

**EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY
ADOLESCENTS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES IN THE
WATERBERG DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

BY

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DECLARATION

I Olivia Mahlatse Mogoane, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

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Signature

08 February 2010

Date

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ABSTRACT

This research study was inspired by the rise in the number of adolescents who have been charged with misdemeanor. Most of these adolescents came from dysfunctional families. The greater pool research focused on the consequences of divorce on younger children. However, adolescents may be one of the neediest age groups because the divorce experience interacts with the complex developmental changes with which adolescents must cope. Adolescents from divorced families may experience challenges with bodily changes and adjustment to these changes due to a lack of support from both parents.

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences and challenges faced by adolescents from divorced families. It was qualitative in nature. A non-probability purposive sampling was employed to select 10 custodial parents who participated. The snowball sampling was utilised to select the 20 adolescents from divorced families. The adolescents' ages ranged from 13 to 18 years. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the help of a semi-structured interview schedule to gather information from all the respondents.

The research questions focused on the adolescents' feelings and reactions toward parental divorce. The findings indicate that most adolescents despite understanding the reasons for their parents' divorce became overwhelmed by the experience. They became withdrawn and some had to mature early and, therefore, lost out on the opportunity to enjoy their childhood. Their education was also disrupted due to their pre-occupation with a variety of needs such as fitting well into peer groups, seeking family security and stressfree relationships with their custodial, non-custodial parents, as well as their siblings.

An analysis of these experiences and challenges has provided insight for future intervention programmes to help prevent more serious adjustment problems. It has also exposed the need for awareness raising and expedite provision of therapeutic

services to families experiencing divorce. It is hoped that this information will stimulate social workers and other members of the helping professions to enlist their support for children of all ages from broken families.

The plight of children from divorced families needs school social workers as they would assist with early identification of children with psycho-social needs as well as providing the necessary professional assistance. If social workers could be deployed at schools they would design intervention programmes to suit the needs of such children.

Based on the major findings of the study, the following hypotheses were developed:

- If both parents could inform their children of the impending divorce at a level appropriate for each child, children would less likely be traumatised by parental divorce.
- If parents and adolescents could be provided with post divorce counseling they would alleviate long term emotional complications.
- If adolescents find their custodial parents to have adjusted well to the divorce they would not be overburdened by the responsibility of taking care of their parents and siblings' well-being and, therefore, would focus on their own development.

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1. INTRODUCTION

Belonging to an intact family, that is, a family with two parents appears to be an important determinant of one's psychological well-being, and if interfered with the outcome may be detrimental. Magane (2000:2) contends that the family environment of antisocial individuals is frequently full of neglect and abuse, and the dependency needs of such individuals are not always met.

Divorce creates a crisis in a family's life cycle; a state of disequilibrium experienced by all members throughout the nuclear and extended family members (Everett, 1989:81). Despite the considerable wealth of divorce research published in professional literature, and a healthy volume of self help books on the subject, individuals, including adolescents, become overwhelmed by the divorce experience when faced with it. Children display great variation in their response to parental separation and some children experience lasting negative consequences subsequent to divorce (Demo, Emery, Seltzer, and Simons cited by Videon, 2002:489).

Adolescence, as a time of change, has rarely been studied from a point of view of the experiences and the challenges that adolescents from divorced families face, particularly in the Waterberg District. The physical changes and the emergence of new social-cognitive abilities may all occur simultaneously with alterations in peer networks, role expectations, transitions in schooling, and changes in family relationships.

Findings by a substantial number of researchers reveal that divorce typically leads to a dramatic decline in the standard of living of mother-custody families, often pushing them below the poverty line (Duncan & Hoffman; and Weitzman cited by Amato & Keith, 1991:43). Economic deprivation presents obstacles to children's school attainment (Amato & Keith, 1991:43). This study intends to explore the experiences and challenges faced by adolescents from divorced families.

2. MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The researcher has practiced as a generic social worker for four years and two years as a probation officer in the Department of Health and Social Development in the Waterberg district. She has observed that many of the children who had committed offences were aged between 13 and 18 years and that the majority were from disorganised families as a result of, amongst others divorce, separation and desertion. Matsafu (2005:39) found that children from divorced families are at a high risk of being exposed to social and psychological problems such as delinquency and engaging in criminal activities.

According to Gibson-Cline (1996:6) what youngsters perceive as their most serious problems is not necessarily what professionals believe them to be. For example, experts expressed concern about teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases while these problems were rarely mentioned by youngsters (Gibson-Cline, 1996:6). Considering this fact, the researcher is of the opinion that most of the services rendered to the adolescents from divorced families do not entirely meet their psychosocial needs.

The rate of distressing reports on adolescents who are involved in serious crimes and those who are suicidal due to dysfunctional family patterns is increasing in the Waterberg district. Most of these youngsters' parents live apart from each other. Recently a sixteen year old girl was referred by a Phagameng High School guidance teacher to the Modimolle Victim Support Center for counseling as she had attempted suicide after being visited by her biological father who is reported to have separated from her mother following allegations of sexual abuse to this child.

The researcher has also realised that numerous children's future is at stake since most of the programmes offered by social workers are reactionary instead of preventative to the needs of those children who are experiencing discomfort at their homes, particularly due to divorce. Many adolescents experience confusion over parental divorce, therefore, the need to facilitate identification and expression of divorce-related feelings is required.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Divorce is considered by social scientists and policy makers to be a major cause for many social problems and it is rated as the second distressing factor following death (Hodges, 1991:v). Rose (1998:88) maintains that divorce is currently less stigmatised than it was previously, yet it still remains a difficult experience for children and adolescents. Children whose parents are divorced, are more likely to have a lower psychological wellbeing are fraught with depression and have a low life satisfaction (Knox & Schacht, 1997:475). Furthermore, others may engage in non-marital cohabitation. Girls from divorced families reported more problems related to intimacy or interpersonal conflict while the anxieties of boys were tied to physical or intellectual competence (Showalter cited by Gibson-Cline, 1996:6). Generally boys feel more challenged by parental divorce as it affects their self-esteem and tempers with their intellectuality.

Some of the factors that compound adjustment of children after divorce relate to the different treatment children receive from custodial mothers and non-custodial fathers. For example, Hetherington and her colleagues (Twaite, Silitsky & Luchow, 1998:219) noted the following reactions from divorced parents:

- Usually make demands on their children for mature behavior,
- Communicate poorly with the children,
- Show diminished levels of affection, and
- Maintain inconsistent disciplinary practices.

In addition, the degree of conflict between parents, before and after the divorce, has a marked impact on children, especially ex-spouses who are unable to contain their anger and hostility. They find it difficult to separate their roles of ex-spouses and parent (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987:72).

The education of children from divorced families is likely to be disrupted due to financial constraints. Some children may drop out of school and others may not aspire to go for tertiary education due to a lack of parental guidance. Those who do pursue their studies often do not perform well due to their preoccupation with a variety of needs such as food, relating well to peers and seeking for family

security than with their studies. Hence, the emergence of delinquent behaviour has to be understood within the complicated weave of individual, family and environmental factors that have both direct and indirect influences on children's development (Madden-Derdich, Leonard & Gordon, 2002:355-356).

4. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

4.1 AIM

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences and challenges faced by adolescents from divorced families. The investigation also intended to highlight the needs of these children which may be met through social work intervention.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were to:

- Determine the relationship of adolescents with their custodial and non-custodial parents, including siblings (after parental divorce);
- Determine the adolescents' ability to initiate and maintain relationships with their peers after parental divorce;
- Establish how the adolescents were informed of their parents divorce;
- Establish the challenges faced by adolescents from divorced families;
- Determine the type of support obtained by the adolescents from their maternal/paternal relatives after parental divorce;
- Assess social work services and other professional assistance received by adolescents from divorced families; and
- Formulate hypotheses for future in-depth research.

5. ASSUMPTIONS

The study was based on the following assumptions:

- Divorced parents become overwhelmed by their circumstances and are likely not to relate well with their adolescents;
- The loss of a two parent family makes adolescents feel ashamed and they, therefore, isolate themselves from their peers;
- Adolescents are usually not informed of their parents' intention to divorce;

- Adolescents become devastated when their parents divorce;
- Maternal relatives are usually the ones that provide moral support to adolescents from divorced families rather than paternal relatives.
- Adolescents from divorced families do not receive therapeutic intervention services as their parents are not aware of the distress they have.

6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following questions:

- How do adolescents view their relationships with their parents and siblings after divorce?
- How do adolescents from divorced families relate with their peers?
- How did the adolescents react toward parental divorce?
- What challenges do adolescents encounter following the divorce of their parents?
- What kind of support did adolescents receive from their relatives after parental divorce?
- What professional assistance did the adolescents receive after parental divorce?
- What type of social work services are required by these adolescents from divorced families?

7. PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

Divorce as a societal phenomenon, has gained much attention from researchers in the social sciences, particularly social work, psychology, and sociology. Studies conducted on this phenomenon encompassed the causes and effects of divorce on both parents and children, and recommended therapy by clinicians.

7.1 Divorce experience by family members

Peck and Menocherian (1989:337) state that divorce is a major disruption in the family life-cycling process, adding complexity to whatever developmental tasks the family is experiencing in its present phase. Children and parents grieve the

loss of the kind of family they had hoped for, and they especially grieve the loss of the presence of the other parent (Morton, 1994:54). One reason divorce hurts is that a person loses one of the few people who knows him/her and who, at least at one time, did care about him/her (Knox & Schacht, 1997:468).

Divorce is a process rather than an event and according to Morrison and Cherlin (cited by Knox & Schacht, 1997:461), it is characterised by a sequence of potentially stressful experiences that begin before the physical separation and continue after it. Knox and Schacht (1997:461) indicated that the process of divorce involves various stages, namely:

- The emotional divorce, which centers on the deteriorating marriage;
- The legal divorce, which involves meeting with mediators or lawyers and going to court;
- The economic divorce, which focuses on splitting the money and property and (usually) learning to live on less;
- The co-parental divorce, which deals with negotiating the care of children in a binuclear rather than a nuclear family;
- The community divorce which involves the changed interaction with friends and the community; and
- The psychic divorce, involving the problem of regaining individual autonomy.

Kalter and Schreier (cited by Rose, 1998:89) support the above-mentioned stages as they state that divorce stressors include hostility between parents, the distress of the custodial parent, a change and loss in the relationship with the custodial parent, downward economic mobility, and change in residence.

7.2 Impact of divorce on children

Family difficulties including marital separation and divorce, affect the social, emotional and psychological functioning of school-age children (Rose, 1998:87; Matsafu, 2005:50; and Knox & Schacht, 1997:467). Many couples divorce while their children are still of school going age (Glassman & Reid cited by Rose, 1998:87). According to Craig and Baucum (2002:366), parents are often under

considerable stress right after the divorce and may be incapable of providing warmth or control; they may be less affectionate, inconsistent in applying discipline, uncommunicative, or unsupportive.

Divorce brings with it numerous changes and a very real sense of loss. Children from divorced families usually feel abandoned, anxious, depressed, isolated, and rejected (Hetherington, 1993:39). According to Lauer and Lauer (cited by Matsafu, 2005:41), initial reactions to parental divorce may include intense anger, self-blame, fears about the future, and loyalty conflicts as the child is pressured to take sides in the parental battle. Children are often confronted with contradictory rules and expectations from their parents (Matsafu, 2005:50).

In most instances, children do not cope with the absence of the parent; they feel unloved and unprotected, and sometimes blame themselves for the divorce (Craig & Baucum, 2002:366; and Rose, 1998:87-88). According to Matsafu, (2005:3); Hodges (1991:8) and Rose (1998:87), some children, even after the finality of the divorce has been explained to them, still hope that their parents will some day get back together.

In addition, it might also be a fact that previously the father used to be primarily responsible for the economic security of the family. Therefore, with his absence, there may not be sufficient income for the maintenance of the family. This may contribute to a child experiencing social or peer rejection, or to the child isolating him or herself because he or she does not fit in with his or her friends (Magane, 2000:1). For example, the child may lack proper clothes or pocket money, and this could make him to feel different from the peer group.

7.3 Consequences of divorce on adolescents

According to Erickson's model, adolescence is a stage of identity versus role confusion in which adolescents need to resolve the crisis of role confusion by stabilising their sense of identity (Craig & Baucum, 2002:46). To address this stage adolescents need emotional, physical, moral and financial support which are usually provided by parents and the society. It is thus possible that the absence of one parent, the presence of a step parent in the family, or the

change in the family setting during or a few years prior to the child's adolescence, may deprive a child of the necessary support, and thus it may have detrimental effects on the child's identity development which may impact on his or her future.

Erikson's model shows that the sense of identity consists of three elements, namely the individual's certainty about his or her own ability, certainty about his or her own values, and certainty about his or her social and personal identity (Craig & Baucum, 2000: 409). In order to solve this identity crisis, the adolescent is likely to experiment with various possibilities, which could include smoking and drinking, sexual intercourse, stealing (Magane, 2000:18). The peer group and the extent to which the child has parental support influence these experimentations.

Since the conflict and pain of divorce leave parents with little energy to nurture adolescents some tend to have higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse, premarital sexual activity, poorer academic performance, higher rates of school dropouts, poor classroom conduct that interferes with performance, and a number of learning disorders than other children (Matsafu, 2005:42 & Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, Perry, and McLaughlin cited by Rose, 1998:88).

Theories of human development emphasise the importance of an emotionally supportive and responsive environment (Craig & Baucum, 2002:392). Studies conducted by Young, Jensen, Olsen, and Cundick (cited by Craig & Baucum, 2002:392) have proved that generally, male and female teenagers from two-parent families have less and later sexual experience than those from single-parent families.

Amato and Keith (1991:46) found out that adult children of divorced parents experienced lower levels of psychological well-being such as depression and low life satisfaction; family well-being such as low marital quality and divorce; socio-economic well-being like, low educational attainment, income, and occupational status; and physical health. Single-parent families have been associated with the children marrying while they are still teenagers, having

children while unmarried and getting a divorce too (McLanahan cited by Knox & Schacht, 1997:475).

7.4 The difference between males and females in coping with divorce

The impact of divorce varies with the gender and age of the youngsters (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:30). Findings from a study conducted by Lauer and Lauer (cited by Matsafu, 2005:47) indicated that boys from divorced families exhibited more problematic behaviour than those from intact families; however, such difference was not found among girls. Boys who were living with a divorced mother might even have higher levels of depression and withdrawal than boys who live in an intact family with high, persistent conflict (Matsafu, 2005:47). Boys usually take longer to adjust to divorce than girls.

According to Matsafu (2005:48-9), boys are less self-controlled and more impulsive. They conform less to rules. They seem to show less guilt and are unwilling to accept blame for their own behaviour. Girls from father absent families were observed to have difficulty in getting involved into heterosexual relationships (Matsafu, 2005:49).

8. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Theories have been developed to explain different aspects of people's behavior. Divorce is a very complex phenomenon that has been explored from different theories to establish its causes and effects on human beings. The researcher identified four theories from literature, namely, the social learning theory, the conflict theory, the disaster theory, and the family systems theory.

The social learning theorists hold the viewpoint that children who were brought up in dysfunctional families learn to accept and live with it as a way of life. They even accommodate it in their own adult relationships (Craig & Baucum, 2002:53). Bandura (cited by Magane, 2000:16) describes an adolescent as a child-adult who observes other people as models for his or her actions. As the children grow up, their parents serve as models, as do siblings, teachers and other persons who are important to them. The process of learning for children is continuous, and current behavior is a product of both past experiences and

present social environmental conditions (Magane, 2000:16).

Conflict theorists recognise that not all family practices are good for every member of the family (Knox & Schacht, 1997:21). For example, if a woman has been a housewife for quite some time and suddenly decides to seek full time employment, this may not be a good decision for all the family members and may, therefore, cause conflicts amongst them. These theorists view conflict not as good or bad but as a natural and normal part of relationships. They also regard conflict as necessary for change and growth of individuals, marriages, and families.

The disaster theorists hold the viewpoint that the dissolution of marriage regularly produces emotional distress almost irrespective of the quality of the marriage or the desire for its dissolution (Twaite et al., 1998:2). Howard and Johnson (cited by Twaite et al., 1998:2) conclude that there can be no doubt that divorce is a life crisis of major proportion for almost all the families who experience it. Among the complaints that are depicted as characterising divorced individuals are loneliness and depression; anxiety; alcoholism; psychotic breaks; and suicide attempts (Twaite et al., 1998:2). The disaster theory assumes that these negative parental characteristics are reflected in poor psychosocial adjustment among children.

