. Conflict with step-parent or partner

Three adolescents (just under a third) reported experiencing conflict between a parent and a step-parent or partner (please refer to Table 4). As with inter-parental conflict, adolescents found this conflict to be stressful. P1, who used to visit her father but no longer has contact with him, reported that she used to feel scared witnessing him abusing his fiancé, she commented *"Sometimes I felt unsafe around my father due to his drinking and violent behaviour. He would become abusive with his partners and I was scared he would turn on me."*

The remaining two were both adolescent boys, who spoke at great lengths about their difficulty living with stepfathers who were abusive towards their mother, as well as them. They described unstable, volatile and unsettling home environments, which they found very frustrating and hurtful. P7 reported, *"He is abusive, shows no respect. He is still treating my mother in a very disrespectful way."* He continued to say that *"it hurts quite deeply"* and that they *"moved seven to eight times due to mother and stepfather splitting up and getting back together. I can't stand it."*

In both cases their mothers returned to abusive relationships with their stepfathers, P8 stated *"I told her he is not a good man and we should leave. But she chose to go back to him. I think she just does not want to be alone when she dies one day."* So, even though his mother knew that her son was being exposed to a conflicted environment, she opted not to be alone.

A few adolescents felt responsible to protect their mother physically and emotionally. P7 felt incapable of helping his mother with an abusive step-father, stating, *"I do get quite upset, but what is even more upsetting is that I can't do anything about it."* This sense of powerlessness and responsibility to help his mother made it exceptionally stressful for him.

In conclusion, it is clear from this sample that pre-and-post divorce parental conflict, including conflict arising from remarriage, negatively influenced adolescent adjustment to divorce. Although for some divorce was a welcome relief from intense ongoing conflict.

The experiences reported by the participants indicated that the duration of pre-divorce conflict tempered by the target of conflict, the strength of the father-child relationship, the type of conflict and the age at divorce were the underlying factors dictating whether relief,

sadness, surprise or lack of surprise to the divorce was experienced. Ongoing physical and verbal conflict between parents was the most stressful for the participants to cope with, particularly when they were targeted in the conflict. They felt relieved at the news of the divorce and their comments suggest that they were better off away from the conflict. A good father-child relationship, or verbal but no physical conflict, caused ambivalent or confused reactions to ongoing conflict. No conflict, or conflict of any type which was limited to the time of the divorce caused surprise and sadness, indicating a difficult adjustment to the divorce event.

Ongoing conflict was rife between those parents who had regular post-divorce contact. Adolescents fervently disliked the conflict and often felt caught in the middle as a mechanism for parents to get back at each other. Conflict between a mother and stepfather was also commonly reported. A few adolescents felt responsible to protect their mothers emotionally and physically from an abusive relationship with their stepfather, which added stress and made adjustment to remarriage extremely difficult for them.

5.3.1.2 Inter-parental cooperation

Adolescents spoke about cooperative behaviour between parents in terms of parental friendship and parental respect and uncooperative behaviour in terms of parents' irregular contact and parents using the child as a go-between to communicate.

In terms of parental friendship, only one participant, P10, reported that his parents got on well commenting, *"Parents still getting along nicely. Mom and dad are good friends, doing things for each other, helping. We have gotten on better than ever since they were married. Now we are tighter than ever."* This response indicates that even though there was an affair, parents worked together for the child's best interest. He goes on to praise his father for his effort, stating, *"My dad is not one to keep grudges after all the things she has done to him. They never fight."* This response indicates that he appreciated his parents' efforts as well as having a close post-divorce family life.

Two mothers promoted the post-divorce father-child relationship, which was appreciated by both adolescents. When asking his mother what made them separate, P11's mother said, *"I don't want to paint him [father] in a bad light in your eyes. You have to ask him."* He later questioned his father himself, which he experienced as cathartic.

As was previously reported over half of the participants' parents tended to avoid contact. Participants commonly reported that their parents used them as a go-between to relay

messages. P5 reported a common response stating, *"[They] stopped all communication. I was their communicator. It's still like that today. It gets annoying after a while. It's terrible."* It seems that these participants were burdened by this added responsibility as indicated by the words *"annoying"* and *"terrible"*. This response indicates that she wanted her parents to act more maturely and remove this emotional burden from her.

In conclusion, this sample has shown that generally parents were uncooperative, mostly by not making an effort to remain in regular contact, but also by involving their children in parental relationship matters causing undue emotional stress and making adolescents' adjustment to divorce more difficult. A few parents remained cooperative by remaining friends or by promoting the parent-child relationship, which made adjustment easier.

5.3.2 Parental support

This theme discusses adolescents' experiences of parental support throughout the divorce process, and how this affected their ability to adjust. The following subthemes were found: parental transparency, father-child relationship, mother-child relationship and parenting quality.

5.3.2.1 Parental transparency

Adolescents spoke about their experiences of parental transparency in terms of parents' openness about the divorce, including how they were told and what they were told.

a. How participants were told about the divorce

Four of the participants were too young at the time to understand the concept of divorce and hence were not told by their parents. Although one three year old girl, P2, missed her father commenting *"Since I was three I was asking where is my dad and my mom kept on lying to me to comfort me, then when I was five she explained to me nicely where he was and I wasn't that sad."*

Out of the remaining seven participants, four were told about the divorce in a family meeting, which was appreciated. P11 cited a common response commenting, *"They told all of us at once that they are getting a divorce. I thought it was a good way to tell us all together."*

The remaining three adolescents who were not told about the divorce in a family meeting but rather in a haphazard manner reported that they found this situation difficult as they wanted to be considered. P3 cited a common response stating, *"I wish the whole family had sat down and they tell us okay we are divorcing. My mother just told me that she is divorcing my*

father. And I had to live with it." Her father never told her about the divorce. P5 confirmed this commenting, *"They considered their feelings only. I felt hurt they didn't take me into consideration."* This response suggests that she wanted her voice to be heard, as she was also affected by the divorce.

b. What participants were told about the divorce

None of the participants were told detailed reasons for the divorce, leaving unanswered questions and a yearning for an understanding of the cause of the divorce. P3 cited a common response *"Make your children understand, don't leave them in the blue. Why would my mother go to another guy instead of marriage counselling or tell dad she fell out of love?"*

Many wanted to ask their parents questions about the divorce. For example, P10 wanted to ask, "*What was that one thing that got them to say okay that is it? Why just give it up completely? As they have children involved it is a big decision to make."* A few were too scared at the time of divorce to ask questions, as an example P5 stated, *"I didn't want to question them, because they are the type of parents who would shout at you."* Commonly parents did not initiate the conversation or create a safe place where the child could ask questions, rather leaving it up to the child to make sense of the situation him/herself. As suggested by P10's comment *"I would have enjoyed the opportunity to meet with parents to ask them exactly why they divorced."* P5 agreed by saying *"After the divorce it was just something that happened. They never brought it up."*

Two participants did receive reasons, but were left confused or sad. P3 was left confused by the answers given commenting, *"My mother tells me one story and then my father tells me a different story."* P11 was upset to overhear the reasons for the divorce *"My parents did not speak to me about the reason for divorce but I overheard my older brother and my mother speaking. I am a bit sad that I had to overhear the reasons."* This response suggests that he wished his parents had been responsible and had told him the reasons for the divorce themselves.

Those children that asked their parents questions were left disappointed by the responses. Some parents were asked questions but did not want to talk about the divorce as it was in the past. P4 said, *"Mom doesn't really like talking about it as she wants to close that chapter of her life."* These responses suggest that some parents may not have fully dealt with their negative emotions surrounding the divorce. Perhaps some parents had suppressed their emotions as a defence mechanism, resulting in difficulties for their children to speak to them.

Hence, it seems that not feeling free to ask parents questions is a significant difficulty. P11 told how difficult it was, saying *"I don't like confrontation"* and *"I had conflicting emotions as he was my father"*. These responses indicate that he found it extremely difficult to initiate the conversation and that he did not want to disrespect his father. He goes on to say, *"Talking to my father was an extremely important thing to do. That was a hectic conversation...talking to my father has really lifted a weight of my shoulders."* This response indicates the extent of the need to be told the reasons for the divorce by his father and the cathartic release of having done so. Thus it is important for parents to take the initiative to provide reasons for the divorce to their children and to invite questions from them.

The participants indicated that if parents provide understandable reasons for the divorce, then often the child is not left feeling to blame. For example, P9 commented:

> *They [parents] said it's not about you guys. They were cool with us, like my father tells us all the time it had nothing to do with you guys, we just failed as parents that's all. They handled the divorce very well.*

However, the opposite seems true, whereby two participants felt that they were partly to blame for the divorce. P10 said, *"At the time I did think it was partly my fault, as I was always around them, bugging them and them shouting at me often."*

Two of the younger participants said that due to their age, their parents felt that they would not understand the reason for the divorce. P10 stated, *"They just said there is going to be some situation that they have to go through not that it isn't our business, but because we were small it does not have to affect us."* Hence, an age appropriate explanation was provided.

In conclusion, adolescents appreciated being told in a family meeting about the divorce. Those that were told haphazardly felt hurt and unconsidered and wanted their voice to be heard. None of the participants were given detailed reasons for the divorce and were left yearning for an explanation and an opportunity to ask questions, both of which seldom occurred. Some, who were children at the time, felt they were to blame. It is clear that parental transparency not just during the divorce event, but also throughout the divorce process is important for positive adjustment, a lack of which results in added stress and puts the child or adolescent at risk of maladjustment.

5.3.2.2 Father-child relationship

Post-divorce father-child relationships are discussed first followed by stepfather relationships. Eight out of the eleven participants (all six adolescents girls and two adolescent boys) spoke about their relationships with their fathers as unsupportive or uncaring, indicating that the extent of the problem was great. The remaining three adolescent boys reported good relationships with their fathers.

Adolescent girls commonly felt rejected and uncared for by their fathers after the divorce, P4 had a common response commenting, *"Whenever I thought of my father, it was like he does not love me, he does not care about me. He never talks to me about anything."* This response suggests that she does not understand why her father treated her this way and that she felt very hurt by this. P5 whose father was the resident parent at the time reported that he latched onto her emotionally as a way of coping with the divorce, which she found frustrating, commenting, *"He is emotionally focused on me. I'm just hoping that my father finds someone, so he can let go of me."* This indicates that she needed emotional independence. P1 who grew up with an absent father reports how much she misses having a father in her life stating *"I might not have known him but I know what I feel now and it did affect me a lot, my whole childhood, and I had to grow up really fast."* This participant shows how much she was affected by not having a responsible, caring father in her life.

The three remaining adolescent girls had traditional Zulu fathers whom they experienced as uncaring. These experiences appeared to be linked to ancestral lineage and the daughters' role in the father's home. In terms of ancestral lineage these participants indicated that their fathers placed a higher priority on having multiple children and continuing their lineage than on caring emotionally for them. P4 said, *"[My father] used to compare his children to his father, as his father had thirteen children. He wanted to beat his father."* This gives an idea of the status her father placed on having many children. P6 spoke about her father's reaction to having a baby out of wedlock and indicates that her father was not emotionally tied to his children, she commented:

> *On the day that the baby was due, my dad sat with us and said that I am done with you guys, I am no longer your father as I have a new baby and I am starting a new family.*

P4 spoke about her father wanting to have her face cut (symbolising his family's surname) against her wishes, stating:

> *I remember how he [father] sent his sisters to come and speak to my mother as he did not want to go himself. And they dragged me out of the house and they forced me and I think that a person who cares about me is totally ignoring my feelings about everything that I believe in.*

Her father thus appeared to be more focused on ancestral lineage than her feelings and beliefs. In terms of the daughter's role in the home, three participants said that they had to become the *"mother"* of their father's house, which was a very difficult experience for them. P6 whose father was the resident parent reported growing up too quickly after her mother left the home and now struggles to connect socially with her peers. Another, P4 commented:

> *That house is so big and I have to do it [clean it] all alone. I get tired...I have to go there [as he is paying maintenance]. If I had to choose I wish that he would just give me money instead of having to visit him and clean and work and get tired. I hate it but the thing is that I have to.*

Her response indicates that she does not have a close relationship with her father and would prefer not to visit him, due to the way that he treats her without affection.

In contrast to adolescent girls, only two adolescent boys reported a difficult relationship with their fathers. P9 commented, *"I think if I had a son, I would call him a whole lot, but I would think months have gone by and he still hasn't called, he's not really worried is he?"* This response suggests that he felt uncared for by his father.