The socio-cultural theorists emphasise the importance of cultural influences. Comparing adolescents in different cultures, periods of history and socio-economic situations within a culture, has demonstrated the impact that social structure and cultural mores have on adolescents' behaviour and attitudes (Nielson, 1991:13). It is further mentioned that sociologists such as Kingsely David believe that parents naturally rely upon the experiences relevant to their own generation and since their experiences are now relatively irrelevant to their children in a more modern society, a certain amount of conflicts will inevitably arise between the young and the elders whereas cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict argues that different societies impose on the young their own unique expectations and social roles, which create distinct, not universal, adolescent experiences (Nielson, 1999:13).

Developmental theorists define adolescence as the preparatory phase into adult life (Newcomb & Bentler, 1988:27) while Piaget contends that adolescence is a qualitatively unique period of life, set apart from childhood by our expanding cognitive abilities. Cognitive theorists hold the point of view that this cognitive advance is responsible for the many new behaviours and attitudes that accompany adolescence, such as the ability to reason abstractly, to formulate and test hypotheses, to assume the perspective of another person, to recognise incongruities and hypocrisy, to behave less self-consciously, and to recognise the motivations underlying other people's behaviour (Craig & Baucum, 2000:406).

9. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of this study, the researcher aligned herself with the family systems theory since it holds to the fact that the disruption of a family has negative outcomes on the psychosocial being of the individual family members (Twaite et al., 1998:218). This theory emerged from two different perspectives. The first is derived from some of the landmark studies of adjustment following divorce, which emphasise that the event of divorce typically results in a number of significant changes in both family organisation and in the relationships that exist among family members (Hetherington, 1989:94).

The family systems theory views a family as an integrated set of parts that function together for some purpose (Twaite et al., 1998:219). Twaite and his associates regard a family as a system in which various members function to maintain a unit. Family members are interdependent, and change in one family member affects the entire family (Matsafu, 2005:39). From a systems perspective, family members are viewed as influencing one another in reciprocal fashion (Knox & Schacht, 1997:26). Just as children influence the marriage of their parents, the marriage to which the children are constantly exposed will influence the children.

10. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The definition of basic concepts is a prerequisite for any research project. The clear definition of basic concepts plays a significant role in the reader's need to come to grips with the subject under investigation. Like any other area of study, the study on the challenges faced by youth in divorced families was structured around an understanding of certain concepts and the key concepts were defined as follows:

Adolescence

According to Barker (1999:9), adolescence is the life cycle period between childhood and adulthood, beginning at puberty and ending with young adulthood. Adolescents struggle to find self-identity, and this struggle is often accompanied by erratic behavior. Barton, Warkins and Jarjoura (1997:488) define adolescence as the time for dramatic change in terms of physical growth, sexual development, cognitive development, and identity development.

According to Tanner (1991:419), the term adolescence is derived from the Latin verb *adolescere*, which means to grow or to grow to maturity. It refers to a period of transition when the individual changes physically and psychologically from a child to being an adult. In this study, the researcher referred to adolescence as the transitional stage from childhood to young adulthood. The period of adolescence in this study was limited to the 13 to 18 year old age group.

Divorce

It is an institutionalised way of voluntarily ending a marriage. There are other forms of voluntary marital dissolution such as desertion or a mutually-agreed upon separation; but divorce differs in that it is officially sanctioned by the state or the ruling group, and it allows both partners to remarry (Kuper, 1987:57). Previously, a divorce was granted when one partner failed to fulfil an important responsibility such as sexual fidelity, economic support and so forth. But in many Western countries, divorces are now granted on the basis of incompatibility, without the need for either partner to be legally at fault (Hoffman, 1992:12).

Knox and Schacht (1997:453) define divorce as the legal ending of a valid marriage contract. According to Barker (1999:136), divorce refers to the legal dissolution of a marriage. Each state establishes its own laws determining the criteria (grounds) for dissolution. Adultery, incompatibility and living apart for specified periods of time are the grounds most commonly accepted. In this study, the researcher referred to divorce as the voluntary and involuntary ending of marriage such as legalised divorce, mutually agreed upon separation and desertion.

Family

The National Association for Social Workers Commission on families defines a family as two or more people who consider themselves as a family and who assume obligations, functions and responsibilities generally, essential to healthy family life. Childcare and child socialisation, income support, long-term care, and care-giving are among the functions of family life.

The United States Bureau of the census (cited by Knox & Schacht, 1997:15) defines a family as a group of two or more persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption. According to this definition, married couples with or without biological or adopted children, one parent and a child or children, and two or more siblings or cousins who live together are the only groups that constitute a family.

Barker (1999:53) defines a family as a primary group whose members are related by blood, adoption or marriage and who usually have shared common residences, have mutual rights and obligations and assume responsibility for the primary socialization of their children. In this study, the researcher referred to the latter definition as a family. Couples (heterosexual or homosexual) who live together and foster families are excluded.

11. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the art of investigating something (Babbie, 1992:89). It is the most important part of a research, as it comprises tools and techniques

upon which the entire research will be based, namely, type of research, research design, population, sampling and data collection methods.

11.1. TYPE OF RESEARCH

This study was qualitative in nature and enabled the researcher to gather information on the experiences, feelings and needs of adolescents from divorced families. The advantage of the qualitative approach was that it allowed the researcher to describe the adolescents' experiences based on spoken or observable behaviour (Bloom, Fischer & Ormer, 1995:9). The qualitative approach also seeks to understand human experience from the perspective of those who experience them (Richard & Grinnell, 1997:14). The qualitative approach was useful as it allowed the researcher to record information as it was revealed and also explored the topics that the respondents were uncomfortable with to discuss.

11.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher utilised an exploratory research design as she was exploring the experiences and challenges faced by adolescents, since no such type of study has ever been conducted in the Waterberg district. The advantage of the exploratory design is that it is flexible and informal, thus it covers a large scope through accommodating diverse information on the subject (Neuman, 1997:19).

11.3 POPULATION

The target population in this study was adolescents whose parents were divorced who were residents of the Waterberg district municipality. The exact figure of this population was unknown to the researcher since there were no statistics that had been compiled on marriages and divorce of black people in the Waterberg district. According to Bless and Higson-Smith (2002:84), a population refers to a set of objects or people which is the focus of the research and about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics. A population is the total set from which the individual units of study are chosen (Seaberg cited by Strydom & Venter, 2002:198).

11.4 SAMPLING

Method

The researcher utilised non-probability purposive sampling to select 10 parents who participated in the study. The snowball sampling, which is also a subtype of non-probability sampling, was utilized to select 20 adolescents from divorced families. The purposive sampling is based on the judgment of the researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample, whereas the snowball sampling begins with one or a few people and spreads out on the basis of links to the initially identified people (Neuman, 1997:206). The respondents were selected on the basis of the researcher's own knowledge of the population, its elements and the nature of the research objectives as well as the respondents' network, namely, the respondents' knowledge of others with similar characteristics.

A sample of 10 custodial parents who were divorced, who had custody of children from divorced families, was selected. Three of these respondents were the biological parents to some of the 20 adolescents who participated in the study. The respondents comprised of eight females and two males from different socio-economic classes, and their age ranged from 36 to 59 years. The researcher used the client base from the records of the social workers, probation officers, as well as the magistrate's offices and those that were known to the ministers or health professionals. The respondents also included 20 adolescents aged between 13 and 18 years from different socio-economic classes and ethnic groups, both in school and out of school who were identified by those respondents who were known to the researcher.

Procedure followed

- Permission from the Department of Health and Social Development to conduct the study was obtained;
- The researcher assessed the case load of the social workers and selected relevant participants who were suitable for the study;
- The researcher requested the local legal aid office to refer some of their clients who had experienced a divorce.

11.5 DATA COLLECTION

The researcher made use of face-to-face interview. This type of interviews assisted the researcher to understand the closed worlds of individuals, families, organisations, institutions and communities (Greeff, 2002:292). An interview schedule was developed and utilised to gather information from the respondents (Greeff, 2002:302).

The advantage of an interview schedule was that it provided a relatively systematic collection of information and at the same time it ensured that important information was not forgotten. The researcher used a semi-structured questions which enabled her to make follow ups where necessary. This method of data collection allowed the researcher to probe for specific answers and to repeat a question when necessary. It also assisted to have a better response rate as the researcher could observe the non-verbal behaviour and assessed the validity of the respondents' answers.

The interviews were conducted between June and September 2007.

11.6 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The Nvivo programme was used to manage and organise the qualitative data. The programme organises raw data and links them with memos and databites to enable researchers to make codes and analytical notes, and then edit and rework ideas as the project progresses (Walsh, 2003:253).

The following system was followed using the Nvivo programme:

- Stored, managed and linked documents and ideas;
- Linked data documents and nodes as ideas were developing;
- Coded documents at nodes to show where the concept was occurring in the text;
- Created memo ideas about the data/documents;
- Searched and created cases; and
- Organised ideas in trees of nodes.

12. AREA OF STUDY

The research study was conducted in the Waterberg District Municipality, which is in the western part of the Limpopo Province. The district shares the provincial border with Botswana. It comprises six local municipalities, namely Bela-Bela Local Municipality; Lephalale Local Municipality; Modimolle Local Municipality; Mogalakwena Local Municipality; Mookgopong Local Municipality; and Thabazimbi Local Municipality. The areas are both semi-urban and rural as they include townships, villages, informal and farm settlements.

The area of study consisted of people from different ethnic groups, economic classes, and religious groups. Available resources in the area included the South African Police Services, Health and Social Development services, Magistrates' offices, three Multipurpose Community Centers and Non-Governmental Organisations such as Trauma centers, Suid Afrikanse Vroue Federasie (SAVF), Ondersteunings' Raad (OSR), Red Cross, Love life, Welfare societies, Modimolle Ministers Fraternal, HIV/AIDS centers and People Opposing Women and Child Abuse.

13. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A limited research on the phenomenon of divorce, particularly on the experiences of adolescents, was conducted in South Africa, especially in the Limpopo Province. The findings of this study are thus significant to social workers and others, in that they will be enabled to:

- Understand the phenomenon of divorce in the area of Waterberg;
- Understand the experiences and the challenges faced by adolescents from divorced families and to suggest possible contributory factors to their present well being;
- Establish new programmes and adapt the existing ones on the issues of adolescents in divorced families;
- Gain knowledge and insight into the experiences and challenges faced by adolescents from divorced families;
- Guide social workers as they work both programmatically and in direct service with families and children; and
- Enable policy makers to adapt and develop appropriate policies with

regard to divorce.

This study will also benefit families that have gone through or who are in the process of a divorce to identify and understand emotionally difficult aspects of the divorce.

14. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the study were:

- The findings cannot be generalised to the entire population since the study focused on few respondents (20 adolescents and 10 custodial parents) who form part of one District within the Limpopo Province.

15. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study, the researcher gave consideration to the following aspects:

Informed consent – The researcher explained to the parents of the adolescents who were from divorced families and explained to them the purpose, goals and motivation of the study to obtain consent from them if they were interested in participating in this study. The respondents were not coerced to participate in the study; however, they were encouraged to participate in it. Looking at the fact that most of the respondents were minor children, the researcher requested consent from their parents once clarification was made. Berg (1998:47) describes informed consent as the knowing consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of choice.

Protection from physical and mental harm - The researcher ensured that she would not cause any physical discomfort and injury to the research participants. The researcher was sensitive to any emotional harm and discomfort to the subjects. Precautions were considered and the researcher weighed any potential harm against potential benefits by not asking the respondents to recall unpleasant events they were not comfortable with. The respondents who were experiencing emotional discomfort were referred to the area social worker for debriefing.

The researcher was sensitive to the emotional and psychological well-being of the participants throughout the study. The respondents were informed beforehand about the potential impact of the investigation. For example, some of the questions might evoke feelings and emotions that the respondents had suppressed due to their painful nature (Strydom, 1998:25). The respondents were informed at the beginning of the interview about the potential impact that the interview might have. The researcher used her experience as a social worker since she had knowledge and skills to handle a crisis where necessary.

Anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality - The researcher made sure that the respondents' identity would not be disclosed or accessed by other people and that their identity would be treated with respect and protected.

The researcher was aware that it is important to safeguard the privacy and identity of the respondents and act with the necessary sensitivity where the privacy of the subjects was relevant.

The researcher ensured that information given was treated confidentially. The data collected were used for the stated purpose of research and no other person will have access to the empirical data. The respondents' right to privacy was observed throughout the study and the information obtained from them was treated as confidential.

Deception of the respondents - The researcher clearly gave the respondents information about the role, name and identity of the researcher. The respondents were respected and the information given during the interview did not leak. The common goal of the study was made known to the respondents and all the procedures to be undergone by the respondents were disclosed to the respondents.

Debriefing of respondents - The researcher handled termination and withdrawal of the research in a sensitive way. Strydom (1998:33) states that debriefing sessions during which subjects get the opportunity after the study to work through their experience and its aftermath are possibly one way in which

the researcher can assist subjects and minimise harm. After the completion of the study, the researcher conducted debriefing with the respondents who were affected by the interview process.

Publication of findings - The researcher informed both the parents and adolescents from the divorced families who participated in the study about the findings in an objective manner without too many details or impairing the principle of confidentiality after the study had been completed. A copy of this study will also be made available to the Department of Health and Social Development's Social workers in the Waterberg District.

Strydom (1998:32) points out that report writing includes doing all one can to make sure that the report is as clear as possible and contains all information necessary for readers to understand what has been written. Short comings and errors of the investigation were identified and reflected in the chapter where the data were analyzed in order to give a realistic picture of the sources consulted and the people who collaborated. The findings of this study will be made available to the public in the form of a book and it will serve as a guide for future researchers.

CHAPTER 2

THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Divorce is an ever increasing trend that negatively affects families and children. Braude and Francisco-La Grange (1993:11) describe divorce as a process involving the dissolution of a marriage, which requires major familial reorganisation and affects the individual adults involved, their children, their parents and the society of which they form part.

The accumulated research suggests that marital dissolution has the potential to create considerable disorder in people's lives but people vary greatly in their reactions. Divorce benefits some individuals, leads others to experience temporary decrements in well-being, and forces others on a downward path from which they might never recover (Amato, 2000:1269).

A growing body of literature about the causes and the consequences of divorce amongst family members has appeared a lot in the past years and the researcher believes that little research has been conducted about the aftermath of divorce amongst adolescent-children particularly in the Limpopo Province.

This chapter also seeks to unfold the adolescent phase as well as the impact that parental divorce has on adolescents. The following topics will therefore be covered: the nature of adolescence, adolescence phase as a developmental phase, identity formation, personal relationships, the aftermath of parental divorce, adolescents' experiences following parental divorce and the available support for adolescents after parental divorce.

2.2 DIVORCE RATES

Forty percent of children in the US are predicted to experience divorce and half of them will reside at least temporarily in a single parent household and one in three children will live with a step parent for some period of time before the age of 19 (Portnoy, 2003:126).

In South Africa the rate of divorce has doubled annually between 1997 and 1999. The rate was 2.2 per 1,000 populations before South Africa got its independence (1994). The modified crude divorce rate in South Africa for 2003 was 520.4 per 100 000 married females (STATSSA: 2003). Similarly, there has been a marked increase in the number of children involved in divorce.

There is an agreement among researchers that children from divorced families are more likely to experience psychological difficulties than children from intact families, and those effects are likely to continue into adulthood (Amato, 2000:1269) depending on the parent-child relationship after the divorce.

Adolescence is generally perceived as a difficult developmental period both by those living through it and by those who live with adolescents. It is considered as an ideal stage for the unfolding of the drama of the quest for selfhood (Adams, Gullota & Markstrom-Adams, 1994:253). The physical, cognitive and social aspects start to develop and the body assumes the proportions of adulthood. The ability to think abstractly and to see the world differently, to also look critically at the past, present and the future also emerges.

Having surveyed relevant literature, the following issues were found to be critical to the discussion of the nature of adolescence and the development tasks of the phase. The main question normally asked when one enters the phase of adolescence is "Who am I?" The theme of the question is the search for identity, being the awareness of own abilities, beliefs, attitudes and history that make an individual unique.

2.3 THE NATURE OF ADOLESCENCE

The term adolescence is derived from the Latin verb "adolescere" which means to grow up or to come to maturity (Atwater, 1996:4). It is defined as a period that is distinct from both childhood and adulthood and is characterised by the rapid growth of the individual. The majority of developmental psychologists are of the opinion that the onset of adolescence is marked by clearly discernable physical changes, which usually occur between the ages of 11 and 13 years (Atwater, 1996:4; Gouws, Kruger & Burger, 2000:11).