However, the majority of adolescent boys experienced their father as supportive. When asked about his relationship with his father, P7 reported, *"It's very good. He's very good as a father. He pays attention and offers advice and enjoys being a father. If I SMS him and say I'm upset he will call instantly"*.

a. Quality time

Participants commonly reported that they were not able to spend quality time with their non-custodial parent, usually their father, which affected their ability to cope emotionally with the separation. P4 suggests that even a phone call would have helped, commenting:

> *We used to be very close as we lived together. Now we just talk rarely...my relationship with my father is not that good. So I used to turn to drugs...whenever I thought of my father, it was like he does not love me, he does not care about me he never talks to me about anything.*

P2 indicated her strong need to spend time with her father, regardless of his attitude towards her or what material things he could offer, commenting, *"And wasn't just the material things, I just wanted him to spend time with me, even though the way he is [uncaring], I still want to spend time with him."*

Almost half of the participants reported long distance relationships with their non-custodial parent, which they experienced as difficult. P8 commented, *"To not see dad for the whole year is affecting me. I have lost joy."* P5 who missed her mother agreed commenting, *"I used to cry so much because my mom used to be all the way this side. It used to be so heart breaking being apart."*

In conclusion, participants were commonly not able to spend quality time with their non-custodial parent, usually their father, this either due to a lack of effort from the parent or due to living far apart. Regardless, both situations were experienced as very difficult for adolescents, often leading to negative emotions and putting them at risk of negative adjustment to divorce.

b. Broken trust

Linked to the parent-child relationship, participants commonly spoke about how trust for their parents was broken by the divorce, especially by their father. P9 stated, *"I used to trust my father and he broke all the trust that I had for him."*

Two adolescent Zulu girls reported that their father wanted to test their paternity, which devastated them. P4 felt rejected and betrayed by her father, commenting:

> *After the divorce he took me to some lab and they did a DNA test to make sure that I was his child. I just felt that how could he doubt that I was his own daughter. And I just really did not want to see him anymore. I just stopped going [to see him].*

This parental mistrust then commonly translated into mistrust for other people. For example, when asked how the divorce had affected the way she saw people, P5 reported, *"I just feel that I couldn't trust anyone after the divorce."*

In conclusion, broken parental trust particularly by the father was common. This often translated into trust difficulties with other people. This may have negatively affected parental and extended social relationships, reducing access to support and increasing stress, putting the adolescent at risk of negative adjustment.

c. Relationship with stepfather

Six participants had a stepfather, four residing with the adolescent and two not. The adolescent girls seemed ambivalent, but appreciative to have a stepfather. For example, when asked how she got on with her stepfather P2 said, *"He's okay, we have our moments, but he is okay, he treats me okay and he has been there since I was four supporting me"*, she goes on to say *"good was that I had a new person in my life."*

Two out of the four adolescent boys with a stepfather, P7 and P8, were looking forward to having a male role model, but were left disappointed by him. P7 stated:

> *[I] thought it's about time I got a father figure in my life. I saw him [stepfather] as a father figure. It was different when he moved in as he became a completely different person. It was quite hurtful as finally I've got someone that I can look up to and then he changes completely.*

This was a very difficult experience for him, not only losing a male role model, but also having to live with a stepfather that he did not get on with.

However, the other two adolescent boys, P7 and P10, reported a good relationship with their stepfathers, P10 reported *"He [stepfather] is like a father to us" and "does a lot for us. He's very nice and caring"*. P7, who felt comfortable with his father being gay and got on well with the man that he married, commented:

> *It's actually nice that he's not hiding his true self and it doesn't bother me at all, as long as he is happy...the guy that he has married is also very friendly. He's like another father to me. He's always making me smile a lot.*

Three participants reported that their stepfather favoured their biological children. P8 said, *"Like his son has been eating most of the bread, but when it is finished I get blamed. So step brother and I don't really get on that well."*

In conclusion, fathers were generally experienced post-divorce as unsupportive and uncaring by adolescent girls, whereas the majority of adolescent boys experienced good father-child relationships. Stepfathers were experienced with ambivalence by adolescent girls, some adolescent boys were disappointed by their stepfathers and others had good relationships.

5.3.2.3 Mother-child relationship

Ten out of eleven participants reported a close post-divorce relationship with their mother. As eighty percent of participants resided with their mother, it makes sense that this relationship would be incredibly important for support and a positive adjustment to divorce.

Adolescent girls commonly referred to their mother as a best friend, for example P2 said *"Talking to my mom helps me cope. I do talk to my mom a lot. She knows basically everything in my life. She is my best friend."* Adolescent boys were also commonly close to their mother, for example P11 said *"My mom, best of the best, I can't say anything bad about my mom. My mother and I, we are close."*

Although current relationships were commonly reported as good, at the time of divorce and again at remarriage, mothers were commonly experienced as unsupportive. Immediately after the divorce, mothers were commonly self-absorbed dealing emotionally with the divorce themselves. P4, whose mother was a teacher, reported:

> *I think she used shopping as a coping mechanism for it [divorce]. Because she used to buy a lot of stuff and come home late. So we only saw her in the evenings. I think that I missed her a lot...she never even noticed that I was depressed.*

This response suggests that the time immediately after divorce was when she needed the most emotional support, but her mother was unsupportive. P9 also felt unsupported, but in this case his mother moved on quickly and expected the same from him, not giving him enough time to deal with his emotions. He commented:

> *My mother was like after a few months, ag it's over now, got to get up and carry on with life, all of us...so there's not much time to show emotion. When it takes me a long time to adapt, she is the type of person where you've got to adapt fast.*

Overall, these responses indicate that the way a mother deals with the divorce strongly influences her child's ability to adjust.

Besides inadequate emotional support immediately following the divorce, children and adolescents lost interest in activities due to a lack of encouragement from their mother and father, P9 reported:

I started losing interest because no one is showing you support. No one is coming to watch you. They were too busy going on with their lives, dealing with the divorce. They stopped going to sports day at school. Mom's working dad's not coming for sure. Even now, support is an issue.

This response suggests that activities such as sport, which act as mechanisms to release negative emotion, were stopped due to reduced support from parents. Reduced activities may have led to a build-up of stress, putting the child at risk of negative adjustment.

a. Remarriage

Remarriage was common, with seven adolescents reporting that their mothers remarried. This had a significant impact on adjustment to divorce. P9 reported that he was not emotionally ready for a stepfather and felt unsupported by his mother deciding to remarry *"She [mother] has got remarried. It was hard for me to adapt. It was when I had just moved to Pietermaritzburg. [I had to] Adapt to a new place and a new guy."* It is not explicitly stated, but one can presume that he felt insecure and experienced additional stress, which put him at risk of negative adjustment.

Another instance relating to additional stress due to disappointment at a mother returning to an abusive relationship is described by P8, *"I told her he is not a good man and we should leave. But she chose to go back to him. I think she just does not want to be alone when she dies one day."* While the participant did not expand on this further, he spoke of sadness at his mother's decision. Even though his mother knew that her child was exposed to a conflicted home environment, she opted to remain in an abusive relationship rather than be alone in the future.

Three adolescents reported having stepmothers. Two spoke fondly of their stepmother. P8 reported, *"My father's new wife has really been there for me, she is like a second mother to me."* The third, P11, however reported a strained relationship with his stepmother as his father had had an affair with her *"I did feel very awkward, this lady was the lady my father had a relationship with."*

Adolescents' experiences of adjustment to divorce commonly included emotional and physical concern for their mother. Five adolescents reported concern, one of them P8 commented, *"Last year he [stepfather] used to have a drinking problem. And that would be every night fighting. Eventually I thought of running away to my aunt. But then I had to stay*

and help my mother out." This added responsibility likely added to existing developmental stress for these adolescents, placing them at risk of negative adjustment.

In conclusion, the mother-child relationship was most commonly experienced as close and supportive, promoting positive adjustment. However, mothers were commonly experienced as unsupportive immediately after divorce and prior-to-and-during remarriage. In addition, adolescents commonly felt responsible to assist their mothers emotionally due to the divorce and physically due to abusive stepfathers. The way that a mother deals with these two events thus strongly influences her child's ability to cope with the related additional stress and adjust.

5.3.2.4 Parenting quality

This subtheme discusses adolescents' experiences of post-divorce parenting quality, and how this affected their adjustment to divorce.

It was commonly evident that parenting quality immediately after the divorce was compromised as parents became irritable or angry whilst struggling to cope with the divorce. P3 commented, *"Before the divorce I would say they were great parents. Afterwards they changed became stubborn and shouting. They changed too much for me."*

a. Custodial parent child-rearing style

The adolescents described different parenting. Four adolescents experienced their custodial parent's child-rearing style as controlling, unapproachable and unsupportive often withdrawing and coping on their own, indicating that controlling parenting is a risk factor for maladjustment. P8 commented:

> *All mom does is take my phone away and wants control. She may threaten me or send me away or something…as can't talk to mother has affected how I relate with others. I struggle to tell my mom things about myself.*

In a similar way, one adolescent girl, P4, whose isiZulu father was the resident parent reported *"My dad is very traditional",* and *"it was horrible for me!!"* When asked if she felt supported, her reply was *"There is no one at all!"*

Three adolescents experienced their custodial parent's child-rearing style as permissive, often having to take the responsibility of parenting themselves and growing up quickly. They would have preferred growing up under a more disciplined, responsive parenting style. Their

responses indicate that permissive parenting is a risk factor for maladjustment. P7 commented:

> *She [mother] completely does not discipline. She says that I am mature enough to move out and take care of myself. She doesn't tell me what to do. I can go to bed whenever I want. She doesn't give motivation for school.*

When asked if he would prefer his mother to have been stricter he replied, *"I've grown up quicker, learnt through her mistakes."*

The three remaining adolescents suggested a sense of security in knowing what was expected of them by having an involved parent who maintained discipline, indicating that involved parenting is a protective factor for positive adjustment. When asked whether she needed more discipline, P5 answered, *"Yes that is why I moved to my mom. My dad would let me do anything…I think living with my mom I know my responsibilities."* Her response indicates the importance of an involved parent.

b. Non-custodial parent child-rearing style

Five participants perceived their non-custodial parents, typically the father, as approachable and someone who maintained discipline. P7 commented, *"He gives good and helpful advice and always shows that he's there for you…he's constantly on my case about school work and focus. It's a good thing, it's what I prefer."*

However, two participants with Zulu fathers perceived them as controlling and harsh. Their responses indicated that it was difficult for them to adjust to divorce without supportive parenting. P4 described her non-custodial father as *"very strict"* and that *"he is traditional about everything."*

In addition, uninvolved parenting was described as uncaring. P2 reported, *"I can't speak to him [father] about my problems. He does not care. He says my mum must deal with it. He doesn't have time."* This response suggests that she is hurt and frustrated by not being able to speak to her father about her problems.

c. Differences in parents' child-rearing styles

The sample shows that differences in parents' child-rearing styles were common, where one parent's style was perceived as supportive and the other was not. With divorce, the supportive parent may no longer be resident to compensate for poor parenting by the other parent. In addition, the adolescent has to adapt to two different parenting styles. This may have made it

difficult for these adolescents to adjust. P9 stated, *"I listen to my father's advice. My father requests respect whereas my mother preaches and preaches, but she is hard to listen to because of all the rules. My mother forces respect."*

In conclusion, parenting quality commonly declined immediately following the divorce. Adolescents adjusted better to divorce with approachable and involved parents who maintained fair discipline. Parents who were perceived as controlling, permissive or uninvolved made it difficult for adolescents to deal with negative emotions arising from the divorce, even adding to adolescents existing stress. The participants also showed that adolescents may struggle to adjust when the non-custodial parent is not available to compensate for poor parenting by the custodial parent.

5.3.3 Family functioning and stability

This theme concerned the practical and relational aspects of family functioning and stability post-divorce, and whether these affected adolescent adjustment. The following subthemes were found: home environment, routines, lifestyle, sibling support and extended family support.

5.3.3.1 Home environment

This subtheme concerns participants' experiences of the time when the non-custodial parent left the home. Included are participants' reactions and the relationships between remaining family members in the home.

Adolescents commonly described that time as sad and dramatic. P9 reported *"I was sad, but you don't really know what you have until it's gone.*" Being able to see their non-custodial parent regularly softened the impact. P5 reported, *"I could see her [mother] every second weekend which made it easier."*

However, a third of the participants including three adolescent girls with Zulu fathers were used to their fathers not being around as they worked and lived away from home. This meant that the home environment stayed relatively stable. P11 reports a common response:

> *Him not being around 24/7 kind of made it easier for me to deal with the fact that my parents aren't going to be together anymore. It made it easier as I had some time to deal with him not being around.*

A few reported that relationships between remaining family members were strengthened and experienced as supportive. P11 commented, *"I guess it brought us closer, my brothers my mom…I have become closer to my immediate family."*

Commonly the home environment changed negatively, with some participants feeling lonely. In particular, mothers dealing with the divorce significantly affected the environment, whether withdrawing or working longer hours. P11 described that time:

> *It was quiet, very quiet. Everyone was in their own kind of world. It was just a really quiet time. Nobody wanted to say anything. Just let it settle in that this just happened, very quiet. Mother spent a lot of time in her room.*

P5, whose father was the resident parent, described relational difficulties:

> *Hectic, we used to fight a lot. I think that was the year I was sick the most because I used to get so stressed out. I used to rebel so much. Then my mom came down and spoke to me and supported me.*

In conclusion, participants generally experienced the departure of their non-custodial parent as sad or dramatic. These negative emotions put the adolescent at risk for maladjustment. However some were used to their father not being around, which made it easier for them to adjust. Others drew strength from remaining family members supporting each other. Commonly the post-divorce home environment was experienced as negative, especially immediately after the divorce when the custodial parent was struggling to adjust.

5.3.3.2 Routines

Out of the seven participants who could clearly remember that time, four reported stable routines, which provided a sense of security during an unsettling time. As a common example, P11 inferred that routines bonded the family during a time of insecurity *"We pulled tighter together. We ate supper together all the time, we were always together."*

Three participants reported unstable routines. They commonly stated that this was unsettling and that it added to their existing sense of insecurity surrounding the divorce. P5, who previously resided with her father stated, *"With my mom I had a curfew. She was a routine person and was stricter than my dad. I think I moved to her because I knew she would put me in my place."* This response suggests that stable routines were preferred and protective of positive adjustment.

5.3.3.3 Lifestyle

This subtheme discusses how participants experienced their post-divorce lifestyle. A few adolescents reported that they had all they needed and that their lifestyle did not change drastically. P9 reported that finances *"Changed a little bit. My mother made sure that we had everything we needed. She made a huge effort. She has bounced back. She sacrificed a lot."*

However, most reported that financial difficulties negatively affected them. Two reported having to stop activities that they liked. P4 commented, *"We couldn't afford all the luxuries that we had before. We don't go out as much. We don't go on vacation as much as we used to."*

Commonly, fathers did not pay sufficient maintenance, which adolescents experienced as difficult due to lifestyle changes. P3 reported:

> *He did not want to look after us financially. At first he didn't pay and then as time went on he started paying. I wish that my father could have just given my mother the house instead of just kicking her out in the street with us.*

Three participants moved house immediately after the divorce due to financial reasons, which was experienced as stressful and unsettling by adolescents. P4 said, *"After the divorce the first few months are just blank. I can remember us moving to another place. I guess we didn't focus so much on the divorce, but rather on adjusting to the new location and everything."*

Eight participants stayed in the same house, but five moved at a later stage. Of the five, two moved to stay with their other parent, two moved to live with their stepfather and one moved due to financial difficulties. Remarriage may have assisted financially with the additional income from stepfathers.

Commonly those who moved for financial reasons did not enjoy their new accommodation. P3 commented, *"We were living in a one roomed house. Not a nice place. I was used to living in a big house with my own room. It was difficult. It was kind of cramped."*

Three participants reported moving in with extended family. P9 who moved in with his aunt found it difficult *"You don't really know who to listen to, you don't see the hierarchy. One minute he's [aunt's boyfriend] telling us to do something, the next minute my mother is telling us something else."*

A few reported that moving schools was difficult, for example, P2 reported, *"I changed schools four times, because my dad didn't want to pay school fees. Main reason was*

financial. Changing schools caused my marks to go down, then they went up again when I got used to the school." P9 said that it *"Was very difficult. Level of education [of new school] was lower."* However, P3 who changed school, reported that *"It was kind of fun having a new environment, leaving the old bad memories behind."*

Commonly, participants experienced difficulty due to losing friends after moving house or school. P7 reported, *"I had plenty of friends and cried when we moved here, as I hardly had any friends at my new school."* However, P4 moved closer to her friends *"Most of my friends from school lived in the same area. So I was kind of happy for that."*

In conclusion, most participants were negatively affected by financial difficulties. This included moving house, changing schools and losing friends, making it more difficult to adjust to the divorce.

5.3.3.4 Sibling support

This subtheme discusses participants' experiences of post-divorce sibling support. It was commonly reported that siblings were supportive during the divorce. P3 stated, *"My brother and I grew closer to each other. We comforted each other."*

A few participants reported conflict for attention or jealousy with their step-siblings, which negatively affected these relationships. P9 commented, *"He [stepfather] has a child, so she [mother] gave his three year old attention which hurt a bit."*

One participant, who was an only child at the time, felt that having a sibling to talk to would have helped to support and normalise her experience. P5 stated, *"I don't even have siblings so it's even worse. I didn't even speak to any of my friends. I didn't know how to. I was literally by myself."*

Participants with younger siblings reported answering their questions and comforting them, indicating an added responsibility to look after younger siblings. P10 stated *"During that time my brother came up to me and asked me was it our fault that my parents got divorced…so I had to talk to him, then after that he was fine."* When asked how he experienced this, he said, *"Just doing what I thought was best for my brother."* Commonly participants were protective over their siblings. Two adolescent boys tried to protect their younger sisters against their stepfather. P7 said, *"The one night my sister was arguing with my step dad and then he started walking up against her and cornering her in the bathroom. Then I grabbed his arm and pulled him back."* Another, P9, assisted his sister with her

schoolwork commenting, *"Well I had to help her more with homework. She was in trouble and was almost going to fail. Her learning was disrupted."* All these accounts indicate an added responsibility towards younger siblings, adding to existing stress levels and making adjustment more difficult.

Two participants reported that their older siblings moved out quickly, due to conflict with their stepfather negatively affecting these potentially supportive relationships. P2 reports, *"My older sister is never there for me. She has moved out of the house."*

In conclusion, supportive sibling relationships assisted with positive adjustment to divorce. In addition, conflict for attention with step-siblings was common. Those without siblings felt isolated and those with younger siblings felt responsible to assist them adjust, compounding existing stress levels and making it more difficult to adjust.

5.3.3.5 Extended family support

Commonly grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins provided the most support. P2 reported, *"I had lots of support from my grandparents. My gran used to tell me to forget about it and just to think of other things. She also used to comfort me when I was feeling sad"*, she added that *"I had lots of support from my girl cousin. She's also been through the same situation where her dad's not there for her."* However, P10 did not recommend grandparents stating, *"Grandparents are very close to their children. They would also gossip a lot [to their children]…in terms of support I would suggest uncles and aunties."*

A few participants with extended families who were Indian or Zulu reported difficulties, adding to their existing negative emotions. P5 reported:

> *When my father got married to my mother, his family [Indian] disowned him. It was a big issue because my mom is coloured. I always felt like an outsider when I was there, and I did go through this depression stage where I was cutting myself in grade eight due to the way they treated me…my dad's family wasn't there [for me] and my mom's family lived in Durban.*

Contrasting stories about extended family support were presented by two of the isiZulu participants, where one found her extended family to be supportive and the other did not. When asked who supported her, P4, residing with her mother, stated:

> *I think my grandparents. I never used to see them when my parents were still married. So we used to go there pretty much every weekend. And they would*

give so much affection that we would forget about everything that was going on at home and just relax.

However, P6 was not allowed to visit her maternal or paternal grandparents reporting:

Because of what my mother did [affair] my father's family do not even like me, so I do not even go there at all...I cannot even go to my mother's house as my father's family would be against it, horrible!!

In conclusion, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins were commonly found as supportive, assisting with positive adjustment to divorce. However, some extended family difficulties were experienced within Indian and Zulu cultures.

5.3.4 External social support

This theme discusses participants' experiences of support by organisations and individuals outside of the family. Psychologists, teachers and friends were the main areas of support. However, some adolescents received no external support.

5.3.4.1 Psychologists

Four out of eleven participants saw psychologists, with differing accounts of this experience. Trust played a big role in how effective therapy was. Having to trust a stranger after experiencing parental trust issues made it difficult to open up to the psychologist, others indicated that rapport with the therapist was vital.

P2 reported, *"I did go for counselling from the age of seven until the age of eleven. Well I don't really feel comfortable speaking to anybody in particular, just a person that I don't know, even though they are a counsellor."* P1 reported:

It just felt like people were lecturing me. Until I went to this lady [psychologist] and what is nice...we grew a connection and I think that's why I felt so open to talk to her and she did help me a lot.

A common positive report about counselling was that adolescents could get things off their chest. P7 commented, *"It was helpful to express things."*

The majority of participants, almost two-thirds, did not access support from a psychologist, including all of the participants with traditional Zulu parents. They wished that their parents had offered them support. P5 reported a common response stating, *"No one ever told me you could talk to someone."* Similarly, P1 reported to desperately need therapy due to the divorce

"junior school was a very difficult time for me but there were no psychologists at the school."

5.3.4.2 Teachers

Two participants reported that teachers were supportive. Teachers provided regular contact with an adult who had a positive influence on the adolescent's life. P10 commented, *"I would also talk to teachers and sports coaches who would help me, as they didn't really speak to my parents."*

5.3.4.3 Friends

Over half of the participants reported that friends were a helpful form of support. Especially close friends who could be trusted and had experienced divorce. When asked what advice she would give to another adolescent experiencing divorce, P4 said, *"She could confide in a close friend. Someone she knows will help her and someone that she trusts."* P10 stated, *"Friends were good. Their parents had been divorced for a long time and so would know exactly what to do."* P11 reported, *"I spoke to my girlfriend. Girlfriend has been very helpful."*

Given that friends were commonly found as supportive, parents living far apart caused disruption to this support base. P5 commented, *"In the holidays I can't spend time with my friends here [Pietermaritzburg] because I'm there [Johannesburg]… That makes it difficult."*

However, not all participants reported positive support from friends. Adolescents experiencing significant negative emotion may be easily tempted by friends to deal with these emotions in an unhealthy way, such as with alcohol, drugs or by self-mutilation. One participant, P1, learnt how to self-mutilate from friends at school, reporting, *"People [peers] would talk about cutting [at school]"*.

5.3.4.4 No external social support

Three participants reported that they received no external social support, placing them at risk of having limited support for coping with negative emotions. External social support is important, especially when family and extended family are unsupportive. When asked who supported her outside of the family, P3 stated, *"No one, I am quite isolated."* P6 who could not even talk to family or extended family reported, *"There is no one at all!"*

In conclusion, many participants did not receive counselling, those that did enjoyed the opportunity to express their divorce related issues. Teachers and especially friends who had

experienced their parents' divorce were considered helpful. Almost a third of adolescents reported no external social support, which left them having to cope with negative emotions on their own and placing them at risk for negative adjustment.

5.3.5 Individual coping

This theme discusses adolescents' experiences of how they coped individually with their parents' divorce. The following subthemes were found: developmental level, transition to high school, individual characteristics, negative emotions and current adjustment.

5.3.5.1 Developmental level

This topic focuses on experiences of divorce at different developmental levels. Earlier development is discussed first followed by later development.

a. Early developmental level

Adolescents' responses commonly indicated that limited understanding at an earlier cognitive developmental level, ages 2-10, acted as both a risk and a protective factor. On the one hand, it resulted in them not comprehending the seriousness of the situation; on the other hand, it caused a sense of guilt and emotional regulation difficulties. P11 commented, *"It didn't bother me that much then. I guess then I wasn't really worried or concerned, just thought this is what usually happens with divorce."* P5 said *"I did not know how to respond to it or what to do."* Others blamed themselves, P1 reported, *"I thought you know what it happened so maybe it was my fault and I was very aggressive."*

At an earlier developmental level peers were perceived as unsupportive. For example, P3 stated, *"You know when you are young, I would feel like a black sheep. People would talk about how their parents are together and I would say my parents are divorced."*

b. Later developmental level

At a later cognitive developmental level, ages 11-16, participants also commonly indicated risk and protective factors. On the one hand adolescents could make better sense of the divorce when they were older, realising that they were not to blame for the divorce, on the other hand some participants felt that the ability to comprehend the seriousness of the situation resulted in difficulties. P2 said, *"It didn't have to do with me it had to do with other women involved and he used to lie a lot."* This response suggests a better ability to make sense of the divorce. P11 said, *"I am more serious about this whole divorce thing now that I am older. I am grasping that things are not so easy like my mom said back then"*, he went on

to say, *"when I was younger it happened I couldn't have done anything about it. Now there is more to think about, my parents need to be questioned and things need to be said."*

At a later developmental level, friends were reported as understanding and supportive. P3 reported, *"As time went on, when you grow up, my friends understand and we would move on and act as if nothing happened."*

In conclusion, adolescents reported that at an earlier developmental level limited understanding assisted with not comprehending the seriousness of the situation, but hindered with them often feeling that they were to blame for the divorce. At a later developmental level, increased capacity to understand assisted with making better sense of the divorce and not feeling to blame, but also added a sense of responsibility and concern.

5.3.5.2 Transition to high school

Over a third of adolescents reported problems which manifested during the first year of high school including depression, drug use, self-mutilation, smoking and aggression. This transition marks a stressful time when an adolescent is expected to grow up and face developmental challenges. If negative emotions or insecurities resulting from the divorce are not fully dealt with prior to this, then the adolescent may be at risk of negative adjustment.

P1 reported, *"In grade 8 I overdosed and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital…I also used to cut. I think I was depressed as that was when I needed my father the most."* When asked why she needed her father, she reported, *"As high school is where you grow up. He's never there for me. To give me advice, to be there, like you are going to be okay, don't fall into peer pressure."*

The developmental stage of puberty added stress, P5 reported, *"My mother left [moved away] when I started becoming a teenager. I rebelled a lot, I was bunking school, with the wrong crowd, and my marks were terrible."*

It is suggested that preadolescents and adolescents need extra support during this transition, in particular from both parents, as existing divorce related insecurities may manifest at this time.