Identifying the end of adolescence has proven to be even more complex task. From a social point of view, adolescence ends when the individual begins to carry out adults' roles and has thus become independent and self reliant. This could result in adolescence ending when the person is in his or her twenties. Legally, within the South African context, the end of this phase of development is characterised by the individual's ability to vote or apply for a driver's license at the age of 18 years, or when they achieve legal independence from their parents' at the age of 21 years (Gouws et al., 2000:15). Therefore, one can see that there could be great disparity in the age at which adolescence ends. However, it is commonly understood to end between the ages of 17 and 22 years.

Biologically an adolescent child considers him or herself an adult, but sociologically and psychologically he or she is maintained in a dependent condition. Adolescence is also recognised as a discrete period of development that came about as a result of cultural and societal conditions (Henning, 2005: 12). Their behavior often becomes erratic and unpredictable. Thus it is suggested that adolescence as a developmental phase is a cultural construct.

2.4. ADOLESCENCE AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE

Adolescence is a time characterised by changes in all social contexts as well as dramatic individual changes in physiology and cognitive capabilities (Henning, 2005:11). As this study focuses on the experiences and challenges faced by adolescents from divorced families it is vital to understand the developmental changes that occur during this phase and identity formation during this period.

2.4.1. Physical Development

2.4.1 1. Physical and psychosexual development in adolescence

The physical changes that the individual experiences at the start of adolescence visibly mark the start of a change or transition in status and are mainly linked to the psychological changes of the stage.

The changes are described as seeing flat-chested little girls developing some breasts and scrawny little boys becoming broad-shouldered and mustached young men. These changes are also described as pubescence and puberty. Pubescence is described as the stage of physiological growth marked by the maturation of reproductive functions and the primary sex organs. Pubescence lasts for about two years. Puberty, is, when an individual become sexually mature and ready to reproduce (Louw, Van Ede & Louw, 1998:385).

To further explain these stages, human develop-mentalists have indicated the existence of what is known as a secular trend, whereby an individual reaches adult height and sexual maturity earlier than they used to (Louw et al; 1998:391). The explanation provided is that healthier well nourished and well-cared for children reach puberty earlier and grow big. This encourages sexual behaviours at an earlier age than before. Opposite to these factors are the children in less developed countries who reach puberty later and girls even start menstruation at 15 to 18 years of age.

Another trend experienced during adolescence is the growth part, whereby a sharp increase in height and weight occurs in girls of nine to fourteen and boys at ages ten to sixteen years. At the end of this a young person reaches sexual maturity. The adolescent then experiences menarche which means he or she developed physiologically and skeletally. Boys start to experience sperms in their urine. Girls develop breasts. This includes the broadening of the shoulders in boys, voice changes, skin changes and the growth of body hair in both sexes. These changes influence self-concepts and personalities.

The radical physical changes to the adolescents' body are those that differentiate adolescence from other periods in the life span (Henning, 2005:13). The body parts of an adolescent do not grow all at the same pace. Puberty refers to the onset of physical and more specifically sexual maturation (Atwater, 1996:10). Both boys and girls have a sequence of pubertal changes. Although the rate of maturation varies from one adolescent to another, the order of these physical changes rarely does.

Pubertal changes for girls

Girls embark on their journey to adolescence with a head start, literally. The changes in height and weight occur quickly and are referred to as the growth spurt, which roughly peaks at 13 years of age, then declines (Rice, 1995:132). From the ages of 10-14 years, adolescent girls will grow approximately 7,5cm in a single year and reach their adult height at an estimated age of 16 years (Atwater, 1996:18). Following the onset of the growth spurt, the following changes occur in sequence:

- The breasts begin to enlarge;
- Pubic hair begins to appear;
- The internal sexual organs (ovaries, uterus, vagina, labia, and clitoris) enlarge and develop;
- Straight pigmented armpit hair appears;
- Menstruation begins (initially it is irregular and ovulation is unstable);
- Full development of the breasts.

Adolescent girls are capable of reproduction with the increased maturity of their reproductive organs and stable ovulation (Irwin & Simons, 1994:134; Rice, 1995:132-133 & Tanner, 1991:421).

Other changes that occur are the widening of the hips and an increase in muscle and body fat (Rice, 1995:133). There is a decline in the growth of the skeleton and an increase in the production of the hormone oestrogen, resulting in the body depositing relatively more fat than muscle on the hips, stomach, thighs, and breast areas. The contours of the girls' bodies become rounded, therefore, losing the straight, hip-less shape they had in childhood. It is this gain in fat that accounts for many adolescent girls' negative body image.

Pubertal changes in boys

Boys are late starters in comparison with girls. Their growth spurt begins approximately 2 years later than girls, between the ages of 12 and 16 years. During this spurt they will grow approximately 10cm each year, reaching their adult height at an estimated age of 18 years. The following is a sequence of the physical changes that occur in boys at puberty:

- The testes and scrotum begin to enlarge;
- Pubic hair begin to appear;
- The growth spurt begins;
- The penis increases in circumference and length;
- First ejaculation, usually during sleep (sperm count is low; the adolescent remains infertile);
- Growth of armpit and body hair;
- Larynx grows and voice deepens (voice breaks);
- Beard begins to grow;
- Adolescent boys are capable of reproduction with the formation of spermatozoa (Irwin & Simons, 1994:135; Rice, 1995:133 & Tanner, 1991:422).

Boys' bodies undergo further changes, namely an increase in shoulder and chest width and increase in muscle mass. Furthermore, the boy's body shape becomes more angular and his facial features more prominent (Rice, 1995:134).

2.4.1.2. The psychological impact of physical changes

Adolescents are acutely aware of the physical changes to their bodies. Their emotional reactions to these physical changes are important to their development as they have an influence on the self-concept and self-esteem of the adolescents. The physical changes in adolescents create concern about the body image, which refers to their concern regarding their body weight and the timing of their own development in relation to norms.

Early and late maturation is believed to have significant psychological ramifications on adolescents' development and self-esteem (Henning, 2005:15). However, the impact is unique for both boys and girls and may prove to be both constructive and destructive for them. Adolescence is a period of the life span that is characterised as embarrassing for both boys and girls (Adams et al., 1994:148), as they are acutely self-conscious and aware of the extreme changes to their bodies. These changes can be difficult enough when

development occurs in synchronisation with the norm. However, when adolescents develop faster or slower than their peers, it tends to be problematic.

According to Rice (1995:123), the disadvantages for late maturing boys are as significant. These boys are in danger of being socially rejected by their peer group due to the differences in physical development, resulting in the development of negative self-perceptions, feelings of self-consciousness and inadequacy. Late maturing boys may further exhibit an overt dependency on others and an eagerness for status and attention in an effort to compensate for their feelings of rejection.

2.4.2. Cognitive development

Cognitive development can be defined as an individual's growth in knowledge, the ability to understand, think, and perceive, and to utilise these abilities in solving the practical problems of everyday living (Rice, 1995:141). According to Piaget's theory the highest level of cognitive development is attained in adolescence and he refers to it as formal operational thought. Adolescents are no longer confined to the concrete operational stage, which characterises childhood.

As children grow up they begin to realise who they are especially when they enter into the adolescent stage. A psychological self begins to emerge and continues to change during adolescence (Adams et al., 1994:152). Adolescents begin to put forth a psychological description of themselves. This is done because they develop a more self-reflective ability that allows them to turn inwards and see their own private attributes. It puts a lot of pressure on all areas of development during this stage. Identity developments are considered a major development phase. With the development of formal operational thought, adolescents need to be able to see accurately how others perceive them.

The phase of adolescence is viewed as a period of storm and stress, marked by indecisive contradictory emotions (Louw, et al., 1998:381). The researcher's own point of view when defining the age limit of adolescence is that it begins at the

age of twelve till eighteen years of age and focuses on the forming of an identity. In most instances adolescents' relationship with others is problematic because of the establishment of adult identity development, inconsistency and unpredictable behaviour because of their consideration of own feelings and beliefs (Rice, 1995:142).

Adolescence is a stage filled with many changes, physically and emotionally (Peck & Manocherian, 1989:355). It is a time when children are beginning their own process of leaving home, forming an identity separate from their parents. Adolescents rather lose their parents' relationship to that of own peer for emotional support. Parents' views are often rejected and the adolescents, even though immature, want to be treated as adults because they seek independence.

Adolescence is the crucial time in which individuals establish lifestyles and behavioural patterns that have profound effects on adult well-being (Davis & Friel, 2001:669). Crosnoe, Mistry and Elder (2002:690) observe that adolescence represents a developmental period that is a potential source of variation in both risk and resiliency factors.

According to Erickson's model, adolescence is a stage of identity versus role confusion in which adolescents need to resolve the crisis of role confusion by stabilising their sense of identity (Craig & Baucum, 2002:46). To address this stage adolescents need emotional, physical, moral and financial support which are usually provided by parents and the society. It is thus possible that the absence of one parent, the presence of a step parent in the family, or the change in the family setting during or few years prior the child's adolescence may deprive a child of the necessary support, and thus it may have detrimental effects on the child's identity development which may impact on his future.

Erikson's model shows that the sense of identity consists of three elements, namely the individual's certainty about his or her own ability, certainty about his or her own values, and certainty about his social and personal identity (Louw, et al., 1998:278). In order to solve this identity crisis, the adolescent is likely to

experiment with various possibilities, which could include smoking and drinking, sexual intercourse, stealing (Magane, 2000:18). The peer group and the extent to which the child has parental support influence these experimentations.

Even under the best circumstances, moving successfully through adolescence is difficult. The common attributes toward adolescent's realisation are a lack of resources such as residential stability, a strong economic base, adequate schools, and a baseline level of public safety, he or she is likely not to find opportunities for personal growth or positive role models to engage him or her in healthy activities (Rodgers, 1996:176).

2.4.3 Social and personality development in adolescence

The influence of social and personality development in adolescence is characterised by many factors playing a major role during this stage, such as the cultural influences, family structures, and socio-economic factors.

2.4.3.1 The role of culture

The way a particular culture handles the physical changes of adolescence determines the nature of the transition and how some adolescents handle the stage, that is, culture is very crucial in the developing morals of adolescents. By moral development the researcher is referring to the process by which adolescents learn the principles that are established by the greater society or culture to enable them to judge particular behaviour patterns as right or wrong and to direct their own behaviour in accordance with these principles.

Adolescents are guided from infancy with certain standards; with some being formalised while others are established through tradition. As children, adolescents readily accept the moral values imposed upon them by various authority figures such as parents and teachers, and institutions (Henning, 2005:22). However, adolescents' cognitive ability to formulate hypotheses and think in an abstract manner enables them to weigh choices against each other, thereby becoming less reliant on adults for guidance (Dacey & Kenny, 1994:94). They begin to question and challenge the moral values imposed upon them by others in an attempt to develop their own personal value system.

2.4.3.2 The role of the family in the development of an adolescent

Nielsen (1991:43) points out that adolescence may indeed be a time of storm and stress in modern times and also the most financially demanding period for parents.

Kohlberg speculates that there is a positive relationship between moral development and cognitive development as well as being confronted by moral decision making through experience (Henning, 2005:24; & Bednar & Fisher, 2003:610). However, parents and peers have also been found to significantly influence adolescents' development of moral reasoning (Rice, 1995:142).

In childhood, adolescents gain their first knowledge of the world through observing the actions and attitudes of their parents. Their parents set rules based on their beliefs of what is honourable or immoral and convey to them the norms of the society. Therefore, parents should assist in establishing the foundation of moral reasoning through a warm, emotional context (Henning, 2005:24). As a result of being respected, parents are likely to be admired and imitated by their children, resulting in similar traits in adolescents. Furthermore, through the love and care adolescents receive from their parents, they learn consideration for others.

Parents often find themselves confused by conflicting advice from older parents and from articles in the media. Thus, they are unable to bring up their own children the way they were brought up as adolescents. Adolescents are thus going through their developmental tasks without a clear frame of reference provided by their parents. To counteract these negative factors, good social and personality development of an adolescent is determined not by fixed norms, customs and role prescriptions but rather by the friendly relationships they have built up in communicating with their parents (Louw et al., 1998:416). Both parents and young people need to make special efforts to understand each other. Thus, if the relationship between an adolescent and the parent is strained the outcome of that will be poor.

Parental discipline too has been shown to foster moral learning in youths (Rice, 1995:112). Authoritative disciplinary techniques, which are characterised by consistency, are motivated by the care and love of adolescents, and rely on clear, rational, verbal, explanations (Bednar & Fisher, 2003:610). This seems to be effective as it involves cognitive reasoning and acknowledges adolescents' abilities to understand the reasoning of their parents and, therefore, to accept and internalise the values.

The adaptations in family structure and organisation required to handle the tasks of adolescence are so basic that the family itself is transformed from a unit that protects and nurtures young children to one that is a preparation center for the adolescents' entrance into the world of adult responsibility and commitments (Preto, 1989:357). Very often this profound shift in adolescents' physical maturity is paralleled and coincides with changes in parents as they enter midlife.

An important purpose of the family during these adolescent years is to provide the youngster with the opportunity to return to base, to replenish emotional supplies that have been depleted, to restore battered self esteem, to regress briefly, to retreat temporarily, and finally, to gather courage for the next venture into dependence (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:82).

It appears the foundation of self-esteem emerges in the family. Studies reveal that a high self-esteem is associated with positive perceptions and interactions with parents from an early age (McBridge, Schoppe, & Jane, 2002:1001 and Ostgard-Ybrandt & Armelius, 2004:445). This may be established from infancy and extend throughout childhood and adolescence when parent-child relationship is characterised by love, concern, interest, warmth, and support. As a result, infants may discover that their caregivers will meet their needs and a sense of trust begins to be developed. However, if these needs are not met, mistrust in their environment and in others may develop, and a feeling of insecurity and threat may pervade their future development. This is supported by literature whereby people with a low self-esteem generally feel socially insecure and anxious about the future (Ostgard-Ybrandt & Armelius, 2004:445).

2.4.3.3 The role of peers

Peer groups have been identified as playing a significant role in the moral development of adolescents. During this period, parental influence begins to diminish, and the peer group becomes the primary reference group. Although the values of the peers may be in conflict with the values of the family, parents are usually successful in encouraging interactions with peers who have similar values. However, adolescents who are neglected or rejected by their parents will primarily turn to the peer group for support (Bednar & Fisher, 2003:610).

2.4.3.4 The role of the media

Nielsen (1991:23) agrees that television may influence adolescent values and affect their self-esteem as they compare themselves to their idols, which are rich, attractive, popular, and physically well developed while remaining slim. The childhood dynamics by families, especially by parents are no longer valued. The media probably has the biggest influence on adolescents in modern times.

Adolescents have the developmental task to form a sexual identity. This task is not an easy one due to peer influence and post-modern trends of free choices. Parental guidance and support are very crucial at this stage.

2.5 IDENTITY FORMATION DURING ADOLESCENCE

2.5.1. Separating from parents

Louw et al., (1998:430) argue that an adolescent child needs to separate from the family, give up the childhood identification of little boy or girl and establish an individual identity. Separation is normal and healthy, but it is often painful as parents feel that their values are being rejected.

Atwater (1996:231) shares this sentiment and points out that the rejection is temporary, partial, or superficial as teenage values are closer to those of their parents than is commonly believed. Parents also report that conflict between them and adolescents involve indulgence in violence, drugs usage, and sexual

activities. Regardless of all these, warm and supportive family interactions can reduce the negative results which parents are worried about.

2.5.2. The psycho-analytic model

Erik Erikson (1950), a psychoanalyst and the founder of the theory of psychosocial development, points out that development takes place through eight stages, which are characterised by developmental tasks and crises (Craig & Baucum, 2002:45). Erikson's theory of the psychosocial stages of development encompasses the whole of the life span and takes into account the individual's psychosocial relationships within the larger society. Each of these stages has two opposing poles. The solution of each stage does not simply lie in choosing the positive pole but rather in a synthesis of two opposing poles. When the crisis of one stage has been successfully resolved, this facilitates the solution of the next crisis.

Erikson proposes that adolescence is the ideal time for deconstructing one's childhood identity and reconstructing a viable identity (Kroger, 1996:186). Therefore, the crucial task of this stage of development is the resolution of the conflict of identity versus role confusion. Adolescents experience an identity crisis, with the best possible outcome being a sense of continuity between their past, their current identity, and their future plans and goals, as well as congruence between how they and others perceive them (Irwin & Simons, 1994:133). An alternative outcome could be role confusion. This is defined as a difficulty in arriving at a self-definition, which may result in an extensive time being taken to reach adulthood (Kroger, 1996:187). In the search of identity, adolescents are confronted with the necessary task of making definitive choices for themselves from the experiences and possibilities available to them. Some of these choices involve values, past and present skills, behaviour, and future goals. As a result of role confusion, Adams et al. (1994:162) believe that adolescents may experience this decision making as threatening as they have not immersed themselves in the exploration of the self and are unprepared to make the choices expected of them by society.

Within the adolescents' environment, there is a growing awareness of behaviours, roles and life-styles, which encourage modeling from external agents (Craig & Baucum, 2002:46). The peer group plays a prominent role in this experimentation as they provide the playground and encouragement to engage in new behavior as well as important social feedback to adolescents. Within the limitations set by the family, adolescents are likely to experiment with a range of behaviors and roles as they set out to achieve their identity. This behavior is likely to challenge the family resulting in conflict. Role experimentation extends further into heterosexual relations, with friendships and instances of being in love. These relationships act as a sounding board that reflects the adolescents' own values, attitudes and emotions.

The fundamental virtue arising from the identity crisis is fidelity, which is sustained loyalty, or a sense of belonging to another person (Erikson, 1968). Self-identification emerges when adolescents choose values and people to be loyal to, rather than accepting them from the significant adults in their lives. This ability to make a personal choice represents an extensively developed sense of trust. It is no longer only important to trust others, but also to be trustworthy oneself. Adolescents will now begin to transfer their trust and loyalty from their parents to others who can help guide them through life.

According to Erikson (1968) an important task of adolescence is the search for identity, the quest to find "Who I really am". This quest is often not fully resolved in adolescence but is a theme that individuals return to for the rest of their lives.

From a psychological point of view, adolescence ends when the individual is reasonably certain of his or her identity, is emotionally independent, has developed an own value system and is capable of establishing adult love relationships and friendship. The individual has to comply with certain cultural prescribed norms before he or she may be considered as having outgrown adolescence and these include passing through a traditional initiation school or physical maturation such as the occurrence of menstruation in girls and voice change and beard in boys (Nielsen, 1991:31).

Adams et al. (1994:162) describes an adolescent as a child-adult who observes other people as models for his or her actions. As children grow up their parents serve as role models, as do siblings, teachers, and other individuals who are important to them. The process of learning is continuous, and current behaviour is a product of both past experiences and social environmental conditions.

Although Erikson's theory remains the starting point for research on identity, other researchers have expanded on his theory in an effort to refine this construct. A researcher by the name of James Marcia (Craig & Baucum, 2002:46) elaborates on Erikson's fifth psychosocial stage of identity versus role confusion. In accordance with Erikson's theory, Marcia identified two variables that are vital for the attainment of a mature identity, namely exploration (crisis) and commitment. According to Marcia, adolescents are faced with search for what fits them best, or they can miss making any choices and be guided by their parents' values. This process of achieving a personal identity is demanding as it may involve challenging parental figures in the course of making decisions for themselves. However, this is necessary if adolescents are going to achieve a sense of self and not a sense of how their parents view them. According to Adams and Berzonsky (2003:165), with the employment of these two variables, exploration and commitment, to Erikson's fifth stage, Marcia identifies the following four statuses that the adolescent may encounter in achieving identity:

❑ Identity Foreclosure

Any significant identity exploration has on the whole, been avoided by these adolescents, and usually through premature choices endorsed by their parents. The adolescent in the foreclosure status has without questioning accepted and adopted the expectations of significant others, instead of going through the process of questioning and evolving his or her own beliefs and vocational choices. For instance, they blindly adopt their parents' beliefs as their own and strongly support authoritarian values, such as obedience, strong leadership, and respect for authority.

▣ Identity Moratorium

These teenagers are experiencing a delayed drawn-out exploration of their identity and have not made any choices or personal commitments. They are engaged in a personal struggle and are evaluating the alternatives. In this status, the adolescents engage in a variety of identity experiments, trying on different roles, beliefs and behaviours as part of the process of evolving a personally satisfying achievement status which can be observed in the consistent change of friends. Furthermore, these adolescents experience increased anxiety due to their prolonged state of uncertainty (Atwater, 1996:56) however; their self-esteem appears to be stable.

▣ Identity Diffusion

This status is characterised by a failure to achieve a stable and integrated sense of self. The adolescents in this status experience considerable self-doubts, but do not appear to be concerned about doing anything to change their circumstances. They also appear to have a lower self-esteem and experience feelings of inadequacy and alienation. Their unwillingness to enter into an exploration of the self results in an acceptance of incorrect descriptions of themselves and a readiness to be influenced by peers. Consequently, they are more likely to engage in deviant behaviour to satisfy the meaninglessness they feel (Henning, 2005:31).

▣ Identity achievement

In this status the adolescent has successfully resolved the identity crisis and is able to make a commitment to a vocation and to a political personal ideology. Having confronted the crisis and made a personal commitment, individuals have effectively linked future aspirations with the past, thus creating a sense of personal continuity. These individuals reflect self-confidence, security, and emotional maturity and their commitment to friends and heterosexual relationships is strong and well-established.

A negative identity refers to a self-concept that is opposite to dominant parental and societal values. A negative identity evolves because there has been too

little support from the parents or society, that is parental support for a child enables him or her to achieve a healthy sense of identity.

According to Erikson, an adolescent need to solve the crisis of this stage by developing a healthy sense of identity, otherwise role confusion will be experienced. The sense of identity consists of three elements, namely the individual's certainty about his or her social, physical and personal identity (Craig & Baucum, 2002:47).

2.5.3. The difference between males and females in forming identity

Boys and girls differ in the forming of an identity during the adolescence stage. Girls view themselves as adults based on their responsibilities, and their ability to care for others as well as for themselves. Girls achieve identity less through competitive striving and more through co-operative effort (Atwater, 1996:56).

Adams et al. (1996:167) point out that stability of identity is so important for women that it is just as adoptive for them to achieve this identity early in life without too much effort on their own part as it is for them to struggle to forge their own identity. They attribute the findings to society's pressure on women to carry on social values.

Part of the differences in male and female patterns may be due to different parental treatment of the sexes, since several studies have found different child-rearing patterns to be associated with different identity statuses.

Managing teenagers is difficult, even when the marriage is intact. Handling adolescents without the support of the other spouse compounds the difficulty, especially for mothers with sons (Hetherington, 1993:39). Parents with adolescents need to redefine their roles and establish different and more permeable boundaries. Parents are no longer the complete authority yet children need the stability they represent. Adolescents need to be dependent at times and to test their independence at times.

2.6. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Adolescents' development of an identity is significantly dependent on their separation from their parents. However, they still require support and guidance in making the transition to independence. The effect that this separation has on the parent-child relationship will be explored as well as the relationships with peers and siblings as the people to whom they turn for emotional support.

2.6.1. Relationships with parents

In order for adolescents to achieve a personal identity or sense of self, relationships with parents need to be redefined and a certain amount of detachment needs to take place. Relationships with parents remain both important in adolescence and they are renegotiated and, therefore, characterised by both change and continuity (Cobb, 1992:34).

The adolescents' ability for self-awareness leads to their understanding of how their relationships with their parents differ from the ones they share with friends. In their peer relationships, the distribution of power is generally equal. Therefore, they share in the decision-making and negotiate the differences that may arise in the relationship. However, this differs from parent-adolescent relationships. As children, adolescents held little power in their relationships with parents; they made fewer decisions and usually conformed to parental expectations (Dacey & Kenny, 1994:94). As they enter into adolescence, the parent-adolescent relationship is unstable. With their need to achieve a single sense of themselves, adolescents begin to push for fuller participation in relationships with their parents, beginning with the decisions that concern them (Dacey & Kenny, 1994:94). Many of the arguments between adolescents and parents concern trivial matters such as schoolwork, loud music, personal appearance, and chores. However, underlying most arguments is not what to decide but who gets to decide.

One of the developmental tasks of adolescence is to become autonomous, which entails separating from the family and taking responsibility for one's actions. This entails challenging patterns set in childhood, which may be misinterpreted by parents and consequently amplify the already turbulent nature

of their relationships (Jaffe, 1998:267). Although the conflict is not an enjoyable experience for either adolescents or parents, it is a necessary part of adolescents' development towards self-reliance (Paley, 2000:761). In expressing and defending their opinions and differentiating their views from their parents, they are discovering how to think for themselves and gain increased independence.

Since the parent-adolescent relationship is in a state of instability, the disciplinary style of the parent may need to be reassessed as well. Parents need to walk a fine line between granting adolescents sufficient independence to support their development whilst still protecting them from immature lapses in judgment (Henning, 2005:56). Steinberg (2001:03) believes the authoritative parenting style seems to provide this balance, as it offers warmth and acceptance; assertiveness about rules and values, and demonstrates a willingness to listen, explain, and negotiate.

This is contrasted with the authoritarian style, where adolescents are taught to follow their parents' demands and decisions without question and avoid any decision-making of their own, the permissive style, where adolescents are cared for but are responsible for regulating their own behaviour, and the rejecting-neglecting style where parents do not demand anything from their children, although they are also not receptive of their children's needs (Adams et al., 1994:167; Paley, 2000:763, & Jaffe, 1998:268).

Authoritative parenting seems to be successful with adolescents as it takes into account their cognitive development. When parents explain the reasons behind a particular stance, they acknowledge the adolescents' ability to evaluate a situation on a more sophisticated cognitive level. The contrary is true for adolescents raised in an autocratic environment where parents suppress the adolescents' attempts to exercise their newfound cognitive abilities in an attempt to control and dominate. Consequently, adolescents raised in these environments may display hostility and resentment towards their parents (Olapegba & Emelogu cited by Henning, 2005:35). A recent study by Wolfradt, Hempel & Miles (2003:523) further more supports the view that the authoritarian

style has a negative impact on adolescents. Their findings reveal that adolescents raised in this manner exhibited increased anxiety and a decreased ability to cope, whereas those raised by authoritative and permissive parents', demonstrated enhanced coping behavior.

The changes to the parent-adolescent relationship are emotionally challenging for both. Adolescents experience a constant tension between trying to establish their own private identity while at the same time staying connected to their parents. The adolescents' emotional turmoil is matched by the parents ambivalence, which is derived from them simultaneously wanting their children to be independent and wanting to keep them dependent (Jaffe, 1998:268).

2.6.2. Relationship with peers

The changes adolescents experience during this stage of development reverberate through all the arenas of their lives. However, they are least able to turn to their parents in the face of these changes, as the relationships with their parents are undergoing change themselves. The peer group plays an important role in the adolescents' move towards achieving autonomy and independence from their parents. Jaffe (1998:269) feels that during adolescence, most teenagers come to prefer the companionship of peers to that of family members.

Within the peer group, they find reassurance in being able to turn to their friends with their concerns, triumphs, secrets, and plans and create a relatively safe base for experimentation to take place. They come to regard loyalty as critical to a friendship, they compete less, and share more with their friends than they do as younger children (Irwin & Simons, 1994:135). These changes are partly due to cognitive development, as adolescents are able to express both their thoughts and feelings and can also consider another person's point of view.

During adolescence, both male and female adolescents regard friends as important. However, the two genders emphasise different aspects of the relationships. For female adolescents, the emphasis falls upon mutual trust and self-disclosure. They are open to disclosing their feelings, especially with

reference to the anxieties and concerns they experience regarding their physical changes as well as the changes to their parental and heterosexual relationships (Camarena, Sarigiani & Peterson, 1990:20). Male adolescents, however, place less emphasis on self-disclosure and being emotionally understood, and are more concerned with finding someone who shares similar interests and activities (Camerana et al., 1990:20). Although intimacy is established through their shared activities and experiences and less through discussing their feelings, they too regard loyalty and trust as an important characteristic in their peers.

Members of adolescent peer groups usually are similar to begin with (Mounts & Steinberg, 1995:915). The need for similarity in friendships may be important to adolescents' as they have to struggle to differentiate themselves from their parents; therefore they need the support of people such as themselves. This need may be exhibited in the manner in which adolescents often imitate each other's behavior and conform to the norms of the peer group (Atwater, 1996:74). However, as they become surer of themselves, they may be more likely to make up their own minds and to stick with their decisions in the face of disagreement from either parents or peers.

2.6.3. Relationship with siblings

Anderson, Linder and Bennion (1992:178)'s research shows that the presence of a sibling relationship can serve as both a risk and a protective factor in adolescents with regard to the risks of divorce. There is evidence that in addition to the changes to the parent-adolescent relationship, adolescents from non-intact families experience more negative sibling relationships than those in intact families (Hetherington, 1992:189; 1993:41, & Drapeau, Samson & Saint-Jacques, 1999:35). A study conducted by Sheehan, Darlington, Noller, & Feeney (2004:92) reveals the likelihood that adolescents from broken families have affect intense sibling relationships characterised by high levels of both hostility and warmth. The increase in conflict in sibling relationships has been attributed to the separation and divorce of their parents, the degree of conflict present between the parents (Amato, 2000:1280) and the separation of siblings due to custody arrangements (Drapeau et al., 1999:35).

It is suggested that negative sibling relationships are associated with an increased risk of externalising behaviours (Hetherington, 1992:189; 1993:41-42). However, positive sibling relationships with siblings in divorced families can lead to increased social competence (Kempton, Armistead, Wierson & Forehand, 1991:436).

Henning (2005:57) states that adolescents are often assigned greater responsibilities, such as caring for younger children and doing household tasks, when being raised in single-parent families. These adolescents become aware of financial constraints that their parents undergo through and act as sources for the parents who confide in them after the divorce (Hetherington, 1993:42). Although some adolescents view these abilities with pride, they also experience regret at not being given more time to remain dependent on their parents (Kaslow & Schwartz, 1987:179). Furthermore, the reliance of parents may interfere with their ability to individuate and separate from their parents (Atwater, 1996:74). At this time in their development, adolescents need to disengage from their parents and the family to successfully experiment with their identity. They require emotional distance to focus on themselves, for the purpose of individuation, and the peer group to assist in the separation. However, when parents divorce, adolescents are forced to re-engage with their parents' needs and wishes, thus obstructing this differentiation process.

2.7 FACTORS THAT PUT ADOLESCENTS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES AT RISK

The effects of divorce upon children depend on several factors that most researchers agree upon (Hodges & Bloom 1984:23; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:30, and Braude & Fracisco-La Grange, 1993:11). These are: the age and gender of the child when the divorce occurs, the conditions that led to the divorce, the personality of the child, the financial situation of the parents, the quality of the relationship the child has with each parent, the parents' negotiation of their own conflicts, and the availability of supportive people. In addition to the above Cui, Conger, Bryani & Elder. (2002:678) point out that other challenging factors of parental divorce include the departure of one parent

from the home, changes in socioeconomic status, moving from one home to another, transferring schools, and making new friends.

Allison and Furstenburg; Amato and Booth; Emery, Hetherington, Law, and O'Connor, Kierman; Wallerstein, and Blakeslee (cited by Furstenburg & Kierman, 2001:446) also agree that children do not react uniformly to divorce but rather construe the transition differently depending on their age and developmental stage, their temperament, the way the process is managed by their parents, and the outcome of the breakup, such as the economic impact or the amount of the preceding or lingering conflict.

Nonetheless, in review of the literature Kaslow and Schwartz (1987:51) point out that although there is some disagreement among these authors as to which age group tends to show which symptoms, a consensus exists that poor self-esteem, depression, aggression, poor school performance, and antisocial actions are very frequently found in adolescents from divorced families. Furthermore, when these behaviours occur, note the authors cited, their families contained a distant, uninvolved, unsupportive, or angry non-custodial parent and/or a chronically embittered, angry, vengeful custodial parent.

2.7.1 Adolescence phase

The Wallerstein and Kelly study (1980:38) proves that young children who have no memory of the pre-divorce life adjust better over time than older children, who remember the family that was and consider the divorce as the central event of their childhood. Braude and Francisco-La Grange (1993:11), Hodges and Bloom (1984:23); Johnston and Campbell (1988:157-158), and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980:30) found that children's responses toward their parents varied according to their ages, and were partly linked to the child's cognitive understanding of the conflict. For instance, six to eight year olds were likely to have less clear preferences, shifting allegiances and loyalty conflicts whereas nine to twelve year olds were more likely to be in alignments and those alignments likely to be harsh and unshakable (Amato, 2001:356 & Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:38).

Anderson et al. (1992:179) and Twaite et al. (1998:114) suggest that a divorce that occurs during adolescence may have a profound negative effect on the child's self-esteem, since a major component of self-concept at this time is the sense of belonging to a peer group. Adolescents typically experience shame and embarrassment with respect to their parents' divorce, and they may be unable to share this distress with their peers. Academic achievement may be affected and the development of appropriate peer relations may be harmed (Twaite et al., 1998:112).