5.3.5.3 Individual characteristics

This subtheme discusses attributes of participants' character and their related experience of coping with divorce. The following adolescent characteristics were found to influence

coping: resilience, attitude, introversion and extroversion, sensitivity to emotion, source of control and religion.

a. Resilience

A few participants reported getting over the divorce quickly. For example, when asked whether she felt the divorce changed her, P3 stated, *"I was sad for a while and then went back to the old me. At first, I was reserved. Moved on and act as if nothing happened. I became outgoing, have fun, live life to the fullest."* This response suggests that she bounced back quickly from divorce, a characteristic of resilient people.

b. Attitude

In terms of attitude, a positive outlook and level headed thinking was commonly reported as important for positive coping. When asked what advice they would give another adolescent experiencing divorce, P2 replied *"Best advice is stay strong, try and put the past behind you and think of the future and live in the present."* Another, P10, suggested level headed thinking, commenting, *"Don't take it personal, don't take it as if it is your fault…it was their decision. You will see your parents equally. It is nothing really to get too overwhelmed with."*

c. Introversion and extroversion

Introversion and extroversion appeared to affect how participants coped with the divorce. Extroverted adolescents reported positive and negative coping, whereas introverts reported negative coping. Extroverted adolescents were able to express their emotions and move on with life, but they did not always deal fully with these emotions. P10 commented, *"I've never been one for keeping things in. I don't care what people think, making judgements, it's my life not theirs."* Another self-reported extrovert, P3, implied that she had not fully dealt with her emotions *"When I am on my own everything starts coming back and then I am sad again. I start to remember things and feel sad."* Introverted adolescents struggled to express their emotions, which caused difficulties coping, including not being able to confront their parents with questions about the divorce. P11 commented:

> *Keeping it to yourself is a big problem…I am a more keep things to myself type of person I'm quiet I like to be in the background. I don't like confrontation…it took me a couple of years to confront him [father].*

d. Sensitivity to emotion

Sensitivity to emotion also effected participants' ability to cope with divorce. High sensitivity to emotion made dealing with an inharmonious home environment difficult, whereas low sensitivity protected against being easily hurt and resulted in less negative emotion. P7 stated, *"I would say I have a sensitive side... I was made not to hurt people."* He went on to say, that he was hurt by his stepfather *"It was quite hurtful as finally I've got someone that I can look up to then he changes completely."* P2 appeared to have low emotionality, stating *"I don't cry that much. In general, I don't really get upset."*

e. Source of control

The extent to which adolescents were affected by their parents' divorce relied in part as to whether they felt in control of themselves (enhancing coping) or controlled by others, particularly their parents (negatively influencing coping). P5 stated, *"I'm a very free spirit. I'm my own person…I've learnt to stand my ground [with my father]."* P9 commented, *"Support is an issue you need motivation to go into something."* This indicates that he relied on his parents to motivate him.

f. Religion

Not many participants mentioned religion, when it was reported it was not necessarily a protective factor. P3 said how her faith had helped her get through that time, *"I used to pray every night for them to get back together. There was this time at night, when I made peace with it."* However, for another participant the divorce made him question his faith, P11 commented, *"We don't really go to church anymore after the divorce...I don't know what I am right now, I am kind off doubting my religion at the moment."*

In conclusion, the sample showed that resilience, a positive attitude, extroversion, a low sensitivity for emotion and being in control assisted with coping. Whereas introversion, extroversion, high sensitivity to emotion and being controlled by others made coping with divorce more difficult. Religion assisted with coping, but faith was also negatively affected.

5.3.5.4 Negative emotions

This subtheme describes how adolescents coped with their negative emotions related to the divorce. Expression of negative emotions, self-harm, anger and distraction from negative emotions are discussed.

a. Expression of negative emotions

Participants commonly reported that they were not able to process or make sense of their negative emotions especially when they were younger, which often resulted in depression. P5 reported, *"Even though I had all these issues I still didn't talk. I just didn't know how to deal with it. Maybe that was why I started getting depressed a lot".* Suppressing emotions was common. P11 reported, *"I kind of pushed them away as a defence mechanism to keep things as good as possible."* Withdrawal was also commonly reported. When asked how she would describe herself after the divorce, P4 stated, *"I guess I just keep to myself now. Keep my head inside the books more and I just kind of talk less."*

Adolescents commonly reported that getting issues off their chest made them feel better. P11 reported *"Someone to talk to is helpful I would say...it doesn't actually help to just get over it. It was helpful to express things."* He went on to say, *"I would like to talk to another research participant, preferably my age, about their family being divorced. To know what they went through."* This indicates the need to express divorce experiences.

b. Self-harm

Seven adolescents reported self-harm including self-mutilation, suicidal ideation, drug use, drinking alcohol and smoking. This was most likely a way of dealing with negative emotions linked to divorce. Two participants reported that they self-mutilated. P4 reported, *"I also used to cut, I think I was depressed."* Two participants reported that they became suicidal. P1 said, *"I thought you know what it happened so maybe it was my fault and I became suicidal"*. Three turned to drugs, alcohol or smoking. P5 said, *"Started drinking at friend. I used to rebel so much. I think it was because of my dad and my relationship. It wasn't healthy"*.

c. Anger

Adolescents commonly reported that they had felt angry due to the divorce. P1 said, *"Because of what had happened I put up a protective barrier [aggression]"*. P10 stated *"[I was] Angry that parents got divorced, as now I couldn't spend time with them both at the same time."* P1 reported displaced anger *"I was angry with the world and I took it out on myself and my mom"*.

d. Distraction from negative emotions

Adolescents commonly reported that activities helped them to take their minds of negative emotions including doing school work, listening to music and playing sport. In terms of school work, P7 commented, "*There is not much you can do, just focus on school work."* In terms of music P8 said, *"Luckily for me I listen to music on a computer and block everything*

out" and related to sport, P10 reported, *"My school sport helped a lot to take my mind of everything."*

In conclusion, adolescents commonly attempted to cope in an unhealthy way with negative emotions by avoidance such as internalising, suppressing or withdrawing, or by alleviating the negative emotions through self-harm such as self-mutilation, taking drugs, drinking alcohol and smoking. Anger was also commonly reported, including displaced anger. However, some reported healthy coping mechanisms commonly by expressing themselves in conversation with others, focusing on school work, playing sport or listening to music.

5.3.5.5 Current adjustment

This subtheme discusses how adolescents had currently adjusted to the divorce. They spoke commonly about acceptance and the effect of the divorce on their character. Adolescent perspectives on family life and career choice were also found.

a. Acceptance

On average nine years had passed since the divorce and most adolescents had accepted their parents' divorce. P10 reported, *"As time went on I had forgotten about it as it happened five years ago, so it does not affect me anymore"*. Others felt that they had no choice but to accept, however they were still struggling, P6 commented, *"Just accept else it will destroy you, but internally just know what you want to do, this is not forever. Make sure you do not carry this over in to your own relationships. I just accepted."*

b. Effect on character

Some participants felt that they were better people due to their experience of divorce. P1 commented:

> *It is hard, I went through a lot, but at least now I can say that I am a better person because of what happened and I don't think I would be the person I am today if I didn't go through it.*

Others commonly felt that they had grown up or matured quickly. P9 stated, *"I grew a lot. Small things don't get to me. Sometimes think need a tear for this, but not sad."* This response either suggests emotional maturity or being cut-off from emotions due to hurtful divorce experiences. P8 said, *"I have lost joy, was happy when I was with dad."*

Difficulty trusting others was also a very common effect on character. This topic was discussed in detail within the parental support theme.

c. New perspectives

The sample showed that perspectives on family life were commonly shaped by adolescents' experiences of divorce. In addition, one adolescent reported that she had chosen a career due to her experiences of support from a psychologist.

Commonly participants' experience of divorce affected their view on parenting and children. P5 stated *"I will never just get a divorce and let my children go through what I went through it is terrible never ever will I do that. That is the worst thing to go through."*

P1 reported that her experiences of divorce led to a career choice. *"This experience is what has led me to want to study psychology and I have seen how it has helped me and if I can help someone else I would love to."*

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of the study. The most prominent subthemes discussed were parental conflict, parental transparency, the father-child relationship and the mother-child relationship. Thus it seems that the relationship with, and support from parents, as well as the inter-parental relationship are experienced as the most prominent factors influencing adolescent adjustment to divorce. The next chapter discusses these findings.

6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of the study. This chapter provides a discussion of these findings. The discussion will endeavour to answer the three research questions:

- How do adolescents experience adjustment to divorce in a South African context?
- What do adolescents experience as risk factors associated with divorce in a South African context?
- What do adolescents experience as protective factors associated with divorce in a South African context?

6.2 Adolescent adjustment to divorce in a South African context

6.2.1 Negative emotions

Most participants in the current study experienced negative emotions related to parental divorce, but how they processed and coped with it were vital determinants as to whether positive or negative adjustment prevailed. Storksen et al. (2005) also found that adolescents with a childhood experience of divorce developed negative emotions.

Overall, the way negative emotion was processed and coped with by the study participants fell into two categories, healthy or unhealthy.

6.2.1.1 Healthy processing and coping

Expression as a means of dealing with negative emotion was a significant finding in this study as it assisted significantly by alleviating the negative emotion. Some participants reported a healthy coping mechanism by expressing themselves in conversation with others, which allowed emotion to be processed and coped with by obtaining perspectives and support from others. This is consistent with Nhlangulela (2011) who found that verbal expression of emotions and other experiences pertaining to divorce is important otherwise negative emotional wounds grow.

Some participants reported other healthy coping mechanisms such as focusing on school work, playing sport or listening to music. Although these activities are useful coping mechanisms as they distract from, or alleviate the negative emotion, they do not necessarily assist with processing the emotion and so reappearance is probable.

6.2.1.2 Unhealthy processing and coping

The adolescents in this study commonly attempted to cope in an unhealthy way with negative emotions by avoidance such as internalising or withdrawing. Both of these strategies proved unsuccessful in dealing with negative emotions and resulted in stress build up.

Adolescents also commonly attempted to cope by alleviating their negative emotions through self-harm such as self-mutilation, taking drugs, drinking alcohol or smoking. Nock and Prinstein (2005) found that the primary reason for self-mutilation is to reduce negative emotion. The idea is that the physical pain from self-mutilation distracts from the overwhelming negative emotions.

Displaced anger was reported by some adolescents whereby anger directed towards their father was redirected towards others. This had a systemic effect as it affected other relationships within and outside the family, such as the mother-child relationship and friendships.

Depression was a common finding in this study, generally as a result of the inability to process negative emotions. Nhlangulela (2011) also found that adolescent depression was common due to divorce experience. Negative emotions cause the production of the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Chronic stress keeps an individual's system flooded with the stress hormones, which in turn reduces the feel good hormones, serotonin and dopamine, and places the individual at risk of depression. (Bruno, 2011)

6.2.2 Coping skills

Coping skills equip an individual to cope better with negative emotions that are experienced due to the stressful divorce situation. Many of the participants in this study received little or no assistance with coping skills and had difficulty dealing with their negative emotions.

If an adolescent cannot cope with divorce, then problems adjusting are common. Increased stress due to divorce experiences reduces coping skills and increases behaviour problems (Hetherington et al., 1989). This indicates the importance of promoting and supporting coping skills, especially early in the divorce process in order to assist adolescents deal with their negative emotions. Whatever reinforces child coping skills is key (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). The use of active coping skills is protective (Amato, 2000), where active coping refers to the utilisation of those psychological or behavioural coping efforts that are characterised

by an attempt to use one's own resources to deal with a problem situation (Zeidner & Endler, 1996).

6.2.3 Stress

If negative emotions are not addressed quickly, then stress results. Findings in this study confirm that added stress is the most important underlying reason for risk of maladjustment. This finding is consistent with other authors Hetherington et al. (1989), Hetherington and Elmore (2003) and Hughes (2005) who found that children and adolescents of divorce face more stresses, especially in the initial years after divorce or remarriage and it is the exposure to, and the accumulation of multiple stressors that adversely effects adjustment.

This indicates the need to protect against stress and to determine the factors that ultimately protect against accumulation of stress. Multiple risk and protective factors interact and influence individual adaptation to stressful events, such as divorce (Leon, 2003).

6.2.4 Transition to high school

Transition to high school seemed to be a key developmental period for adolescents when adjustment was most problematic. Over a third of the participants in this study had problems that manifested in grade 8, including depression, drug abuse, self-mutilation, smoking and aggression.

Moving to high school is a stressful event for adolescents in general. There is less personal attention and adolescents must readjust their feelings of self-confidence and self-worth as they encounter revised academic expectations and a more complex social world. This puts them at risk of experiencing negative emotions and stress. In addition, adolescent self-esteem generally drops if this transition coincides with other life changes such as puberty and dating (Berk, 2013).

Adolescents who face added stress at transition to high school, due to family disruptions and high parental conflict, are at greatest risk for self-esteem and academic difficulties. Adolescents in this situation showed a far greater rise in truancy (the act of staying away from school with no good reason) and out of school problem behaviours, such as drinking or thrill seeking, compared to adolescents who were not facing these additional challenges. (Berk, 2013). This further emphasises the dire need to assist children and adolescents cope with negative emotions in order to protect them from the harmful effects of chronic stressors.

Similar to the existing research, this study has shown the importance of assisting children and adolescents cope with their negative emotions as a result of stressful situations surrounding the divorce process, and that if they are overwhelmed, then negative outcomes such as depression or self-harm are common. Hence, it is important to understand the risk factors that exacerbate negative emotions, and conversely the protective factors that reduce or prevent negative emotions.

Children and adolescents living with a single parent are exposed to many stressful experiences. Although there were many stressful situations throughout the divorce process, the time immediately after divorce was when the adolescent was most at risk and in need of the most support and care. Unfortunately, this is also the time when parents are the most emotionally disconnected.