2.7.2. Gender of the adolescent

The majority of the studies conducted before those of researchers such as Wallerstein and Kelly (1980:37); Amato (2000:1275) and Videon (2002:490) suggested that the adverse impact of divorce is greater for male adolescents than female adolescents. However, a substantial minority of the available studies that have addressed this issue have come to the opposite conclusion, namely that divorce is more devastating for female adolescents than male adolescents.

Peck and Manocherian's and Hetherington's studies cited by Twaite et al. (1998:147) conclude that the impact of marital discord and divorce is more pervasive and enduring for male adolescents than female adolescents whereas Spigelman, Spigelman and Englesson (1994:898) argue that male adolescents seem to do better when they are living with their fathers than with their mothers.

Amato and Keith (1991:51) and Twaite et al. (1998:148) suggest that the types of changes in the behaviour of adolescent females following a divorce may be different from and more difficult to measure than the types of changes among adolescent males. Whereas male adolescents tend to act out, female adolescents may become anxious and withdrawn. Such internalising behaviour problems may not even be noticed by raters such as parents and teachers, but they may have more serious implications for long-term adjustment than the externalising behaviour problems exhibited by male adolescents (Twaite et al., 1998:148).

Twaite et al. (1998:148) found out that female adolescents tend to display problem behaviours that are more difficult to monitor than the variables that have been targeted most frequently in research on divorce. Specifically, they noted that female adolescents tend to experience difficulties in the area of self esteem and heterosexual adjustment.

There may be a correlation between distress and the leaving of the same sex parent affecting the family structure and/or the function of the one parent household. Female adolescents who have same-sex role models as mothers are usually the custodial parents, thus male adolescents have difficulty in adjusting to leave without the same sex role model. Male adolescents who live with a divorced mother have even higher levels of depression and withdrawal than male adolescents who live in an intact family with high, persistent conflict (Matsafu, 2005:47). Male adolescents usually take longer to adjust to divorce than female adolescents (Amato & Keith, 1991:51).

Findings from a study conducted by Amato (2000:1275) indicate that male adolescents from divorced families exhibited more problematic behaviour than those from intact families. Twaite et al. (1998:148) report that male adolescents who were adolescents at the time of their parents' divorce were significantly more likely than male adolescents whose parents divorced when they were younger to become truant or to show academic or behavior problems. However, such difference was not found among female adolescents.

According to Matsafu (2005:48-9), male adolescents are less self controlled and more impulsive. They conform less to rules. They seem to show less guilt and are unwilling to accept blame for their own behaviour.

Spigelman et al. (1994:898) summarise the difference in reacting toward divorce between female adolescents and male adolescents as follows:

- ❑ The loss of the father is experienced as severe by the son;
- ❑ There is a higher level of aggression in male adolescents;
- ❑ It is essential in the development of male adolescents to have a male role model;

- ❑ Male adolescents are more likely than female adolescents to be exposed to marital conflict;
- ❑ Directly after the divorce male adolescents receive less support and nurturance than female adolescents; and
- ❑ Divorced mothers of male adolescents report feelings of stress and depression more often than the divorced mothers of female adolescents do.

Amato (2000:1271) and Twaite et al. (1998:146) employed data from a large national probability sample to study the effects of marital dissolution on children. They concluded that being from a non-intact family of origin does have some significance for psychological well-being in adulthood, especially for men.

2.7.3. Informing adolescents about the intention to divorce

Parents who are contemplating divorce have some sense of responsibility toward their children but in the actual procedure of divorce children are largely spectators as they are likely not consulted (Spain, 1981:91). When the final decision to separate has been reached by one or both parents, adolescents are merely informed, without a real chance to cast their negative vote. Most frequently adolescents from divorced families are abducted if not abandoned by one of the parents from the other in spite of the adolescent's heartbreak.

The manner in which adolescents react to divorce mostly depends on how they were informed about it. Since adults are the ones making the decision to divorce, they have some sense of justification for their decision and a sense of confidence that things will work out eventually. Often they also have a support network of family and friends to help them emotionally and practically during the difficult period of adjustment. But adolescents are often surprised by their parents' decision to divorce. Some adolescents knew things were tense before their parents separated but they did not expect them to divorce (Amato, 2001:356 & Henning, 2005:46). Adolescents feel they have no say in the decision (to get divorced), and they are left unsure about what to expect in the future.

Henning (2005:46) found out that most parents experience difficulty of how to tell their teenagers about their decision to divorce since they are not sure of how much to tell, how much details of their intimacy to reveal, and whether to elaborate on a parent's infidelity, frigidity, or indifference to sex. They are also not sure of where and when to tell them. Should they do so a day, a week, or a month before one parent departs from the household, or whether they should tell their children all together, separately or divided according to their age.

Since parents also feel depleted by their ordeal themselves, they become reluctant to break the news of the divorce to their teenagers fearing that it will make them unhappy, frightened or angry (Amato & Keith, 1991:53). Sometimes parents are worried and heartsick about the psychological, social, and economic effect of their decision on their adolescents in the present and for the future (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:35).

Even if the adolescents do at times sense that their parents are troubled and unhappy they pretend not to see so that they do not contribute to their parents' distress (Amato, 2000:1272). They feel a constraint about questioning their parents and wait for the parent to initiate the discussion.

This announcement when is finally made, it is usually brief and unaccompanied by any explanation of how the adolescents would be affected, what future plans were being made for them to continue seeing both parents, what the divorce was about, where the family would live, and all the many details of life which concern the adolescents and which are of central significance in helping them understand the divorce implications for them.

Sometimes parents make the announcement in such a way that it is almost impossible for the adolescents to express their feelings. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980:40); Amato and Keith (1991:53), and Amato (1993:24) emphasise the fact that parents need help in understanding that telling the adolescents about the divorce provides a signal opportunity to help the adolescent cope with the crisis, and that the telling is not an act apart but a central component in the supportive role of the parent. Johnston and Campbell (1988:127) state that adolescents

are seldom provided with any explanation about the issues under dispute or given sensible information that would help them integrate their two worlds.

Even if the adolescents were aware of the marital conflicts it does not necessarily mean that they were psychologically prepared for the divorce. The parents' inability to be helpful to the adolescents at this time would undoubtedly contribute to the intensity of their children's response, and most particularly to their fearfulness. For some adolescents divorce comes as a relief from parental bickering and the intensely conflicted family and home atmosphere of their growing up years. According to the study conducted by McLoughlin and Whitfield (1984:115), adolescents saw the divorce of their parents as a relief because of verbal and/or physical pre-separation conflicts between their parents.

Adolescents also express distress at the pain one or both parents are suffering, but recognise that the parents are better off apart. Their acceptance and understanding of the divorce did not seem to be sufficient to insulate them from the disrupting effects of the marital dissolution.

Adolescents who coped best with the crisis of parental divorce were those who demonstrated prior ego strength, a good relationship with the custodial parent and experienced minimal parent regression (Kaslow & Schwartz, 1987:178).

2.7.4. Poor custodial parent-adolescent relationship

Divorce brings about losses and changes for parents and adolescents alike. Losses experienced are loss of a significant relationship, loss of a significant person (spouses and children), loss of an established position in a society, loss of roles, loss of identity, loss of a home, loss of finance, loss of a standard of living and loss of hopes and expectations (Knox and Schacht, 1997:467). While parents are facing these losses they are not easily able to meet the emotional needs of their adolescents. At a time when their adolescents are most vulnerable and need support, their parents demonstrate a diminished capacity to parent (Anderson et al., 1992:180).

Adolescents often seem neglected just before the divorce and after the legal separation as their parents are tense, hurt, and unstable, and their energies are being directed toward physically and financially separating, quarrelling over conditions of the agreement, or perhaps taking on a new job to handle the economic drain. Adolescents' stress appears to be positively correlated with parental stress and negative ex-spousal contacts (Kaslow & Schwartz 1987:51).

A number of studies indicate that divorced custodial parents, compared with married parents, invest less time, are less supportive, have fewer rules, dispense harsher discipline, provide less supervision, and engage in more conflict with their adolescents than married ones (Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman & Conger, 1994:629). Craig and Baucum (2002:366) also confirm that parents are often under considerable stress right after the divorce and may be incapable of providing warmth or control; they may be less affectionate, inconsistent in applying discipline, uncommunicative, or unsupportive.

Inadequate, ineffective, or absent parenting deprives the adolescent of the warmth and support necessary for the development of a positive self esteem, and often results in over or under-control by either one or both parents (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:81). This also makes it difficult for an adolescent to learn relational and self-regulatory skills for successful or proper functioning. Indeed, Burns and Dunlop (1999:20) found that adolescents who see their parents as caring or understanding tend to experience less negative emotions about divorce.

Amato (2000:1280) mentions that the negative emotions were more likely to be transmitted from single mothers to adolescent children than vice versa, especially when mothers were under stress. The quality of parental functioning is one of the best predictors of children's behaviour and well-being (Burns & Dunlop, 1999:20).

Adolescents also respond with anxiety and behavioural problems to the parent's tension, agitation, and depression following the divorce. A study on parent-adolescent conflict showed that there is a relation between parental conflict and

adolescent maladjustment which includes depression, injuries, unacceptable behaviour, problem behaviour at school, and academic performance, anxiety and self esteem problem (Shek & Ma, 2001:545).

2.7.5. Loss of contact with one parent

The most important people in the world to a child are its parents since they provide for their physical, emotional, and social needs. As the child grows up the relationship between parents and children changes but does not decrease in importance. When parents divorce one parent generally becomes a full time and the other a part time parent. Adolescents may worry about who will take care of the non-custodial parent in his or her absence if the parent is alone (Henning, 2005:47).

Peck and Manocherian (1989:344) and Shek & Ma. (2001:546) emphasise that adolescents want a qualitative, ongoing relationship with both parents, and that all family members benefit when there is continued shared parenting. The continued involvement and contact of non-custodial parents appear to contribute to their ability to adjust (Henning, 2005:55).

Reduced proximity and involvement with the absent parent often result in the erosion of intimacy in the parent-adolescent relationship (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:85). This has been shown to result in the increased risk of externalising behaviours such as delinquency and substance abuse in adolescents (Simons et al., 1994:629). In most instances adolescents do not cope with the absence of the other parent; they feel unloved and unprotected and sometimes blame themselves for the divorce (Craig & Baucum, 2002:366; & Rose, 1988:87-88).

The overwhelmed loss felt by adolescents with the departure of the non-custodial parent is amplified by the implications his or her departure will bring. Henning (2005:47) mentions that adolescents experience a heightened sense of their own vulnerability, as their relationship with one parent is in danger of being destroyed.

Amato (2000:1280) shows that authoritative parenting on the part of non-

custodial fathers consistently predicted children's higher academic achievement and lower internalising problems. These results tentatively suggest that keeping contact with non-custodial fathers in enacting the parent role has beneficial consequences for adolescents.

Most fathers feel marginalised in their children's lives due to the continuing conflicts between them and their ex-spouses and some fathers try to avoid support maintenance of their children by not keeping regular contact with their children. Adolescents from divorced families perceive their fathers to be less caring, while by early adulthood nearly one third of these children doubt whether their fathers loved them at all (Portnoy, 2003:128).

2.7.6 Inter-parental conflict

Inter-parental hostility and lack of cooperation between parents following divorce is a consistent predictor of poor outcomes among offspring. Henning (2005:53) states that conflict between parents proves to be one of the most crucial moderators of adolescents' adjustment to separation and parental divorce. Inter-parental conflict can exist before, during, and after the dissolution of the marriage (Amato & Keith, 1991:52; Cui et al., 2000:511; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:39) However, at all three times, studies reveal that frequent inter-parental conflict has negative effects on adolescent development resulting in emotional disturbances (Amato, 2000:1280; Paley, 2000:762) decreased self esteem (Burns & Dunlop, 2002:59; Silitsky, 1996:154; Sun, 2001:472) and behavioral problems (Amato, 2000:1271; Simons et al. 1994:629; Furstenburg & Kierman, 2001:446 & Woodward et al., 2000:164).

Richardson and McCabe (2001:469), Peck and Manocherian (1989:344), and studies conducted by Amato and Booth; Block, Block and Gjerde (cited by Woodward, Fergusson, Belsky, 2000:164) confirm that the level of inter-parental conflict may be more central to the adolescent's post-divorce adjustment than parental absence or the divorce itself.

Parents often push adolescents to take sides, no coherent account is given for the dramatic conflict, and often even visitation schedules are not explained

(Johnston & Campbell, 1988:153). Adolescents are often confronted with contradictory rules and expectations from their parents (Matsafu, 2005:50). The worst experience for these adolescents is when they are used to express a parent's anger, to carry negative messages between the parents who refuse to talk directly to each other or are encouraged to think poorly of the other parent (Henning, 2005:54).

Although adolescents have the capacity to empathise with adults adolescents frequently feel torn between the parents when their parents express their rage towards their former spouse in front of the adolescent or even expect to carry hostile messages between the two parents (Henning, 2005:54 & Twaite et al., 1998:149). Some of the older children are used to collect evidence, to spy, to communicate threats and insults, or they are even encouraged to harass the other parent whereas others willingly attack them (Johnston & Campbell, 1988:151). The researcher observed that some adolescents are used to carry messages back and forth about arrangements for the visits and holidays; they made requests for extra money, and acted as debt collectors for overdue child support.

The absence of custody contests does not necessarily mean that there are no loyalty conflicts. Having to shuttle back and forth between two households may also be stressful to the adolescents.

2.7.7. Economic decline

For most families, divorce presents some decline in financial resources. These financial hardships may bring about extended challenges for the adolescents such as a considerable reduction in their standard of living and need to relocate to new residence and community (Drapeu et al., 1999:17).

Post-divorce economic hardship is also associated with negative outcomes among adolescents. Henning (2005:58) indicates that the change to adolescents' socio-economic status is reportedly associated with feelings of shame and rejection, and may lead to social withdrawal. She further mentions that this decline in financial income often results in the increased risk of deviant

behaviour due to diminished monitoring by single parents who are required to work longer hours and limited vocational opportunities as a consequence associated with divorce.

Peck and Manocherian (1989:345) state that father absence is directly related to economic instability, which in turn affects an adolescents' adjustment to divorce. For instance, the child may lack proper clothes or pocket money, and this could make him or her to feel different from the peer group. The decline in financial resource can affect the adolescents' self-esteem if they perceive the non-custodial parent as rejecting them.

Previously the father used to be primarily responsible for the economic security of the family; therefore, with his absence there may not be sufficient income for the maintenance of the family. Research has shown that fathers' payment of child support is positively related to adolescent's school attainment and behaviour and provides additional support for the importance of income in facilitating children's post-divorce adjustment (Amato, 2000:1280).

Parents also become preoccupied with the change in family economics created by the divorce. The most obvious being the legal requirement that the divorcing spouses divide the property equally between them. What once supported one family unit must now support two families (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:22). This decline in standard of living and fear of financial instability cause lots much stress on the custodial-parent and the older children thus may have effects on the emotional stability and availability of the parents, as well as on their parenting effectiveness.

2.7.8. Other stressful divorce-related events

The numbers of negative life events to which adolescents are exposed are a consistent predictor of adolescents' divorce adjustment. Changes of location, new schools, and activities, and loss of established peer support groups appear to be disruptive to the adolescents' well-being. According to Amato (2000:1280), moving to poorer neighbourhoods is the most common stressor following divorce as custodial parents are forced to live on smaller household incomes.

The splitting of relationships due to divorce or separation can also mean loss of grand-parents, extended family, friends, teachers, coaches, family friends and others (Portnoy, 2003:130). For many adolescent children divorce means a change in the nature of the relationship with access to extended family members as well as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins (Peck & Manocherian, 1989:343). Such loss deprives the adolescent of familiar and the needed support while causing a sense of disruption and emotional instability.

Teenagers can be affected by divorce in two ways. For those who are already having difficulties, divorce creates an added burden, increasing the risk of emotional problems; for others the change in participation in family life is a maturing experience. They may be pushed into or assume parenting roles for their siblings (Amato & Keith, 1991:52 and Johnston & Campbell, 1988:153).

2.8. ADOLESCENTS' REACTION TO PARENTAL DIVORCE

Although most adolescents may be aware of the discord and unhappiness in their parents' marriage, very few adolescents expect their parents to divorce (Henning, 2005:46). In response to the news of their parents' decision to divorce, some adolescents may withdraw and isolate themselves from others in an attempt to deny the reality of their parents' physical separation.

Henning (2005:46) indicates that some adolescents may feel a strong sense of relief for the parental divorce especially in cases where the marital relationship has been characterised by violence and elevated conflict. Although these adolescents might not want their parents to divorce, they are able to recognise the superior alternative to the tension and stress that previously characterised the family (Burns & Dunlop, 1999:33).