6.2.5 Parental conflict

Parental conflict increases children's vulnerability to a range of psychological problems by undermining their emotional security in the relationship between their parents (Davies & Martin, 2014). If emotional insecurity is not dealt with quickly, it leads to increased stress and puts the child or adolescent at risk of maladjustment. Hence, parental conflict is a risk factor. Papalia et al. (2009) observed that conflict and hostility between parents can produce emotional insecurity. Parental quarrelling is particularly distressing for children (Maslow, 1943).

6.2.5.1 Ongoing conflict

Ongoing pre-divorce conflict between parents was found to be very common in this sample. Five out of seven participants who experienced parental conflict reported it as ongoing and experienced it as devastating. This finding is consistent with studies where it was found that ongoing conflict before and after divorce was emotionally devastating (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). It leads to stress (Clark, 2013; Lefson, 1997) and is commonly predictive of poor adjustment (Morris & West, 2000).

As a result of a conflicted home environment more children and adolescents enter the period of turmoil surrounding divorce with reduced capacity to cope with family stress, as their stress response system is already compromised (Berk, 2013).

6.2.5.2 Level and type of conflict

Four out of the seven participants who experienced parental conflict witnessed physical conflict between parents. Participants reported these experiences as highly stressful, in particular when it was ongoing. Physical conflict was not specifically reported in global literature, and thus it may be more common in a South African context. Nhlangulela (2011) and Lefson (1997) had similar findings, whereby adolescents in their studies experienced parental physical conflict as traumatic.

Global literature confirms that the level of parental conflict impacts a child's adjustment, whereby the child's stress response system is negatively impacted (Davidson et al., 2014).

6.2.5.3 Target of conflict

Physical and emotional abuse by the father was directed towards one of the participants together with her mother. She was glad that he was gone after the divorce. Maslow in his theory of human motivation explains that parental outbursts of rage directed at the child elicit panic and terror, which goes beyond mere physical pain alone, but represents a fear of loss of parental love (Maslow, 1943).

6.2.5.4 Father-child relationship

It was found that the strength of the father-child relationship can buffer the effect of inter-parental conflict. Sandler et al. (2008) also found that a warm relationship with the mother or father positively affects adjustment even when there is inter-parental conflict.

6.2.5.5 Reaction to divorce

For adolescents who experienced ongoing parental conflict the main reactions were a lack of surprise and relief. For adolescents who only experienced parental conflict close to the time of divorce, shock and sadness were common reactions, regardless of the type of conflict. These reactions had implications for adjustment.

a. Unsurprised and relieved

Participants who experienced ongoing parental conflict were commonly relieved or not surprised at the news of the divorce. Watson (2003) found that adolescents exposed to ongoing conflict are significantly more accepting of divorce. Amato and Keith (1991) found that children from divorced families experience a higher level of well-being than children

from conflicted intact families and Mcloughlin and Whitfield (1984) found that adolescents would prefer to live in a one-parent home than in a conflicted two-parent home.

Berk (2013) warned however that adolescents with these responses have compromised stress response systems and they have a reduced capacity to deal with further stressful situations, which are usually inevitable.

b. Shock and sadness

Participants who did not experience ongoing parental conflict were commonly shocked and saddened by the news of the divorce. Perhaps the inability to understand the marital breakup and grieve over the loss of a seemingly happy home life explains the adjustment problem of these children and adolescents (Berk, 2013).

If children or adolescents perceive little conflict this makes the divorce unexpected, and painful emotions such as sadness, confusion, fear of abandonment, anger, guilt, grief and loyalty conflicts are made worse after separation (Clark, 2013). Sadness can be compounded by bewilderment at an unexpected divorce (Mitchell, 1983).

Mundalamo (2016) and Lefson (1997) also found that adolescents who were not exposed to ongoing parental conflict had a negative emotional response to the news of their parents' divorce, and it was perceived as a crisis adding to any existing stress that is commonly found in this developmental period.

6.2.5.6 Defence mechanism to protect against parental conflict

There was some evidence that adolescents deployed defence mechanisms to assist with coping with inter-parental conflict.

Even though one participant was aware of ongoing inter-parental conflict, the news of the divorce was still shocking. Perhaps she suppressed her feelings to protect herself from parental conflict however she was now forced to deal with reality. Thus parental conflict may have been too difficult for her to process or deal with prior to the divorce.

6.2.5.7 Post-divorce conflict

Ongoing conflict between parents who remained in regular contact after the divorce was common. Adolescents experienced this conflict as frustrating and hurtful. Hughes (2005), found that conflict before and during divorce is a risk factor, but that post-divorce conflict

strongly influences adjustment. Post-divorce stability, including no parental conflict, was found to be protective, allowing for positive adjustment (Nortje, 2012).

Conflict during parental remarriage was also commonly reported, this was found to be frustrating and hurtful, adding stress and making adjustment more difficult. This finding is consistent with Isaacs (2002) who found that disruptive relationships in the new family process are a risk factor, whereas low conflict and authoritative parenting are protective. Two adolescent boys reported the need to protect their mother from step-father abuse. They felt frustrated at not being able help their mother and were also hurt by their mother choosing to remain in an abusive relationship, again adding significant stress.

6.2.6 Cooperation between parents

Over half of the participants reported that their parents were not in regular contact after the divorce, and those that were in regular contact were generally uncooperative. Uncooperative parenting was found as a risk factor, which had a profound impact on many of the adolescents' ability to adjust.

Parents in the current study who avoided contact commonly used their child as a go-between to relay messages and involved them in parental relationship issues and other adult matters. This added stress due to the extra emotional burden. The child or adolescent becomes a mediator, communicator and confidante to parents, including comforting and taking care of their emotional needs (Nortje, 2012). Botha (2014) agreed that children should not have to mediate, stating that parents should never involve their children in conflict. The result of parents using their child as a go-between is that stress is added to existing developmental stress, commonly causing adolescents to feel burdened and making it more difficult for them to adjust (Nortje, 2012).

In the current study uncooperative parenting resulted in irregular father-child contact. Peters and Ehrenberg (2008) found that regular inter-parental contact after the divorce was important for achieving regular father-child contact.

Literature shows that cooperative parents are a protective factor (Clark, 2013; Mundalamo, 2016). Adolescents have age-specific coping strengths or cognitive ability to help their adjustment, but parental cooperation is important as to whether they can utilise these coping strengths (Mcloughlin & Whitfield, 1984).

6.2.7 Parental transparency

6.2.7.1 Empowerment versus helplessness

In terms of parental transparency, adolescents appeared to talk about two areas that empowered or rendered them helpless during the divorce process. Firstly, they yearned for an understanding of events pertaining to the divorce process and secondly, they desired to have their voice heard by their parents.

Related to understanding, Hughes (2005) emphasised the importance of parental transparency, or openness about the divorce for child and adolescent adjustment, citing it as empowerment versus helplessness. The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood (Covert, 2012). In terms of attribution theory, a person's perceptions of the behaviour of another are determined largely by what he or she attributes the causes of that person's behaviour to. In other words the behaviour of others is evaluated on the basis of perceived motives and intentions. (Reber et al., 2009)

In this study, adolescents had a need to attribute the cause of their parents' divorce. The attribution is made either to internal personal causes or to the external action of the environment (Reber et al., 2009). Adolescents appeared to want a sense that they were not to blame for the divorce and that their parents valued and approved of them. If an understanding for the cause of the divorce was not obtained, then the adolescent is rendered helpless to attribute the cause, most likely defaulting to internal attribution. However, if their parents were transparent about the cause of the divorce, then they would likely have attributed the external environment (their parents) as the cause.

Secondly, adolescents desired to have their voice heard by their parents. The need to feel heard is one of our greatest needs. Being heard is so close to be loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable (Covert, 2012). Many individuals seek approval of those closest to them, often by ensuring that they are understood (Mazarin, 2011). It seems likely that the adolescents desired to express their opinions on the matter in order to feel valued, approved off and loved by their parents. With approval a person gains respect, esteem, power and consequent control. Without approval self-esteem deficiency and helplessness is likely. (Mazarin, 2011)

Adolescents need to be a part of their parents' divorce process as this empowers them and shows them respect as members of the family (Mundalamo, 2016). Their feeling of powerlessness and the inability to do anything about it appeared to be disturbing to

adolescents. Children need to feel valued, respected, loved and empowered (Covert, 2012). By parents allowing their child to express their concerns shows them that they matter.

Control is embedded in much of what we do and we have a need for a sense of control. Parents need to manage their children's sense of control by making things more certain and consistent, such as by allowing them to voice their opinion about the divorce. Those things that make them certain and able to understand and predict the things around them are important (Siegel, 2008).

6.2.7.2 Explanations not provided

A significant finding is that detailed reasons for the divorce were not given to any of the participants, which resulted in a lack of understanding about the causes of the divorce, and adolescents who were children at the time of divorce often felt to blame. Botha (2014) found that most of the adolescents indicated that at the time of divorce they blamed themselves for their parents' divorce and needed reassurance that they were not to blame. This stressful situation caused negative emotions and put the child at risk of maladjustment.

In addition, parents did not encourage questions or provide a safe environment to do so. Adolescents had a burning need to ask questions, which suggests that without an understanding of the reasons for the divorce, they felt helpless. Lefson (1997), also found that the majority of adolescents wanted to know more about the reasons.

An unexpected finding was that adolescents were commonly told about the divorce in a haphazard manner, in a sense as though they would not be affected by the divorce. This finding is supported by other authors (Dunn et al., 2001; Ernest, 2003; Lefson, 1997) who found that commonly parents are not open with their children about the divorce.

6.2.8 Parent-child relationships

Findings clearly show that the father-child and mother-child relationships significantly impacted adolescent adjustment to divorce.

Botha (2014) found that a good relationship with *both* parents was very important as the child or adolescent needs to feel cared for. Berk (2013) explained that warm parental relationships protect against the damaging effects of stressful life events and that sensitive adult care helps to normalise cortisol production in emotionally traumatised children.

Adolescents, in particular, need to be cared for by their parents, since they are at a sensitive period in their developmental process when they may already be erratic, emotional, unstable

and unpredictable. Added stress and confusion resulting from the divorce may exacerbate their existing negative emotion and put them at risk for such complications such as depression, substance abuse or other self-harming behaviour (Mundalamo, 2016).

In society in general, withheld love is the most common cause in cases of maladjustment. Hence, parental love is a basic human need. The role of parents and a normal family setup are indisputable in children's ability to satisfy their needs (Maslow, 1943).

Overall, parents are vitally important to the post-divorce adjustment of their children (Mundalamo, 2016).

6.2.8.1 Father-child relationship

a. Emotional disconnect

Fathers were commonly experienced as unsupportive, especially by adolescent girls who were hurt by their fathers' emotional disconnect. Storksen et al. (2005) found that girls depend on their fathers' emotional bond, and Nhlangulela (2011) found that adolescent girls felt emotionally disconnected from their fathers and yearned for their love.

Emotional availability and involvement of the father in a child's life are most important, not mere presence (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Losing contact with a parent can produce emotional insecurity (Papalia et al., 2009). Hence paternal absence, or non-residency, is a risk factor in adjustment to divorce for children and adolescents, particularly on development of negative emotions (Storksen et al., 2005).

Low paternal contact following divorce was common in this study, which was found to be very difficult for some participants to cope with. Thomas and Woodside (2011) found that low father-child contact, especially immediately following divorce, negatively affects this relationship. As a result children tend to have distant and obligatory relationships with their fathers.

An interesting finding was the prevalence of long distance relationships with fathers. This may be partly attributable to the legacy of the migrant labour system, where fathers work and live away from home.

The issue of ancestral lineage also played a role. It is here that emotional disconnect by fathers was experienced as most hurtful by some adolescent girls with isiZulu fathers, for whom these beliefs are important. These fathers appeared to be more focused on lineage than

their daughter's emotional well-being. Nel (2007) and Hosegood et al. (2009) argued that the value placed on childbearing, has precedence over Zulu marriage and family life.

b. Trust issues

It was also commonly found that fathers broke adolescent trust. Two of the isiZulu fathers in this study had their adolescent daughters paternity tested. The adolescent girls felt rejected and betrayed, questioning how their fathers could doubt their paternity.

Broken trust has a systemic affect whereby social relationships in general and even relationships with psychologists resulted in a reduced access to support and increased stress, putting the adolescent at risk of negative adjustment.

c. Step-father

Adolescent girls showed an ambivalent reaction to their mother's remarriage. Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) also found that girls were ambivalent about the remarriage of their mother. However, Isaacs (2002) found that early adolescent girls show more negative reaction to their custodial mother's remarriage, as they have reduced quality interaction with their mother.

Adolescent boys reported that they were looking forward to having a male role model in their lives again, but were disappointed when he became abusive, adding to stress and placing them at risk of negative adjustment. Hence, commonly in this study stepfathers were not role models and adolescent boys reported feeling disappointed. Thus, this study shows that a difficult relationship with a stepfather is a risk factor. Conversely literature suggests that a close relationship with stepfathers is protective (Amato & Keith, 1991; Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Isaacs, 2002).