Although most adolescents have attained formal operational thought and should, therefore, be able to take an objective stance from perceived parental rejection, their advanced cognitive abilities can contribute to a belief that they should have been able to intervene in some manner regarding the divorce. Therefore, this could create the perception that they are responsible for their

parents' divorce which results in a pervasive guilt.

The presence of anger in adolescents is noted as being the strongest and the most consistent emotion felt throughout the divorce process over time (Burns & Dunlop, 1999:20).

Family difficulties, including marital separation and divorce, affect the social, emotional, and psychological functioning of school-age children (Rose, 1998:87; Matsafu, 2005:50; and Knox & Schacht, 1997:467).

Knox & Schacht (1997:475) in their study established that older children from divorced families experienced lower levels of psychological well-being such as, depression and low life satisfaction; family well being; socio-economic well-being such as, low educational attainment, income, and occupational status; and physical health. Woodward et al. (2000:163) also confirm that childhood attachment security has been associated with subsequent social competence, interpersonal functioning, cognitive development, and psychological well-being in adolescence and adulthood.

In addition to the above, according to an earlier study conducted by mental health professionals earlier about the reaction of adolescents towards parental divorce has shown that most adolescents had severe difficulties in school and in personal and social relationships. For instance, there was a noticeable increase in drug and alcohol use and a higher rate of delinquency. Adolescents from divorced families showed high rates of depression, aggression, and social withdrawal. The study conducted by the mental health professionals challenged the idea that helping children express their feelings in therapy at the time of divorce would have long-term preventive benefits. Wallerstein's research shows that ways had not yet been found to prepare adolescents adequately for the stress of divorce. Therapy and counseling may be helpful at the time, but they do not seem to have long-term preventative effects.

Another study suggests that adolescents who grow up in resource-poor neighborhood might have a more difficult time developing the skills necessary to

succeed in school, stay out of trouble, avoid mistimed pregnancies, and ultimately achieve financial independence as adults (Kowaleski-Jones, 2000:449). Such a stance may result in the loss of impulse control, manifested in alcohol and drug abuse, aggression, promiscuity, and truancy.

The parents' psychological distress was found to be very disturbing to adolescent children (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:84). They have a great desire for a stable and strong adult who can provide a steady, reliable, and supportive presence during the many crises of growing up.

Amato and Keith (1991:51) in comparing the well-being of adolescents whose parents divorced with that of adolescents whose parents were married to each other showed that adolescents from divorced families scored significantly lower on a variety of outcomes, including academic achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept, and social competence.

Consistent with this finding Amato (2000:1279) confirms that a large number of studies have demonstrated that parental divorce is a risk factor for multiple problems in adulthood, including low socio-economic attainment, poor subjective well-being, increased marital problems, and a greater likelihood of seeing one's own marriage ends in divorce.

Luttig (1997:44) suggests that there are six major variables that determine an adolescent's adjustment, namely:

- The quality of the nurturing relationship between the adolescent and the custodial parent;
- The quality of the relationship between the ex-spouses;
- The psychological adjustment of the parents, especially of the custodial parent;
- A reliable relationship with the non-custodial parent;
- Availability of financial resources; and
- The achievement by the adolescent of a perceived and actual sense of control concerning the divorce situation.

2.9. THE AFTERMATH OF DIVORCE ON ADOLESCENTS

Many adolescents find parental divorce to be very traumatic. Although they usually experience immense turmoil within, they may outwardly appear cool and detached. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980:35) mention that for children and adolescents, the separation and its aftermath is the most stressful period of their lives.

2.9.1. Psychological impact

According to Peck and Manocherian (1989:343), divorce is perceived by parents as a solution to their problems, whereas few children seem not to want it no matter how much marital tension preceded the split. Children from divorced families usually feel abandoned, angry, guilty, anxious, depressed, isolated, and rejected (Hetherington, 1993:39).

Divorce can influence not only the relationships adolescents have with each parent, but can also influence their mental and physical health (Hoffman, 1992:71). Taylor (2001:149) describes parental divorce as being more traumatic than losing a parent. With the death of a parent, the child is able to mourn the parent. With divorce, the marriage ends but children can be subjected to adjustments and trauma for the rest of their lives (Basson, Pretorius, & Arndt, 2008:91). A dominant desire among teenagers is for the parents to reunite so that the family can be whole again (Hoffman, 1992:72).

According to Lauer and Lauer (cited by Matsafu, 2005:41) initial reactions to parental divorce may include intense anger, self-blame, fears about the future and loyalty conflicts as the adolescent is pressured to take sides in the parental battle. Johnston and Campbell (1988:154) state that most adolescents become apprehensive, vigilant and chronically stressed at the transitions of their parents' divorce.

Many of the adolescent children from divorced families face the tensions and sorrows of divorce with little help from their parents or anyone else. This is because during the critical months following the separation parental care

diminishes not because parents are necessarily less loving or less concerned with their children, but because of the radical alterations in their lives and therefore focus their attention on their own troubles (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:36).

Divorce may also contribute to an adolescent experiencing social or peer rejection, or to the adolescent isolating him or herself because he or she does not fit in with his or her friends (Magane, 2000:1). Johnston Campbell (1988:154) observed that most adolescent reacted to their parents' divorce by being withdrawn, unresponsive or blocked out to the world.

Twaite et al. (1998:115); Rose (1998:87); Matsafu (2005:50); and Knox & Schacht (1997:467) describe adolescents at the time of their parents' divorce as angry, upset, and sad. Unlike younger children they rarely blame themselves for the conflict. Rather, they are likely to be angry with both parents, blaming them for upsetting their lives.

They express concern about their parents' values and are deeply distressed regarding their own futures as adults. Given the duration of time to separate psychologically from parents, adolescents can view parents as individuals and establish a less dependent relationship with them. Divorce pre-empts the gradual differentiation and devaluation of parents, forcing the adolescent to prematurely form judgments about the parents, which can lead to unrealistic negation of them as role models.

2.9.2. Social impact

Just like toddlers, adolescents depend upon a secure base so they can leave; and divorce threatens this base. Others feel they have to hurry and grow up whilst others become attached to their parents and, therefore, do not intend to leave (Peck & Manocherian, 1989:355).

Because of their own unsettled nature, adolescents' reactions to divorce include anger, a desire for a stable home, and a need for clear boundaries between them and their parents, especially around such issues as sexuality, dating, and

household responsibilities.

Adolescents may sometimes assume the role of companionship to their rejected parent and this may isolate them from their peers and may prevent them from moving on (Peck & Manocherian, 1989:356). Sometimes adolescents tend to protect themselves from the conflict preceding separation by distancing themselves.

Discussed hereunder are the common reactions by adolescents following parental divorce.

2.9.2.1. Development of anti-social behaviour

According to Spigelman et al., (1994:897) most adolescents distance themselves and withdraw from their parents in response to the divorce and this renders them vulnerable to behave badly. It has also been suggested that as a result of this parental separation, some adolescents disengage at an earlier age from the family, which, in turn increase their exposure to anti-social groups and activities (Woodward et al., 2000:163).

Adolescents from divorced families are two to three times more likely to engage in adolescent delinquent behaviour than their peers from intact families with a higher incidence of conduct behaviour than in girls (Portnoy, 2003:128).

2.9.2.2. Early engagement into premarital sexual activities

Single-parent families have been associated with the children marrying while they are still teenagers, having children while unmarried, and getting a divorce too (Knox & Schacht, 1997:475). Whitebeck, Yoder, Hoyt, and Conger (1999:935) have found evidence of a positive relationship between early intercourse and depressive symptoms among female adolescents.

Adolescent children from divorced families are more likely to have sex at a younger age and have more sexual partners during their high school years than children from intact families. Portnoy (2003:128) found out that earlier sexual activity is likely due to the early onset of menstruation in girls with poor self-

regulatory skills and that residing in a single mother household appears to increase the likelihood of sexual activity among boys. Some may take the attitude that if their mother or father sleeps with a date why can't they. Furthermore, teenagers may feel competition with their dating parents and want to engage in the same dating behaviors that their parents are modeling (Kaslow & Schwartz, 1987:178).

External controls and discipline are weakened by divorce. These adolescents are more aware of their parents' sexual objects and this may cause them to form heterosexual relationships at an early age. This situation occurs because divorced families tend not to teach the skills needed to gain self-control or self-mastery because many of these adolescents disengage from parents at an early age. These findings suggest that low quality primary relationships with parents result in depressed emotional states that increase vulnerability to peer influence and peer support (Whitebeck et al., 1999:935; Knox & Schacht, 1997:475).

For people to be capable of achieving emotional and sexual intimacy they must first achieve a good sense of their own identity, that is, who they are and what they believe, only then is their ego sufficiently strong so that they can risk becoming very close to another (Kaslow & Schwartz, 1987:13). Divorce necessitates redefining one's identity and perhaps ultimately fulfilling one's desire for intimacy with a new partner.

Theories of human development emphasise the importance of an emotionally supportive and responsive environment (Craig & Baucum, 2002:392). Studies conducted by Young, Jensen, Olsen, and Cundick (cited in Craig & Baucum, 2002:392) show that generally, male and female teenagers from two-parent families have less and later sexual experience than those from single-parent families. Their feelings may well have been based not only on their preadolescent/adolescent perceptions of the facts of their parents' separation, but also on their sense of having been betrayed by those very adults who were supposed to provide protection and security to them (Kaslow & Schwartz, 1987:178).

2.9.2.3 Premature independence

Rose (1998:91) maintain that the sudden loss of one's parents as role models may lead some adolescents to have a premature independence. Such adolescents become worried about themselves, their siblings, and their parents. They assume more household and family caretaking responsibilities earlier in their lives than they would have assumed had the divorce not occurred (Henning, 2005:47).

In addition, what was meant to last for a few months might go on for years as the parent becomes dependent and the adult child feels guilty about wanting to leave because the parent has limited or openly communicated that this would be perceived as a second abandonment and would be intolerable (Kaslow & Schwartz, 1987:179).

Clinically it appears that if the residential parent does not date, he or she feels socially alienated and isolated and clings to the adolescent for contact and bolstering up, the adolescent's ability to individuate and leave him or her to go to college or take a job away from home is hampered (Kaslow & Schwartz, 1987:179).

These feelings may be realistic as parents are not always considerate of the impact of their continuing post-divorce conflict on their own grown children and may attempt to keep them embroiled by using them as confidants. Basson et al. (2008:95) found out that older-children from divorced families loose out on a carefree childhood and on a normal family life

2.9.2.4 Inability to initiate and maintain relationships

Children from divorced families are more likely to experience difficulty in initiating romantic relationships in adulthood, marital instability, and a slight elevation in their own divorce rates (Portnoy, 2003:128; Amato, 2000:1276 and Twaite et al., 1998:4). The primary manifestation of this effect is the sudden emergence of an intense fear of betrayal, which may lead to the avoidance of heterosexual relationships. Another aspect of the sleeper effect is the sudden

realisation that one is angry with one's parents. This anger is triggered by the prospect of having his or her own relationship.

A longitudinal research study conducted by (Hoffman, 1992:72) also confirms that young women in their late teens and early twenties may suffer from sleeper effect of the divorce of their parents, which occurred when they were children. Girls from father absent families were observed to have difficulty in getting involved into heterosexual relationships (Matsafu, 2005:49).

Twaite et al. (1998:4) furthermore suggests that when these adolescents confront the developmental task of establishing love and intimacy, they lack a template for a loving relationship between a man and a woman. They conclude that our divorce prone society is producing a generation of young adults so anxious about attachment that their ability to create enduring families is imperiled.

Some adolescents who were exposed to poor parental models of interpersonal behaviour might have difficulty forming stable, satisfying, intimate relationships as young adults (Amato, 2000:1277). He makes mention that parental divorce reduces commitment to marriage among offspring particularly for divorces that were preceded by relatively low levels of parental conflict.

These considerations suggest that even if some adolescents show improvements in functioning a year or two after the marital disruption, delayed effects of divorce might appear only when their adolescents have reached young adulthood.

Amato (2000:1276) developed a useful model for summarising and outlining the mechanisms through which parental divorce is presumed to affect subsequent marital instability. The model postulates that parental divorce affects the risk of offspring divorce through three mediating mechanisms, which are:

- Life course and socio-economic variables: the idea is that adolescents from divorced families make life course decisions such as early marriage, having a pre-marital birth, or cohabiting before marriage;

- Commitment and attitudes toward divorce: they bring to marriage attitudes, levels of commitment, and patterns of interpersonal behaviour that are detrimental to marital stability; and
- Patterns of interpersonal behaviour.

2.9.3. Academic impact

Most (couples) married partners divorce while their children are still of school going age (Rose, 1998:87). According to the study conducted by McCombs and Forehand (1989:876), the academic performance of adolescents from broken families is not the same. Instead it depends on a number of family variables such as lower levels of maternal depression and inter-parental conflict.

The trauma of divorce disrupts the adolescent's ability to participate freely in the process of learning. Scientists such as Langeveld, Bollinger, Sonneskus, and Ferreira (cited by McCombs & Forehand, 1989:876) agree that an adolescent who is emotionally disturbed or upset may experience problems with effective learning and scholastic achievement. A high level of anxiety in the adolescent is expressed through restlessness, inability to concentrate, intrusive thoughts about divorce, and drop in school performance.

Authors such as Wallerstein and Kelly (1980:35) and Rose (1998:88) point out that adolescents from divorced families display the following classroom behavior, which is typical of emotional disruption and disturbance: regression, aggression, increased emotionalism, forgetfulness, nervousness, tiredness, liability, withdrawal, scholastic deterioration, and impulsive behaviour. Some adolescents may maintain their academic standards but get into difficulty with classmates because of their increased irritability.

Crosnoe et al., (2002:690) maintain that adolescents from economically disadvantaged families are less likely to enroll at college and since education is a primary means to adult success, the problems that these youths have in entering higher education represent a clear obstacle to social mobility. The lack of education also has broader implications by reducing the pool of skilled workers and undermining the social service system.

Economic hardship due to parental divorce might lead some adolescents to abandon plans to attend college, resulting in lower occupational attainment and wages throughout adulthood (McCombs & Forehand, 1989:877).

Adolescents at this age may engage in self-destructive behaviour such as truancy, school failure, substance abuse, and sexual acting out since conflict and the pain of the divorce leave parents with little energy to nurture them. Matsafu (2005:42) and Rose (1998:88) state that some adolescents tend to have higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse, premarital sexual activity, poorer academic performance, higher rates of school dropouts, poor classroom conduct that interferes with performance, and a number of learning disorders than other adolescents.

2.10 AVAILABLE SUPPORT FOR ADOLESCENTS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES

The divorce process results in the loss of the family structure for adolescents, and when that structure collapse; their world is temporarily without supports. Although the family structure may have been unstable before the divorce, it still provided some form of support and protection (Henning, 2005:46). Thus, adolescents can be left feeling alone, isolated and scared about the present and their future (Jennings & Howe, 2001:92).

After the divorce has finally occurred, the kind of support system the adolescent has is a critical factor. Do they have family support to help them with their concerns? What about friends? Are they accessible or does the divorces interrupt with their own beliefs. Although in reality an extended support system may be in place, this is cold comfort for the adolescents faced with the disintegration of their immediate support system (Amato & Keith, 1991:53). This section is aimed at outlining the importance of social support systems to adolescent youngsters following parental divorce.

Braude and Francisco-De Lange (1993:14) indicate that divorce implies transition accompanied by uncertainty, the collapse of familiar structures and

provisions, and a change in existing relationships.

The functions of the family include providing emotional stability and meeting the physical needs of the child. Institutions such as educational, recreational and social also play a vital role in meeting their needs. In instances where certain support systems cease to function, other systems are required to meet the unmet needs.

To give support is to nourish, to strengthen, and to sustain. Support should not be understood as propping up someone weak but rather as increasing a person's strength to facilitate his or her mastery of the environment.

Braude and Francisco-De Lange (1993:16) make mention of three elements of support, namely the mobilisation of an individual's psychological resources, the sharing of tasks and the provision of extra supplies of money, materials, tools, skills, and cognitive guidance.

The significance of a social support system cannot be overestimated. When a person facing a crisis is assured of assistance in the form of emotional or practical aid his or her sense of security and well being will be enhanced. Usually when a marriage is dissolved the couple's individual network is likely to resume its pre-marital characteristics, that is, the network become less kin-centered, less heterosexual, and less couple oriented. Instead, relationships with own relatives are maintained but not with the spouse's relatives or acquaintances (Braude & Francisco-De Lange, 1993:17).