6.2.8.2 Mother-child relationship

a. Close relationship with mother

A close relationship with mothers was commonly found, which was experienced as protective. Velez et al. (2011) found that a high quality mother-child relationship is beneficial to a child's adjustment to divorce, through building their sense of efficacy in their ability to do something in response to stressful events. In other words a positive mother-child relationship assists with active coping ability.

b. Unsupportive at time of divorce

An unexpected and highly significant finding is that mothers were commonly found as unsupportive immediately after divorce. This is a time when adolescents are most at risk due to a culmination of stressful events and are in need of coping assistance. Thus due to emotional needs not being taken care of, stress is added.

This finding is however well supported by literature and is well summed up by Becvar and Becvar (2009) whereby children and adolescents are better able to accept the stress and adapt to the changes associated with divorce, when the resident parent (usually the mother) handles these stresses and changes in a responsible manner. Thus how well the mother handles stress and shields the child from family disruption is key (Berk, 2013).

Interestingly, in a study by Berk (2013) parent training and support reduced newly divorced mothers' punitive discipline directed at their children. In the year following the divorce these children showed fewer behaviour problems and deviant peer associations when compared to children of candidates who were not chosen for the study. In a nine year follow-up these changes translated into a reduction in adolescent delinquency.

c. Unsupportive at time of remarriage

One adolescent boy reported that he was not emotionally ready for his mother's remarriage, and that she had moved on from the divorce quicker than he had. This added to his existing emotional insecurity surrounding the divorce and resulted in added stress. Another two adolescent boys were exposed to abusive stepfathers and felt dismayed at their mothers' decisions to remain in these relationships. There was some evidence that maternal psychological well-being affected this decision, including self-esteem and instability issues.

In terms of individual risk and vulnerability, adolescents may have particular difficulty adjusting to a new family, with early adolescence being the most difficult time. The added stress exacerbates their normal developmental issues such as establishing autonomy and sexuality that must also be dealt with. (Isaacs, 2002). This again shows that stress levels are vital to understanding adjustment and the related risk and protective factors.

6.2.9 Parenting quality

The current study found that effective parenting is an important factor in positive adjustment following divorce. Good parenting seems to protect the young brain from the potentially damaging effects of excessive stress-hormone exposure (Berk, 2013).

6.2.9.1 Compromised parenting immediately after divorce

Findings showed that parenting quality was diminished immediately following divorce. Parents appeared to be distracted due to dealing with their own negative emotions. In support Hughes (2005) found that diminished practices are commonly experienced immediately following divorce. Parenting immediately after divorce is a key time (Berk, 2013).

Unfortunately it commonly occurs immediately after divorce that the custodial parent, usually the mother, is dealing with her own adjustment and neglects to monitor her child's activities and also becomes more punitive. This places the child or adolescent at risk for poor adjustment (Clark, 2013; Hetherington et al., 1989). In addition, absent or uninvolved fathers lower a child's well-being (Amato & Keith, 1991).

6.2.9.2 Disparity in parenting styles

Differences in parenting styles were commonly found as frustrating and confusing for participants. Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) confirmed that in divorced families a disparity in parenting practices causes confusion due to the different methods of upbringing and discipline.

6.2.9.3 Child-rearing styles

Some parents in the current study were experienced as involved. This included maintaining discipline which provided adolescents with a sense of security in knowing what was expected of them. A close relationship to an authoritative parent is protective over positive adjustment to divorce (Clark, 2013; Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Authoritative parenting involves high acceptance and involvement, adaptive control techniques, and appropriate autonomy granting. This is the most successful child-rearing approach and is linked to many aspects of competence in childhood and adolescence (Berk, 2013).

Some parents were experienced as controlling, unapproachable and unsupportive often leading participants to withdraw and cope on their own. Hence these parents had a negative systemic effect on adolescent autonomy and social relationships. Authoritarian parenting is low in acceptance and involvement, high in coercive behavioural control, and low in autonomy granting. Children and adolescents exposed to authoritarian parenting tend to have adjustment problems, involving anxious, withdrawn and defiant, aggressive behaviours. (Berk, 2013)

Some participants had to take the responsibility of parenting themselves, but would have preferred growing up under a more disciplined, responsive parent. These experiences caused them to grow up quickly. Permissive parenting involves warmth and acceptance, but is uninvolved. Those exposed to permissive parents tend to be impulsive, disobedient and rebellious (Berk, 2013).

Some parents were experienced as uninvolved and uncaring. Uninvolved parenting involves low acceptance and involvement with little behavioural control and general indifference to issues of autonomy. Those exposed to uninvolved parenting tend to display many problems, including school achievement difficulties, depression, anger and antisocial behaviour. (Berk, 2013)

Parents who were perceived as controlling, permissive or uninvolved made it difficult for the participants to deal with negative emotions arising from the divorce, even adding to their existing stress.

6.2.10 Home environment

As expected most participants missed their father and felt sad when he left the home. Commonly a negative home environment was experienced immediately after divorce when the custodial parent was struggling to adjust, making this a time of risk for adolescents. Hence this dramatic change placed the adolescent at risk of negative emotions and added stress. Lefson (1997) found that the non-custodial parent leaving the home often disrupts family functioning and stability and that adolescents experienced a sense of loss of the presence of one parent, with most finding the initial period after divorce very difficult.

Some of the fathers of the participants in this study worked and lived away from home. This fact softened the blow of the divorce as the adolescent was used to their father not being in the home.

6.2.11 Routines

As expected, stable routines were found to be protective of positive adjustment. Stable family functioning and routine is protective (Clark, 2013; Cohen, 2002; Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Whereas chaotic, unstable family functioning has been found to be a risk factor, including a lack of routine and multiple family transitions such as moving house and remarriage (Clark, 2013).

In his theory of human motivation Maslow explains that a child's preference for some kind of undisrupted routine or rhythm is related to his need for safety. Inconsistency in the parents seems to make a child feel anxious and unsafe, mostly as this treatment makes the world seem unreliable, unsafe or unpredictable. Children prefer some sort of routine, something that can be counted on, not only for the present but also for the future. (Maslow, 1943)

6.2.12 Lifestyle

As expected, most participants experienced lifestyle changes due to custodial parent financial difficulties. Many moved house, changed school and lost friends. This was experienced as unsettling and negatively affected adjustment. These multiple unsettling transitions and losses on top of divorce, cause additional stress and place the child at risk of adjustment problems, adding to their vulnerability and sense of insecurity. This again indicates the systemic impact of divorce.

This finding is consistent with literature which reported that divorce may cause poverty (Cohen, 2002) or a decline in household income, which may result in multiple changes involving home, school and friends (Clark, 2013). Having to move house, change school and lose friends causes instability and disruption placing the child at risk of adjustment problems (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Hughes, 2005).

It seems that limiting lifestyle changes is protective of positive adjustment. Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) found that adequate parental provision limits lifestyle change and is protective. Adolescents in this study needed reassurance that the resident parent was financially secure in terms of the basic physical needs of food, clothing and shelter. Botha (2014) found that although adolescents had to make some lifestyle changes, the basics were most important.

The literature reviewed indicated that children of single parents did better in countries with supportive family policies such as child and family allowances, tax benefits to single parents, maternity leave, and released time from work (Papalia et al., 2009). It is thus suggested that significant difficulty in this regard is found in South Africa due to very limited supportive family policies.

Amato and Keith (1991) found that financial difficulties were a minor cause of adjustment problems. The findings in the current study contradict this, whereby financial difficulties caused significant adjustment problems in a South African context.

6.2.13 Sibling support

The findings showed that siblings were commonly experienced as supportive and thus a protective factor. Literature supports this finding whereby supportive siblings and increased closeness to siblings were reported as protective for positive adjustment (Clark, 2013; Nortje, 2012; Thomas & Woodside, 2011).

However, findings also showed that adolescents who were only children experienced some difficulties due to limited support in the home environment. Thus being an only child is a risk factor.

6.2.14 Extended family support

The findings also showed that extended family were very supportive, particularly grandparents. This is in line with literature where emotional and physical support from grandparents in particular was found (Botha, 2014; Lefson, 1997; Thomas & Woodside, 2011). One participant however stated that he could not trust his grandparents as he felt that they would tell his parents whatever he said.

The findings in the current study indicate that some cultures in South Africa may be more accommodating of divorce than others. One isiZulu adolescent girl was denied access to her maternal family by her paternal family due to her mother having an affair, and another adolescent girl received no support, being outcast from her extended Indian family due to her mother being from the mixed race population group. Thus racial and cultural dynamics appear to have a negative effect on adolescent adjustment to divorce within a South African context.

6.2.15 External social support

External social support in the current study was found as protective. Support was mainly provided by psychologists, teachers and friends. This again adds weight to the view that divorce should be considered from a systemic perspective. External social support is a protective factor against the damaging effects of stressful life events (Berk, 2013). Adolescents are in need of multi-level support from different systems, such as teachers and friends (Botha, 2014). In terms of ecological variables in the larger social environment, peers and school play an important part in adjustment (Isaacs, 2002). External social support is viewed as a protective factor for adolescent adjustment to divorce (Leon, 2003; Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

6.2.15.1 Therapy

In the current study many adolescents, and interestingly all the isiZulu participants, did not access therapeutic support. Lefson (1997) also found that the majority of adolescents were not able to access therapy even though they would have liked therapeutic support. This suggests that access to cost effective therapy in South Africa may be limited, it may also suggest that parents are not aware of their children's needs and the benefits of therapy. A possible significant finding was highlighted by a participant who desperately needed support from a primary school counsellor, but the school could not provide the service.

6.2.15.2 Teachers

Findings in the current study show that teachers were a valuable source of support, which is consistent with Hetherington and Elmore (2003)'s findings that good relationships with teachers are an important source of support. This finding contradicts Lefson (1997) who found that few adolescents felt that their teachers were supportive.

6.2.15.3 Friends

Friends were the most important source of external social support for adolescents in the current study. In particular close friends who had also experienced divorce. This is confirmed by literature whereby good relationships with friends are an important source of support (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Thomas & Woodside, 2011). Adolescents were commonly able to share their feelings with supportive friends who were understanding and trustworthy (Botha, 2014).

What was somewhat unexpected in the current study though was the extent of the negative influence by peers on participants who were feeling vulnerable due to existing negative emotions.

6.2.15.4 No external social support

Another unexpected finding was the extent of participants who reported no external social support, in particular isiZulu adolescent girls. This can be linked to authoritarian parenting and limited autonomy, whereby their unsupportive and unapproachable parents, in particular the father, tended not to involve themselves in their child's emotional concerns and impeded autonomy through coercive control, which impacted on social interaction.

6.2.16 Individual characteristics

Personal characteristics can either protect against the damaging effects of stressful life events or place the individual at risk (Berk, 2013).

Varied responses to divorce are partially due to perception. An event, such as parental divorce, gains its meaning when it is perceived by an individual. One person may perceive an event as a stressor, while the same event may not be experienced as stressful by another person. (Grieve, Van Deventer, & Mojapelo-Batka, 2006). Thus individual characteristics are important to understanding adjustment to divorce.

Individual characteristics are discussed in terms of developmental level, resilience, attitude, introversion-extroversion, emotionality (temperament), locus of control and religion.

6.2.16.1 Developmental level

Developmental level had a significant impact on adjustment to divorce in the current study. This is consistent with other authors who found that adjustment to divorce varies with developmental level (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009; Hetherington et al., 1989). Developmental level influences perceptions of, and responses to experiences (Leon, 2003).

a. Younger developmental level

Six adolescents in the current study were eight years old or younger at the time of divorce. As younger children they were protected by not being able to fully comprehend the seriousness of the situation. Nortje (2012) also found that children at a younger age are typically cognitively immature and protected by not being able to make sense of, or remember the time of divorce.

However the current study also showed that younger children are at risk due to feeling to blame for the divorce as a result of limited understanding. Dreman (2000) found that children's limited-cognitive ability (at a more concrete level) may also result in severe short-term reactions due to their limited ability to understand.

One adolescent girl in the current study, who was too young to remember her father, still regretted growing up without him, which affected her whole life. Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) found that children at a younger age still face long-term vulnerability as feelings about the divorce or lack of a parent may surface at a later point in life. Feelings around the divorce may also be repressed at a young age remaining in unconscious minds (Nortje, 2012).

b. Older developmental level

The findings in the current study showed that adolescents were better able to make sense of the divorce. Hetherington et al. (1989) found that adolescents experience considerable initial emotional pain, but are better able to assign responsibility for the divorce, to resolve loyalty conflicts and assess and cope with additional stresses like financial difficulties. Adolescents have an increased ability to engage in complex processes involved in the meaning-making of past events.

This suggests that abstract reasoning ability enabled the ability to anticipate a divorce related event, which caused anxiety and sadness. Abstract reasoning ability also allowed for a better understanding of the sensitivities surrounding the divorce and the need to offer support.

The characteristics of resilience, attitude, introversion-extroversion, emotionality and locus of control are now discussed. A summary is presented below in Table 5.

Table 5: Individual characteristics

	Findings	
Characteristic	Risk factors	Protective factors
Resilience	n/a	Resilient participants got over the divorce quickly.
Attitude	Participants with a negative outlook adjusted worse.	Participants with a positive outlook and a realistic, level headed outlook coped better with the divorce.
Introversion-extroversion	Extroverted participants did not deal deeply or thoroughly with their emotions. Introverted participants did not express how they were feeling.	Extroverted participants tended to express how they felt in the moment and got on with life.
Emotionality	Participants with high emotionality were easily hurt.	Participants with low emotionality were not easily upset.
Locus of control	Participants with an external locus of control lost motivation easily without support from their parents.	Participants with an internal locus of control were not easily affected by what people said or did.

6.2.16.2 Resilience

Findings in the current study suggest that resilient adolescents coped better with the divorce. It seems that resilience can be built. The intrapersonal resources of a positive attitude and the ability to express issues and the interpersonal resources of supportive extended family and external social support helps to build resilience (Theron & Dunn, 2010).

For some of the adolescents in the current study, who face severe adversity due to divorce, resilience may be one of their only protective factors.

6.2.16.3 Attitude

A positive outlook was commonly found in the current study, which helped adolescents to weather stressful divorce situations. Nhlangulela (2011) also found that an optimistic view enabled children and adolescents to remain level headed and realistic. In terms of attitude, an optimistic or hopeful view of the post-divorce future is protective and related to positive child and adolescent adjustment (Cohen, 2002; Nhlangulela, 2011; Nortje, 2012; Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

However adolescents in the current study with a negative attitude were placed at risk of negative adjustment. A negative attitude towards divorce resulted in despair or hopelessness (Nhlangulela, 2011).

6.2.16.4 Extroversion and introversion

a. Extroversion

Extroversion was found in the current study to be a protective as well as a risk factor for adjustment to divorce. Adolescents who stated that they were extroverted reported that they tended to express how they felt in the moment and moved on with life, however they ran the risk of not processing their emotions deeply, preferring to process information using their senses (Granneman, 2016).

b. Introversion

Adolescents who stated that they were introverted reported that they tended to process information on a deeper level, but internalised the initial negative emotion (Granneman, 2016).

6.2.16.5 Emotionality

Emotionality refers to the degree to which an individual reacts to emotive situations (Reber et al., 2009). Some participants in the current study reported low emotionality, which could be explained by them learning to cut off their emotions due to traumatic divorce situations or a blunted stress response system, which means that positive emotion is not experienced either.

Temperamentally difficult children are less adaptable to change and are vulnerable to adversity (Hetherington et al., 1989). Leon (2003) found that for temperamentally difficult children increased stress resulted in less adaptability, even when high levels of support were

available. Exposure to stressful life events magnified problems of temperamentally difficult children (Berk, 2013).

However an easy temperament is protective, relating to positive adjustment (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). These children are predictable, calm and approach most new experiences in a positive way (Cohen, 2002).

6.2.16.6 Locus of control

Participants who expressed that they were not affected by what their parents said or did appeared to adjust easier than those who lost motivation without support from their parents. This finding agrees with previous studies that an internal locus of control is protective and relates to positive adjustment (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Hetherington et al., 1989). Loss of motivation due to a lack of parental support appears to conform to an external locus of control relating to seeing control as residing external to oneself and attributing success or failure to outside forces (Reber et al., 2009).

6.2.16.7 Religion

The current findings showed that trust in religion was stunted by divorce. Meltzer (2011) also found that children of divorce struggle to experience spirituality and exercise their faith due to trust issues. As a result, children of divorce often feel less religious and participate less in religious communities. Botha (2014) however found that spiritual support was very important to adolescent adjustment.

6.2.17 Current adjustment

Overall the majority of adolescents had accepted the divorce and moved on. This is possibly due to the long period of time since the divorce, on average nine years. Some however were still struggling with their circumstances, but had no choice but to accept them and remain positive, and build resilience. Nortje (2012) found that even though adolescents experienced problems and pains, resilience was the clear outcome.

Divorce had left its mark on all participants in one way or another. Most reported to have matured quickly. Through divorce experiences adolescents learnt to be responsible, mature and independent as well as understanding themselves and the realities of life better (Nhlangulela, 2011). Most reported that due to their divorce experiences, they would never subject their children to the same.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings of the study. The most salient findings are as follows: some adolescents coped with their negative emotions in a healthy way by verbal expression. Others coped in unhealthy ways by internalising, withdrawing, self-mutilation and substance abuse. Adolescents' commonly received little assistance with coping skills and were often overwhelmed by their negative emotions which resulted in additional stress.

Ongoing parental conflict undermined adolescents' emotional security and uncooperative parenting frustrated adolescents as they were often involved in adult matters as mediators and go-betweens. The frequent lack of parental divorce transparency left adolescents feeling helpless and yearning for more information and a better understanding.

The post-divorce father-child relationship was commonly a risk factor for adolescent girls due to paternal emotional disconnect and broken trust. Adolescent boys had more difficulties with abusive stepfathers and felt emotionally burdened to assist their mothers. Close mother-child relationships were protective, assisting with adolescent coping ability. However immediately after divorce, when adolescents were most at risk, they were often unsupportive and self-absorbed.

Parenting quality also had a significant impact on adolescent adjustment, whereby involved parents provided a sense of security, controlling parents caused adolescents to withdraw and cope on their own, permissive parents were unresponsive and uninvolved parents were considered uncaring.

Lifestyle changes due to financial difficulties were common, which added to adolescents' sense of insecurity. Grandparents were particularly supportive both emotionally and practically, and in terms of external social support close friends who had also experienced parental divorce were the most supportive. A few isiZulu adolescent girls however reported that they received no external emotional support, which placed them at risk of negative adjustment due to having to cope without this support. Finally, risk and protective factors were found for participants with younger and older developmental levels at the time of divorce, overall though older participants seemed to cope best. The next chapter draws conclusions and discusses implications for practice.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the main findings are summarised, study limitations are reflected upon, contributions of the findings are discussed, suggestions for future research are made and finally recommendations based on the current findings are made.

7.2 Main findings

The main divorce adjustment factors experienced by adolescents relate to negative emotions, coping and stress, parental conflict, parental transparency, father-child relationships, mother-child relationships, lifestyle changes, external social support and culture.

7.2.1 Negative emotions, coping and stress

Consistent with other studies in the field, the current study found that it is vital to assist adolescents cope with their negative emotions in an attempt to reduce the crippling effects of chronic stress related to divorce. Unprocessed negative emotions fester and are linked to negative outcomes. Verbal expression was found as a healthy means of dealing with negative emotion. Internalising, withdrawing and self-mutilation were found to be unhealthy means of dealing with divorce as the emotion remains unprocessed. As with other studies, depression was a common finding in this study, generally as a result of the inability to process negative emotions. Many of the participants in this study received little or no assistance with coping skills and had difficulty dealing with their negative emotions. This highlights the importance of promoting and supporting coping skills to assist adolescents process their negative emotions, especially early on in the divorce process.

7.2.2 Parental conflict

Consistent with other studies in the field, the current study found that parental conflict was a major stressor for adolescents and negatively affected their adjustment. For some of the adolescents parental conflict continued even after the divorce and in some cases they had to mediate this conflict. Conflict therefore remained an issue that they had to manage. Consistent with South African studies regarding parental conflict, the participants in this sample reported more instances of physical and domestic violence than was reported in global research. Finally, conflict during parental remarriage was also commonly reported in the current study, which also negatively affected adjustment.

7.2.3 Parental transparency

Consistent with other studies in the field, the current study found that the lack of parental transparency surrounding the divorce negatively affected their adjustment. As per one other South African study regarding parental transparency, the participants in this sample reported that black African cultural norms limiting children's involvement in adult matters negatively affected adjustment. Overall participants felt helpless due to the lack of transparency. Those participants that were included in the divorce process felt empowered.

7.2.4 Father-child relationships

The current study found that fathers were commonly experienced as emotionally disconnected by adolescent girls following divorce, which negatively affected their ability to adjust; this was similar to other studies. A finding which was also mentioned in other South African studies on race relations and ancestral theology, was that participants who were isiZulu adolescent girls experienced heightened emotional disconnect from their fathers due to them placing ancestral lineage continuity before their child's emotional well-being.

7.2.5 Mother-child relationships

As per other studies in the field, the current study found that close relationships with mothers were protective and assisted with adjustment, but that mothers were commonly found as unsupportive immediately after divorce and again at the time of remarriage. These are times when adolescents are most in need of coping assistance but their mothers were emotionally unavailable to assist, leading to a risk of negative adjustment.

7.2.6 Lifestyle

Similar to other South African studies in the field, the current study found that custodial parent financial difficulties negatively affected adolescent adjustment due to a change in lifestyle. Multiple unsettling transitions and losses on top of divorce caused additional stress. In contradiction to global studies which found that financial difficulties were not a significant cause of adjustment problems for adolescents, the current study found that financial difficulty is a significant concern in a South African context.

7.2.7 External social support

The current study found that friends were the most important source of external support for adolescents. This was also reported by other researchers. The participants found support in

particular from close friends who had also experienced divorce. An unexpected finding, however, was the extent of participants who reported no external social support, in particular isiZulu adolescent girls.

7.2.8 Cultural complexities

The study revealed that some cultures in South Africa may be more accommodating of divorce than others. Thus racial and cultural dynamics appear to have a negative effect on adolescent adjustment to divorce within a South African context. This requires further research and exploration.

7.3 Study limitations

Due to the small sample size consisting of only eleven adolescents from one high school in Pietermaritzburg, the results of this study cannot be generalised. The study is however transferable due to a thick description of the methodology, which should allow researchers to compare or replicate the study. In addition findings may inform interventions and prove useful for professional helpers working with children.

A limitation of using only one method of data collection, interviews, is that the trustworthiness of the data cannot be completely established. In addition there is always the possibility of misinterpretation of meanings from the text (Ödman, 2007). Triangulation with other sources of information such as drawings and focus groups may have assisted in this regard. These were not done due to time constraints.

The demographics of the researcher (white male) may also have affected the kind of information the participants were willing to disclose. Although the participants appeared to be comfortable talking to the researcher, it is possible that a researcher with a different demographic profile may have elicited different kinds of information.

Only one coder was used for the thematic analysis process. Therefore only one perspective was utilised during the coding section of the data analysis process, limiting multiple perspectives and potentially omitting or incorrectly coding valuable insights.

7.4 Study contributions

7.4.1 To knowledge and understanding

- Emotional disconnect was experienced in particular by some adolescent girls with isiZulu fathers for whom ancestral beliefs are important. These fathers appeared to be more focused on ancestral lineage continuity than their daughter's emotional well-being.
- Many adolescents experienced ongoing inter-parental physical conflict, in particular adolescents with isiZulu fathers. This was expressed as highly stressful. Physical conflict was seldom mentioned in global literature suggesting that it may be more common within the South African context.
- It is vitally important that parents empower their children throughout the divorce process otherwise they may feel helpless and inadequate. The Zulu cultural practice that children are not included in adult matters appears to amplify this sense of helplessness.
- Some cultures appear to me more accommodating of divorce than others. In addition cultural complexities surrounding divorce of parents from different populations groups, appears to be significant.

7.5 Suggestions for future research

- Physical conflict between parents was commonly found in South African research, which suggests a need for further research on adolescents exposed to this type of environment. Research should focus on the isiZulu culture, wherein the majority of inter-parental physical conflict was reported by this sample.
- Cultural practices, that do not allow children to be involved in adult matters, such as divorce, are an area for further research in a South African context. The study should focus on understanding the empowerment versus helplessness dynamic in this context.
- More research on adolescent adjustment is suggested, in connection with racial and cultural dynamics within a South African context. Research should focus on multi-racial divorces, where culture, race and religion intersect.

7.6 Implications for practice

7.6.1 Parent training and support

Accessible and cost efficient parent training and support, especially immediately after divorce is paramount in order to assist parents and adolescents cope. Psycho-education about the risk

of parents neglecting to cater for their child's emotional needs at this time is suggested. Parents need to be made aware that they may not be accessible for the children when they need them the most due to the fact that they are dealing with their own responses to the divorce. Parents should be trained to inform their children appropriately about the divorce, including explaining the reasons for the divorce and giving them an opportunity to ask questions. Support for parents' emotional difficulties is important to enhance their capacity to help their children. Finally parents should be trained to observe their children closely during developmental transitions to ensure that negative coping mechanisms do not emerge.

7.6.2 Access to therapy

Many adolescents were not able to access therapy even though they would have liked therapeutic support. Therapy may assist adolescents to cope with and process their negative emotions and reduce the crippling effects of chronic stress. Access to cost effective therapy in South Africa appears to be limited. Perhaps institutions such as schools and local libraries could provide information about any available counselling and resource centres to increase parent and adolescent awareness. Parents should ensure that support is available in the form therapy or extended family to ensure that their children have the opportunity to express themselves.

7.6.3 Free and accessible information

A crucial aspect is to increase public awareness of factors affecting adolescent adjustment to divorce. Public institutions such as libraries, schools and broadcasting companies could provide information in this regard. This includes items such as simple and easy to read leaflets containing information about the main adjustment factors and books for children or adolescents that help them to understand the divorce situation better.

7.6.4 School intervention

Family disruptions are a common source of emotional turmoil for learners. These learners struggling to cope with their negative emotions tend to withdraw and may be bullied. In addition school work may deteriorate due to concentration difficulties. It is thus important to inform schools and involve teachers in order that they may act as an extra support. In addition, it is important for schools to offer a therapeutic service. For example schools could offer individual counselling and support groups for adolescents dealing with divorce. The

group may be facilitated by the school psychologist or counsellor. These services would encourage learner expression of negative emotion.