2.10.1. TYPES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

The researcher will make a distinction between informal and formal support. Informal supporters include family, friends, and relatives whereas formal supporters include teachers, counselors, religious leaders, social workers, psychologists, medical practitioners, lawyers, and support groups.

In the event that adolescents are faced with a decline in parental support, external sources of support such as grandparents, friends, or teachers can

serve as a buffer from the detrimental effects of their parents' marital transitions (Hetherington, 1989:14 & Silitsky, 1996:152).

2.10.1.1 Informal support networks

2.10.1.1.1 Family as a support network

The best-known and most easily available support system in all societies is the marital and family group. The family ranks first among natural support systems. Caplan cited by Braude and Francisco-De Lange (1993:18) identifies certain elements which must be present for a family group to act as a support system.

Support from families is discussed under the following headings: divorced parents, extended family members, and siblings.

➤ Divorced parents

The most important people in the world to an adolescent are its parents. Parents provide for their physical, emotional, and social needs. As the adolescent develops the relationship between him or her and the parents' changes but does not decrease in importance. According to the studies conducted earlier (Graham, Mitchell, Walzack, & Burns, & Wallerstein & Blakeslee cited by Amato, 2000:1280; & Anderson et al. 1992:180), during the initial phase of divorce, parents are usually less able to parent constructively and provide support and thereby bridge the gap.

➤ Extended family members

Kalish and Visher cited by Braude and Francisco-La Grange (1993:19) studied grandparents of children of divorce and found that many such grandparents felt a sense of powerlessness and experienced fears and anxieties in relation to their grand-parenting. Grandparents often felt isolated from their grandchildren.

The relationships between extended family members and the adolescents after parental divorce depend heavily on the quality of the relationship prior to the dissolution of the marriage (Braude & Francisco, 1993:19). Support from extended family members and especially grandmothers were considered the most available adults apart from the parents (Mitchell, cited by Braude &

Francisco-La Grange, 1993:20). She postulated that grandparents were able to serve a vital role as they could remain more objective than parents and serve the needs of their children.

2.10.1.2 Formal support networks

In the present society there is no one specialist agency responsible for providing help for divorcing families. There is a variety of agencies which offer help with specific difficulties resulting from marital conflicts/divorces.

2.10.1.2.1 Professionals as a support network

There are many specialised professionals such as the family doctor, lawyer, religious leader, psychologist, and social worker. Doctors and Lawyers are well-positioned to offer support to parents and children going through divorce but they do not usually ask questions about the children's coping mechanisms when parents consult them about the marriage break up.

Most families in the society belong to different denominations but they rarely receive support in the form of counseling from them. Parents do at times seek professional intervention from social workers and psychologists yet it is uncommon for such professionals to involve children in such services.

2.11. CONCLUSION

Children from divorced families face numerous economic and psycho-social challenges that impact negatively on their upbringing, development and more often into their adulthood. Parental divorces also affect how adolescents relate with their immediate family members following the divorce. These require that emotional and material support be provided to adolescents and their parents by extended family members as well as professionals.

CHAPTER 3

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data gathered from 20 adolescents from divorced families and 10 custodial parents. The exploratory research design was used. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was utilised to select the adolescents from divorced families who met the following criterion: The criterion for inclusion of adolescents in the study was that their parents were divorced, they were aged between 13 and 18 and they were from various socio-economic classes and different ethnic groups.

The Nvivo programme was utilised to manage the collected data by way of storing, linking ideas and documents, and by coding documents at nodes to show where the concept appeared in the text. The researcher also managed to develop memo ideas about the data by means of this programme.

3.2 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

This section is intended to present the respondents' personal information such as age, socio-economic class, ethnicity and gender.

3.2.1 Sample characteristics

The respondents comprised of twenty adolescents from divorced families and ten custodial parents.

Twelve female-adolescents and eight male-adolescents participated in the study. The respondents' ages ranged between 13 and 18 years. The mean age was 16 years. Nineteen respondents (95%) were Africans and one respondent (5%) was white. Thirteen respondents (65%) were Pedi speaking, six (30%) Tswana speaking and one (5%) was Afrikaans speaking. Eleven respondents' (55%) custodial parents were unemployed at the time of divorce, five respondents' (25%) custodial parents were not gainfully employed, and four respondents' (20%) custodial parents were fulltime employed. Eighteen respondents (90%) were in the custody of their mothers and two (10%) were in

the custody of their fathers, those were, a 15 year-old male and a 13 year-old female.

3.3 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

This section is based on the adolescents' description of their relationships with their immediate family members and friends.

3.3.1 Adolescents' relationships with custodial parents following parental divorce

Divorced custodial parents very often they are overwhelmed by their situation and as a result fail to maintain good relationships with their adolescent children. Eleven respondents (55%) stated that their relationship with the custodial parents had severed. The following excerpts demonstrate how the respondents' viewed their relationships with their custodial parents.

My relationship with my mother turned sour following their divorce with my father (M 15 yrs).

My mother always shouts at us and she is always in a bad mood (F 17yrs).

I find it very difficult to relate with my mother since I do not find a place in my heart to forgive her for letting us move out of our house (M 16yrs).

These findings illustrate that most of the respondents had a strained relationship with their custodial parents because when the custodial parents were distressed they are either aloof or shout at their children. Some of the respondents were angry with their custodial parents and they blamed them for the divorce. This implies that the respondent could not accept his or her custodial parent's explanation for ending the marriage. The above responses also suggest that some of the custodial parents were still emotionally affected by the divorce as they failed to maintain good interpersonal relationships with their children following the divorce.

Another three respondents (15%) described their relationship with their custodial parents as unstable. The respondents shared the following experiences:

My mother is sometimes moody and she calls us names and at times she is happy with us (F 13yrs).

I have a good relationship with my mother except when she is upset with my father (F 15yrs).

These responses reflect that the relationships between the respondents and the custodial parents were to a certain extent strained. The responses also demonstrate that the custodial parents were still bitter following the divorce; hence, they were unable to control their tempers.

The above-mentioned statements support the findings from previous studies that custodial parents very often have considerable stress right after the divorce and may be incapable to provide warmth for their children and their relationships become affected as a result of instability (Henning, 2005:56).

However, six respondents (30%) expressed that they related well with their custodial parents. The respondents described their relationships with their custodial parents as follows:

I have a good relationship with my mother and she seems to be relieved from lots of stress since the divorce (M 18yrs).

My mother is always happy with us since the divorce (F 18yrs).

My relationship with my mother is very good as my father does not bother her anymore. I am like a friend to her (F 16yrs).

I relate very well with my mother and she confides in me (M 17yrs.)

My mother is kind and caring these days (F 17yrs).

The responses indicate that the respondents were happy because they realised that their custodial parents were stress free. The custodial parents were able to bond with their children in the absence of their fathers. The responses also imply that the respondents were unhappy with what was going on between their parents and they were probably wishing for separation or divorce. Hence the divorce came as a relief. These findings reflect that the adolescents were relieved to see their custodial parents happy.

This information suggests that not all relationships between adolescents and their custodial parents become strained after parental divorce. Positive adjustment on the part of the custodial parent does help to maintain good interpersonal relationships among the family members. The researcher attributed this to the fact that both the respondents and the custodial parents were relieved after the divorce. Hence, their relationship grew more in support of one another.

3.3.2 Adolescents' relationship with non-custodial parents following parental divorce

Some non-custodial parents have a tendency to shun away from their children in an attempt to punish their ex-partners. The conflict between divorced parents makes it difficult for adolescents to relate freely with both parents. Amato (2000:1280) observed that marital breakups that are full of inter-parental conflict are not only a direct stressor for adolescents, but also interfere with the adolescents' attachments to the non-custodial parents.

Adolescents develop anger towards their non-custodial parents either because they blame them for the divorce or because the parents hurt them deeply. Most respondents gave the impression that they were scared to relate with their non-custodial parents. Fifteen respondents (75%) indicated that a lot of tension existed between them and their non-custodial parents. The following excerpts describe the respondents' experiences:

My parents fight a lot about us and I am unable to relate freely with my father (F 18).

My father is too serious we are scared of him (F 16yrs).

It appears my father has lost interest in all of us since they parted ways with my mother (F 15yrs).

My father always alleged that my mother did not want him to discipline me and so he still hates me (M 14yrs).

I hate my father a lot for abandoning us and now we are suffering because of him (F 14yrs).

I am okay without him; I feel I am not ready to see him as he hurt us (F 15yrs).

I still visit my mother although she suspects that I am digging information to pass it on to my father (M 15yrs).

My father rarely visits us and whenever we arrange to visit him he makes excuses. He thinks we are siding with our mother (M 17 yrs).

These statements reflect that some respondents experienced anxiety, hurt and hatred while others perceived their fathers as aloof and suspicious that the children were siding with their mothers. Some of them perceived their non-custodial parents as being unfriendly, less caring, or as pain inflictors. They said that their fathers ignored them and, therefore, concluded that their fathers never loved them at all. It also appears from the above statements that some respondents were still angry with their non-custodial parents and blamed them for the stress they had. Other respondents were angry with their non-custodial parents that they did not want to relate with them anymore. These findings show that the majority of the respondents (75%) had negative feelings towards their non-custodial parents and they blamed them for the suffering they endured as a result of the divorce.

However, five respondents (25%) non-custodial parents maintained contact and continued to support their children and, therefore, had a good relationship with them. For example some of the respondents indicated that:

I am still close to my father as we were before he moved out; I often visit him and he sometimes come to our house (F 13yrs).

I visit my mother anytime I want and we communicate a lot over the phone too (F 13yrs).

My father is very nice to us and I am fond of him (F 16yrs).

These responses indicate that some adolescents had a good relationship with their non-custodial parents. The continued contact and involvement of non-custodial parents in their children's lives strengthened their relationships. These responses also reflect that some custodial parents do not deny their ex-spouses access to their children. These custodial parents demonstrated their understanding between parental divorce and parental responsibilities including

the fact that adolescents require qualitative, ongoing relationship with both parents. The findings support the idea that all family members benefit when there is continued shared parenting (Peck & Manocherian, 1989:344).

3.3.3 Adolescents' relationship with siblings following parental divorce

Eleven respondents (55%) stated that their relationship with their siblings was strained. The following excerpts illustrate this point:

It appears as though we are divided between our parents. My elder siblings are not in good terms with our father and therefore, expect me to dislike him too (M 14yrs).

The relationship between my siblings and I is unstable. Sometimes it is good and at times bad since my mother told them that I am no good (F 15yrs).

My little sister dislikes me. She says that I am troublesome and add more stress to our mother (M 14yrs).

My brother is disrespectful I cannot stand his behavior (F 14yrs).

My sister and I quarrel a lot more especially because she passes false information about me and my mother to our father (M 17yrs).

These statements reflect that the respondents were bitter because of the divorce and as a result they had strained relationships with their siblings. Some respondents showed that the siblings blamed one another for distressing their custodial parents. Others became too protective of their custodial parents. Some siblings' relationships were affected by the inter-parental conflicts. This information suggests that an increase in conflict between siblings may be associated with parental divorce. For instance, it has been observed that adolescents from single parent families are likely to experience more negative sibling relationships than those in two parent families (Hetherington, 1992:189; 1993:41 & Drapeau et al., 1999:35).

However, some respondents had to mature earlier given the responsibilities they had to assume such as providing support to their younger siblings and custodial parents. Seven respondents (35%) mentioned that they became close as siblings especially because their younger siblings did not understand what was going on. The relationships among siblings were described as follows:

We have become very close to each other since our parents divorced (F 18yrs).

My siblings and I are fond of each other and we share most of our belongings to minimize costs for our mother (M 17yrs).

I am very helpful to my mother as I take care of my siblings while she is at work and I also help with household chores (F 15yrs).

I relate well with my siblings especially because I take care of them whilst my mother is at work (F 16yrs).

The above responses show that the respondents' relationship with their siblings grew because of their parents' divorce. They also shared whatever they had to cut on expenses and showed sympathy for their custodial parents. These findings indicate that some respondents felt pity for their custodial parents and, therefore, assisted them by looking after their younger siblings. This in a way strengthened the relationship among the siblings. The above findings are in support of Rose's (1998:91) statement that the sudden loss of a father figure led some older children to mature early. Such children are often assigned greater responsibilities, such as caring for younger children and do household tasks, when they are raised in single-parent families.

Two respondents (10%) did not have siblings.

3.3.4 Adolescents' ability to initiate and maintain relationships with peers

Nine respondents (45%) found it very easy to get along with their friends after parental divorce. The following excerpts illustrate their encounter:

I easily initiated friendships with boys of my age because they made me feel fulfilled (M 14yrs).

I joined the most famous group of boys in the area and that made me feel cool (M 16yrs).

I simply turned to my peers for support and acceptance (M 15yrs).

I found it easy to initiate relationships with my peers as they made me to forget that I was hurting (F 15yrs).

These responses show that the respondents (mostly males) found it easy to initiate friendships with their peers and this satisfied their sense of belonging.

They also turned to their peers in an attempt to forget about their distressing situations. These findings suggest that troubled adolescents may find solace in their relationships with friends (Whitebeck et al., 1999:941).

Five respondents (25%) stated that they were unable to initiate or maintain new friendships as they were too concerned about the health of their custodial parents who exhibited emotional strain after the divorce. The following are excerpts that describe their situation:

I am always home with my mother (F 17yrs).

I cannot leave my mother to be with my friends as I am scared that she will be lonely (M 18yrs).

These responses show that the respondents tried to keep their custodial parents company thus depriving themselves of the opportunity to interact with friends. The fact that their custodial parents appeared to be emotionally affected and relied on the adolescents for support made the respondents emotionally affected too. Hence they neglected their own well-being to support their parents. The findings support Basson, Pretorius and Arndt's (2008:100) observation that older children respond to parental distress by trying to offer support and to become the caretaker of the parent.

Nevertheless, four respondents (20%) indicated that it was difficult for them to initiate and maintain relationships with peers for fear of rejection. Some of the respondents' expressed themselves as follows:

I am afraid to initiate friendships with my peers because they may reject me (F 17yrs).

I do not think that there will be anyone interested in me since I do not have a good family background (F 18 yrs).

People think if you are from a single parent family you cannot make a good friendship so I stay by myself (F 16yrs).

These respondents feared rejection by their friends as they had assumed that their friends would not accept them for who they were. Societies still undermine children from divorced families and this makes it difficult for such children to adjust and feel accepted. The findings also illustrate that female adolescents

thought of themselves as unlovable or not worthy as they compared themselves with their peers from two parent families. Their negative self-perception hampered them from forming relationships with other children of their age. These findings support the idea by Twaite et al. (1998: 114) that teenagers typically experience shame and embarrassment with respect to their parents' divorce, and they may be uncomfortable to share this distress with their peers.

Only two (10%) respondents indicated that they kept the friends that they had prior their parents' divorce. The following statements illustrate the point:

My friend was always there for me even prior the divorce of my parents (F 14yrs).

I kept my old friends as I was more comfortable with them (F 18yrs).

These respondents maintained relationships with their old friends as their friends who were supportive towards them.

3.4 ADOLESCENTS' REACTION TOWARD PARENTAL DIVORCE

3.4.1 Adolescents' first informant about the parents' intention to divorce

Henning (2005:46) found out that most parents experience difficulty in telling their children about their intention to divorce since they are not sure of how much to tell, how much details of their intimacy to reveal, and whether to elaborate on a parent's infidelity, frigidity, or indifference to sex. They were also not sure of where and when to tell them. Should they do so a day, a week, or a month before one parent departs from the household, or whether they should tell their children together, separately or divide them according to their age.

Fourteen respondents (70%) noted that they were informed by one or both parents shortly before they physically separated. The following are some of the experiences shared by the respondents:

My mother explained to us before she could initiate the divorce (F 18yrs).

My father told us that he intended to move out of the house as a result of the quarrels they always had with my mother and asked us to decide if we will move out with him or stay with our mother (M 15yrs).

My mother told us when my father moved out to stay with his girlfriend (F 14yrs).

Both my parents explained it to us shortly before our father could move out to stay with his girlfriend (F 17yrs).

My mother told me as I insisted on knowing about my father's whereabouts (M 16yrs).

Many respondents indicated that they were informed by one or both parents about the divorce. The reason for informing them was because they wanted to move out of the house and not because the parents thought that it was important to involve children in divorce matters. The above responses demonstrate that most respondents were informed about their parents' decision to divorce without an explanation about the reasons that led to the divorce and the changes that they should anticipate. These responses imply that parents may be overwhelmed and as a result fail to inform the children formally about their decision to divorce. Adolescents are also neither given an opportunity to express their feelings nor time to process their parents' decision.