7.7 Conclusion

The most salient adolescent adjustment factors were found to be negative emotions, coping and stress, parental conflict, parental transparency, father-child relationships, mother-child relationships, lifestyle changes and external social support.

The adjustment factors found in the current study demonstrate the systemic effect of divorce, where it is clear that systems outside of the family interact with the family system to influence adolescent adjustment. It is hoped that the implications of these findings for planning interventions and support for children and adolescents will be used by practitioners in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A: DoE permission

education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Nomangisi Ngubane Tel: 033 392 1004 Ref.:2/4/8/377

Mr S Penney
103 St Patricks Road
Scottsville
PIETERMARITZBURG
3201

Dear Mr Penney

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF ADJUSTMENT TO DIVORCE: RISK AND PROTECTIVE IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 15 March 2015 to 15 March 2016.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UMgungundlovu District

Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD
Head of Department: Education
Date: 21 April 2015

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa ...dedicated to service and performance
PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel. 033 392 1004beyond the call of duty
EMAIL ADDRESS: kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za / Nomangisi.Ngubane@kzndoe.gov.za
CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363; Fax: 033 392 1203 WEBSITE: WWW.kzneducation.gov.za

Appendix B: UKZN HSRC ethical clearance

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

29 June 2015

Mr Stephen Penney 215080179
School of Applied Human Sciences
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mr Penney

Protocol reference number: HSS/0802/015M
Project title: Children's experience of adjustment to divorce: risk and protective factors in a South African context.

Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 15 June 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **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, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

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

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Ms Carol Mitchell
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor D McCracken
cc School Administrator: Ms N Ndlovu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/8567 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: [illegible]
Website: [illegible]

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Howard College | Medical School | Pietermaritzburg | Westville

Appendix C: High School principal permission

8th August 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: RESEARCH TO BE CONDUCTED AT [redacted]

I am granting permission for Mr Stephen Penney, a counselling psychology master's student at the University of KwaZulu Natal, to conduct his research titled "Children's Experience of Adjustment to Divorce: Risk and Protective Factors in a South African Context"

I understand that Mr Penney will interview ten of our learners, at the school, over the next few weeks. Mrs [redacted] our school counsellor, will assist in identifying suitable candidates for the research.

The study has been approved by the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education and the Research and Ethics Committee at the University

We are happy to participate in this study and contribute to this important area of research.

Sincerely

[redacted]
(School principal)

Appendix D: Parent consent form

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Dear Sir/Madam,

Purpose and Background

Good day, my name is Stephen Penney. I am a counselling psychology master's student at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg. I am conducting research on how children experience adjustment to divorce and what the related supportive and risk factors involved are. My study is entitled: Adolescent's experience of adjustment to divorce: Risk and protective factors in a South African context.

I am under the supervision of Carol Mitchell, a Counselling Psychologist and lecturer at the University. The study has been approved by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, the Research and Ethics Committee at the University, as well as the headmaster at your child's school.

This project aims to find out more about divorce from the child's perspective. Findings will hopefully contribute towards existing knowledge on the topic, which may be used to inform parents and assist with the selection and development of intervention programs to help children adjust optimally to divorce. We would like to request for your child to participate in this study.

Procedure:

Your child will be asked to fill in an assent form asking for their permission to participate in the study, in addition to your consent. Out of respect for children as developing persons, your child is asked whether or not they wish to partake in the study in the form of assent. You as the legal guardian are still in control and the interview cannot be conducted without your consent. In addition, upon your consent, I am more than willing to thoroughly explain the nature of the study with you and answer any questions that you may have. I will, via the school counsellor, coordinate a convenient venue, date and time with you to conduct a one-on-one interview with your child. The interview will take no longer than one hour. The interview venue will need to be quiet and private, due to the sensitive and confidential nature of the disclosed information. Your child will be asked questions on how they experienced their parents' divorce. If consent is granted, the interview will be recorded so that I can transcribe the interview.

Privacy / confidentiality:

Confidentiality will be maintained by ensuring that signed consent forms are stored by ourselves and are not accessible to anyone else. These consent forms will be kept for a period of five years in a locked drawer and will then be destroyed via shredder. If you agree for your child to participate in the study, the recorded interview will be transcribed, but none of your child's or your identifying information will appear on the transcript. The interview transcripts will also be kept in a secure location and destroyed after the mandatory five year period. The digital recorded information will be deleted as soon as the interview has been transcribed. When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your or your child's identity. Information from this study could be used for further research or published in journal articles in the future.

Benefits and risks:

If you choose to consent to your child participating in the study we cannot unfortunately offer you or your child any direct benefits. An indirect benefit to your child might be spending time with me, as a student counselling psychologist, which may help them to deal with any thoughts or feelings about the divorce that may not have been expressed or dealt with.

Due to the sensitive nature of this study a risk is that your child becomes distressed when talking about their feelings and experiences of divorce. In anticipation of this, the school counsellor has agreed to be the primary referral point should your child need counselling. The Child and Family Centre (CFC) at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg has agreed to be the secondary referral point should your child need counselling. The CFC can be contacted at (033) 260 5166. Child line is a third referral point. Child line can be contacted at (033) 394 5177.

Thank you for considering this request. If you have any questions about this study or if you would like to be made aware of the findings of this study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor at any stage:

Researcher: Stephen Penney, [redacted].

Supervisor: Carol Mitchell, [redacted].

If you have any concerns about the nature of the study at any point, you may also contact UKZN's Human Social Sciences Ethics Committee (Tel: 031 260 3587)

Please sign and return the following (by giving it to the school counsellor) if you agree that your child can take part in this study:

CONSENT:

I……. (full names of custodial parent / guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I understand that my child is not forced to participate in this study and that he/she can withdraw at any point should he/she no longer wish to take part.

My child …… (full names of child) has my consent to participate in the research study

ADDITIONAL CONSENT TO AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING:

In addition to the above, I hereby agree to the audio recording of the interview in which my child participates for the purposes of data capture. I understand that no personally identifiable information or recording of my child will be released in any form, and that the identity of my child will be kept confidential in transcripts, reports and future publications and will not be traced back to me or my child.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Please note that only a PARENT or LEGAL GUARDIAN may consent to allow their child to participate in this study

Appendix E: Participant assent form

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Request for your participation in a study:

Adolescent's experience of adjustment to divorce: Risk and protective factors in a South African context

My name is Stephen Penney. I am a student at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg. I am trying to learn about how teenagers experience their parents' divorce and how they coped with the situation. Divorce is a big issue in society and my project is to find out more about divorce from the child's perspective. Hopefully findings of this study will contribute towards knowledge on the topic, which may be useful to inform parents and assist with the development of programs to help children adjust to divorce. If you would like to, you can be in my study/project.

Project Tasks: If you decide you want to be in my project, I will co-ordinate a convenient time with you via your school counsellor to do an individual interview. It will not be longer than one hour. I will ask you questions such how you experienced divorce in your family, how it affected you, how you coped and what support was offered to you. If you say it is okay, I will record the interviews so that I can write down what we talked about.

Benefits and Risks: If you choose to be in my project I will be very thankful, but sadly I can't offer you any benefits. But you might find the interview helps you to deal with your thoughts or feelings about divorce that you may never have expressed. I am a trained counsellor and will assist you in this regard. You will be safe and I will be honest with you at all times in this project. Your school counsellor is available should you find the questions distressing. There are also trained people at the Child and Family Centre at the university who are available for you to see.

Privacy: The study is strictly confidential. Your name will not be used when the project is discussed or reported on. Other people will not know if you are in my study. I will combine information I learn from you together with information from other children, so no one can tell what information came from you. From the combined information I will look for common themes to help make sense of children's experiences. When I tell other people about my research, I will not use your name, so no one can tell who I am talking about.

Your parents or guardian have to say it is okay for you to be in the study. After they decide, you get to choose if you want to do it or not. If you don't want to be in the study, no one will be upset or angry with you. If you want to be in the study now and change your mind later, that is okay to. You can stop

at any time. Your school counsellor is available should you have any questions. She also has my contact details and you are welcome to contact me either through phone or email. I will give you a copy of this form in case you want to ask questions later.

Agreement: I have decided to be in the study even though I know that I don't have to do it. Stephen Penney has answered all my questions.

_____	_____
Signature of Study Participant	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Researcher	Date

Appendix F: Interview schedule

Interview schedule

Study: Adolescent's experience of adjustment to divorce: Risk and protective factors in a South African context

Interview date:

Section 1: Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

Verbal assent:

- Introduction and purpose of the study (the purpose is to research adolescents experience of their parent's divorce. Aim is to understand experiences better, so that can help others)
- Voluntariness / withdrawal
- Confidentiality
- Request to record the interview
- Counselling support (School Counsellor, CFC, Childline)

Section 2: Interviewee Biographical Information

Name:	Gender:	
Age:	Age when parents divorced:	Grade:
Siblings:	Race:	
Cultural background:	Legal guardian:	

Section 3: Interviewee Divorce Experience

Before the divorce

- What was it like living at home before your parents' divorce?
  - How did you all get along? (family functioning, stability, conflict)

Divorce event

- How did you experience the time when your parents got divorced?
  - Were you surprised that your parents divorced?
  - How do you feel about the way your parents handled the divorce?
  - Do you feel that the manner in which your parents divorced was the right or wrong way?
  - Did they both make an effort to make you feel comforted at the time?
  - Did your parents inform or explain their intentions to divorce to you?
    - If yes, did you understand the explanation?
    - Did your parents give you information and answers to your questions?
  - Do you feel that your opinions were considered at the time of the divorce?
    - Were you asked how you were doing / coping / feeling?
  - Did you go for counselling at the time?
    - If yes, please tell me what the experience was like
  - Do you ever feel you were responsible for your parents' divorce?

- Do you ever feel you could have prevented your parents' divorce?

Coping

- How did you cope with your parents' divorce at the time?
  - Was it difficult to cope? If yes, please explain

Memories

- Do you have any particular memories about your parents' divorce that stand out for you?

Family functioning

- What was your home environment like after the divorce?
  - How did everyone get along? What changed? (family functioning, stability, conflict)
  - How did your siblings adjust to the divorce and how did that affect you?

Support

- Did you experience any support during and after the divorce?
  - Please tell me about your experience of support from family, extended family and outside of the family during and after the divorce.
    - Parents
    - Siblings
    - Extended family (grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc.)
    - Other external sources of support (church, school, friends, etc.)

Quality of parenting

- Can you tell me a bit more about your mom and dad as parents before and after the divorce?
  - Were both of your parents involved with parenting after the divorce, did they both make an effort?
  - Please tell me about how well your parents got on after the divorce
    - Did they make an effort to work together?
    - Do you think your parents considered their conduct towards each other?
  - Please tell me about routines after the divorce?
    - Did your routines change? Eg. who picked you up from school, extra mural activities, supper time.
    - Did your parents maintain routines for you?
  - Which one of your parents was the main disciplinarian?
    - Do you feel that discipline was consistent after the divorce?
  - Did you often see Mom? If no, was mom working longer hours?
  - Did you often see Dad?
  - Did you have access to your 'non-custodial parent' (father or mother)?
    - In your experience, do you feel that you spent enough time with both of your parents?
    - Do you feel that your 'non-custodial parent' (father or mother) maintained contact and interest in you?
  - Did either of your parents start new romantic relationships? How was that for you?

Parent-child relationships

- How was your relationship with your parents before and after the divorce?
    - Please tell me about how you viewed your relationships with your parents after the divorce.
    - Did you argue or clash a lot with your parents before or after the divorce?
        - If yes, please explain.
    - How do you and your parents currently get on?
- If you had a question for your mother, what would it be?
    - What stops you from asking her?
- If you had a question for your father, what would it be?
    - What stops you from asking him?
    - Are you able to speak to your father?
    - What is your experience of a Zulu father?

Financial hardship

- Did the divorce affect your lifestyle?
    - Less/more money?
    - Change school?
    - Move house, what affect did it have on your friendships?

Current functioning

- How do you feel you have settled after your parents' divorce?
    - Is there anything that has made it difficult for you to settle in your new family life?

Conclusion

- Do you think there is anything else that helped you settle after your parents' divorce?
- Is there anything else that made it difficult for you to settle?
- Please tell me if there is anything else that you would like to say about your experiences of your parents' divorce.
- What does it mean to you to be from a divorced family?
- What would you suggest to help individuals from divorced families and their wellbeing?

Section 4: Self-concept (self-described personality traits and temperament)

Explain to the adolescent, that the reason for asking self-concept questions is to understand their nature better and to be able to relate this back to their experiences of divorce. Ensure that the child knows there are no wrong or right answers.

- Can you describe yourself (you as a person) before the divorce?
- Can you describe yourself (you as a person) after the divorce?
- Do you think you have changed?
- Have you stopped doing things you used to like?
- Have you joined new friendship groups?
- Have you started doing different things?

Thank you

Appendix G: Child and Family Centre assurance

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

11th February 2015

To whom it may concern

This letter serves to provide the assurance that should any participant require psychological assistance as a result of any distress arising from the research project titled: *"Children's Experience of Adjustment to Divorce/ African traditional separation: Risk and Protective factors in a South African context"* conducted by Stephen Penney a psychology Masters student from the University of KwaZulu-Natal; it will be provided by psychologists and intern psychologists at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus Child and Family Centre – phone 033-2605166.

Yours sincerely,

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