The fact that most divorces occur after a lengthy period of an unhealthy family life, which is full of violence makes it obvious for parents to overrule the necessity for them to inform their children about the finality of the divorce. Apart from that, in the African culture children are taken for granted, as most parents do not think that it is necessary to inform them early about their intention to separate or divorce.

Six respondents (30%) stated that they were not formally informed about the divorce. They overheard their parents talking to other people about it. The following quotations illustrate their experience:

I overheard my mother talking to my relatives and friends about it (F 13yrs).

I was not aware of what was happening until I overheard my relatives talk about it (M 14yrs).

I just heard my relatives talking about it (F 15yrs).

These responses support Amato and Keith's (1991:53) findings that parents

also feel depleted by their ordeal themselves such that they become reluctant to break the news of the divorce to their children fearing that this will make them unhappy, frightened or angry.

3.4.2 Adolescents' reaction to parental divorce

The responses below indicate that adolescents' reaction to parental divorce varies from person to person.

Eight respondents (40%) mentioned that although they were aware of their parents' conflicts they did not welcome their parent's decision to divorce. The following excerpts reflect their emotions.

It was difficult to accept even though I was tired of their fights (F 16yrs).

I knew that they had problems but I was shocked at the news that they were parting ways (M 15yrs).

I was cross with my mother for throwing my father out of our house (F 13yrs).

These findings reveal that most of the respondents had difficulty in accepting their parents' decision to divorce. Some were shocked to hear that their parents were divorcing and others were angry with the parent who initiated the divorce. This information suggests that although the respondents knew that their parents' relationships were tense before the separation they still did not expect them to divorce. The findings affirm the statement that although most adolescents may be aware of the discord and unhappiness in their parents' marriage, few expect their parents to divorce (Amato, 2001:356 & Henning, 2005:46).

Those respondents, who never witnessed any marital conflict between their parents, were shocked at their parents' decision to divorce. Six respondents (30%) said that they were not aware that there were problems between their parents hence their parents' divorce devastated them. The following excerpts reflect their shock:

I was shocked because I was not aware that they had marital problems (M

14yrs).

When I first heard that my parents were to divorce I was devastated and wished I could die (F 14yrs).

For some adolescents their parents' divorce came as a shock to such an extent that they became severely distressed. This is attributed to the fact that the respondents never expected this to happen in their families, especially because they viewed their parents as happily married. In other words, the existence of conflict among married couples does somehow prepare children psychologically for worse things to happen. It is therefore, necessary for divorcing parents to prepare their children psychologically once they have the intention to divorce so that they are not taken by surprise. The findings support the study by Matsafu (2005:41) on the emotional experiences of adolescents as it revealed that children experience strong initial reactions to parental divorce, especially, if they were not aware of the marital conflicts.

Another third of the respondents (30%) expressed relief after their parents' divorce. Such relief is shown by the following statements:

I was happy to hear that my mother has considered divorce since my parents have been fighting a lot (M 17yrs).

At least we had peace of mind following our parents' divorce (F 18yrs).

These responses show that some adolescents were relieved by their parents' divorce as their families were characterised by numerous conflicts. The fact that most divorces occurred after lengthy unhealthy family life made the respondents feel relieved. These statements echo the findings of Burns & Dunlop (1999:33) and Henning (2005:46) that although the adolescents did not want their parents to divorce, they were able to recognise the difference to the tension and stress that previously characterised their families .

3.4.3 Persons informed about their parents' intention to divorce

Divorce is currently less stigmatised than it was previously, yet it still remains a difficult experience for children and adolescents (Rose, 1998:88). Most of the respondents were reluctant to discuss their parents' divorce with their friends.

Nine respondents (45%) did not tell anyone because they were not comfortable to talk about it. Some respondents shared their experiences as follows:

I did not tell anyone, I was scared my family would be the talk of the area (M 17yrs).

I just kept it to myself and my relatives (F 18 yrs).

Most adolescents were reluctant to talk about their parents' divorce with other people for they feared that they would be exposed. This finding support Twaite et al.'s (1998:114) observation that teenagers usually experience shame and embarrassment with respect to their parents' divorce, and they may be unable to share this distress with their peers. Few respondents were comfortable to share their experience with their immediate relatives only. The researcher attributes this to the fact that there is still stigma attached to divorce in society. Furthermore, feelings of shame and embarrassment will ultimately make the respondents become withdrawn or isolated.

Eight respondents (40%) mentioned that they only opened up to their teachers after being confronted, others to their friends and some managed to confide in their relatives. The following quotations reflect their experiences.

I confided in my grandparents (F 13yrs).

I told my aunt who is close to my mother with the hope that she could intervene (F 14yrs).

I confided in my class teacher after she became concerned about my performance (F 15yrs).

I told my best friend because I knew he would notice it himself and might spread it if not told by me (M 15yrs).

Some of the respondents confided in their relatives with the hope that their relatives would rescue the situation, whilst some shared their experience with their closest friends for support and acceptance. Others disclosed to their teachers who observed that they were distressed and requested them to open up. Other respondents found comfort in people that they were close to and not professionals.

However, three respondents (15%) who were Christians opted for spiritual counseling and support. They shared their ordeal with pastors and church members and asked for prayers for their families. One of the participants stated that:

I was emotionally burdened and I asked to be prayed for (F 17yrs).

The researcher attributes this to the fact that most believers rely on prayers from their religious or spiritual leaders as they believe in divine intervention.

3.4.4 Feelings following parental divorce

The majority of the respondents expressed that they were hurt by their parents' divorce. Fourteen respondents (70%) indicated that they were deeply affected by the parental divorce. The following excerpts demonstrate some of the respondents' feelings:

I was deeply hurt because we had to move out of the house (M 14yrs).

I was hurt and was worried about my future (F 13yrs).

I was very much sad moreover that I was not sure how we were going to survive as my mother was not employed (F 17yrs).

I was devastated. I did not want to be from a broken family (F 14yrs).

These responses show that the respondents were actually hurt by the aftermath of the divorce as they lost some material goods. These findings also imply that even though family life was unstable children enjoy the support and protection that it provides rather than to lose their family altogether. They would rather stay in the situation that they know than to start a new family life. For instance, the respondents showed that they were affected by the decline in the standard of living, loss of income, and the loss of a two parent family. Some respondents were worried about their future as they were not sure if their custodial parents would afford to provide for their education. The above statements confirm the argument that pre-adolescent children experience deep sadness and anxiety about their future; therefore, they are the most upset (Rose, 1998:88).

Not all of the respondents were hurt or disappointed by the divorce of their parents. Even though divorce is regarded as a painful experience, for some

respondents it was a relief. Their parents' divorce came as a relief from parental bickering and the intensely conflicted family and home atmosphere of their growing up years. Adolescents can thus feel a strong sense of relief for the parental divorce, especially in cases where the marital relationship was characterised by violence and elevated conflict (Henning, 2005:46). Six respondents (30%) said that they were relieved. The following quote exemplifies the point:

I was happy because I will no longer see my parents fighting (F 18yrs).

This information suggests that as children get older, their level of interpersonal knowledge increases. They are able to understand that they are not the reason behind their parents' decision to divorce.

3.4.5 Loss following parental divorce

Divorce brings about losses and changes for parents and children alike. Losses experienced as a result of divorce include the loss of a significant relationship, loss of a significant person, loss of an established position in a society, loss of roles, loss of identity, loss of a home, loss of finance, loss of a standard of living, and loss of hopes and expectations (Knox & Schacht, 1997:467).

Although some of the respondents showed that they were relieved to be free from family violence they indicated that they still experienced a terrible sense of loss by being deprived a two parent family. They also lamented the fact that they would not enjoy important life events together as a family. Some expressed feelings of grief over the reality that their families would not afford pleasant lifestyles anymore. These findings also imply that since most of the custodial parents were unemployed prior to the divorce their standard of living declined and, therefore, had an adverse impact on the adolescents.

Fifteen respondents (70%) said that they missed staying together as a family and the pleasant lifestyle that they had. The following statements illustrate their experiences:

I miss staying together with both parents and also feel that this will hamper many celebrations that we need to enjoy together like my achievements at school or birthday celebrations (M 15yrs).

I miss being with both my parents in the same house (F 13yrs).

I wish that my parents could have found solutions to their problems so that we could still be together (M 14yrs).

I wish we still had the luxurious lifestyle that we used to have (F 15yrs).

I miss a lot of things like eating out (F 16yrs).

On the other hand, some of the respondents expressed the view that parental divorce made them to mature early and, therefore, missed out on childhood experiences. Six respondents (30%) expressed loss of childhood. The following citations exemplify the point:

I missed being a child and being dependent on my parents (F 17yrs).

I wish I had an opportunity to be a child rather than to assume responsibility for others at an early age (F 16yrs).

These findings imply that some of the adolescents from divorced families were compelled to assume adult responsibilities at an early age, hence they missed being dependent on their parents. For instance, they had to look after their siblings and help with household chores to support the custodial parent. Besides, they were able to understand the constraints that their parents had and, therefore, could not make demands that other children of their age make. These responses confirm the findings that adult-children from divorced families' lost out on a carefree childhood and a normal family life (Basson et al., 2008:95).

3.4.6 School performance of adolescents following parental divorce

Divorce affects the social, emotional, and psychological functioning of children. Rodgers (1996:175) mentioned that adolescents from divorced families have lower academic performance and achievement test scores compared to their peers from intact families. Most respondents showed that their school performance was affected by the parental divorce. Thirteen respondents (65%) indicated that their school performance deteriorated (five of them said it started even before the divorce whereas eight mentioned that it started after the divorce). The following excerpts demonstrate their experience:

I lost interest in a lot of things including my school work even before my parents could divorce (F 16yrs).

I was always absent minded in class (M 15yrs).

My mind was preoccupied and I could not focus in class (F 14yrs).

These findings show that the trauma of parental divorce disrupts adolescents' ability to participate freely in the process of learning. Some respondents' school performance deteriorated even before the actual divorce of their parents due to tensions resulting from marital conflicts. These findings demonstrate that children from divorced families become emotionally and psychologically affected, especially if they are upset about the divorce. The researcher is of the view that the distress caused by parental divorce has an adverse effect on the adolescents' level of concentration at school and, thus, impair their effective learning and scholastic achievement.

However, seven respondents (35%) indicated that their school performance was not hopelessly affected by their parents' divorce. The following excerpts exemplify the point:

At first it was difficult to concentrate in class but later on I adjusted as we moved to another area (F17 yrs).

I was a bit disturbed and my teacher intervened which helped me improve (F18 yrs).

I actually had peace of mind and started concentrating at school and became one of the top students for three successive years (M 16).

Some of the respondents said that they were affected for a limited period and later their standard of performance improved again. Some mentioned that their performance improved due to relocation to new areas whereas some improved as a result of intervention from their teachers. Another respondent indicated that he excelled in his school performance following the divorce of his parents as he was relieved. These statements support the idea of Burns and Dunlop (1999:33) that although adolescents might not want their parents to divorce, they are able to recognise the superior alternative to the tension and stress that previously characterised the family.

3.4.7 Participation in extra-mural activities prior to parental divorce

Half of the respondents (50%) indicated that they did not participate in extra-mural activities prior to the divorce of their parents as they were emotionally unstable. These findings imply that adolescents' are emotionally affected by marital conflicts and, therefore, they impede them from partaking in social activities and also let them isolate themselves. The respondents were deprived from enjoying their childhood as do other children from intact families. Henning (2005:47) states that a high level of anxiety in adolescents is expressed through restlessness, their inability to associate with peers, and drop in school performance. In addition to the above, the findings also imply that the respondents were deprived of being socially competent as they did not participate in activities that could develop them.

Another half of the respondents (50%) participated in various extra-mural activities. Only two of the respondents said that they continued participating in the activities without any hassle whereas four of the respondents indicated that although they wanted to continue participating they could not due to the fact that their custodial parents could not afford the costs involved and/or because they relocated to other areas which did not have those activities. Besides they also lost interest in them. The following quotations exemplify the experience:

I could not continue playing netball, for I had to return home early after school so that I can look after my siblings and also do some household chores since my mother worked far from home (F 18yrs).

I found it difficult to hang around people hence I quit the club. (M 14yrs).

Unfortunately, I was moved to a new school which did not have some sporting activities that I was interested in. (F 13 yrs).

I only restarted with the activities long after the divorce when we were financially stable (F 17yrs).

According to the above statements, parental divorce does affect children' s social network as they are expected to adjust to too many changes after the divorce. Irrespective of how smooth the divorce may be and the absence of parental conflicts following the divorce, children still become negatively affected

by the changes that they have to go through. Some were given responsibilities that hampered them to continue participating in extramural activities, such as taking care of their siblings and doing household chores. These respondents were deprived the opportunity to enjoy their childhood as they had to look after their siblings.

Some of the respondents could not continue participate in extra mural activities because their standard of living had declined. For instance, Henning (2005:58) mentioned that the change in adolescents' socio-economic status is reportedly associated with feelings of shame and rejection, and may lead to social withdrawal.

3.4.8 Challenges encountered by adolescents from divorced families

Divorce is a painful experience for adults and children alike. This is because whether it was a good idea to divorce or not, there were still changes that the affected members needed to adjust to. The challenges experienced include the manner in which the respondents were informed about their parents' divorce. For some respondents their problem was the decline in the standard of living. Some respondents said they were challenged by the manner in which they would be classified by the society. Some were caught up between the fights their parents had. Some were affected by high maternal depression, as they had to mature early to support their custodial parents. Whereas some respondents stated that they were challenged by the fact that their custodial parents were short of resources to provide for them. Each respondent was in one way or another affected by their parents' divorce. The following quotations illustrate their views:

I was not informed at all until the day my father moved out (F 16yrs).

We were a very happy family. I did not expect the divorce of my parents at all (F14yrs).

I was confused whom to please as both parents needed my support (F 13yrs).

I was always worried about my mother as she did not cope with the divorce (M 17yrs).

I did not want to associate with people around us (M 14yrs).

We had to move to a smaller house and we had no car. My mother could not afford to pay for my extra mural activities (F 16yrs).

Those who were challenged by the manner in which the society would perceive them showed that there is still some stigma attached to divorce by the society. The respondents who were challenged by the decline in their standard of living observed that their custodial parents' financial background was not viable. Inter-parental conflicts were also mentioned as a challenge for some of the respondents. These concerns imply that the respondents were frustrated by these conflicts as the parents used them to destroy each another.

These findings support the statements by Basson et al. (2008:95); Knox and Schacht (1997:467) that children from divorced families have to deal with many losses in order to come to terms with the adjustment of the post divorce. Basson et al. (2208:91) further states that divorce is the end of marriage but it can subject children to adjustments and trauma for the rest of their lives.

3.4.9 Adolescents' behaviour prior to parental divorce

Fifteen respondents (75%) indicated that they did not have any behavioural problems even prior to their parents' divorce. The respondents expressed their views as follows:

My parents taught and encouraged me to behave well (F 16yrs).

I looked up to my father as my role model (M 17yrs).

My father was very strict. I was afraid of him (M 14yrs).

I was well disciplined. (F 17yrs).

It is thus clear that these respondents were taught to behave well and they had family rules which groomed and molded their behavior. Some of the respondents mentioned that their parents were too strict; therefore, they did not take chances but lived according to the family principles. The majority of the respondents thus did not have behavioural problems prior to their parents'

divorce as they had proper guidance, supervision, and control from both parents.

Adolescence phase is a delicate developmental stage as most adolescents distance themselves, some become rebellious to their parents' instructions whereas some withdraw from their parents in response to the stage and this renders them vulnerable to adopt their peers' attitudes. Adolescents disengage at an earlier age from the family, which, in turn increases their exposure to anti-social groups and activities (Woodward et al., 2000:163). Five of the respondents (25%) indicated that they had behavioural problems prior to the divorce, varying from stealing, bullying others, and disrespectfulness. The following excerpts illustrate their experiences:

I just found myself stealing from other children (F 16yrs).

I liked fighting a lot even over petty issues (M 16yrs).

I was disrespectful. I called other children names and harassed them (M 14yrs).

These responses reflect that the respondents who were exposed to family violence tended to be violent too. For some it was a means of demanding attention as they were frustrated by their family setting.

These findings also confirm that marital conflicts have negative effects on adolescents' behaviour. A study conducted Shek & Ma (2001:545) on parent-adolescent relationships showed that there was a link between marital conflicts and adolescent maladjustment which includes depression, injuries, unacceptable behaviour, problem behaviour at school, anxiety, and self-esteem problem. This information indicates that if children are from two parent families characterized by conflict and violence are vulnerable and may engage in unwanted behaviour.

3.4.10 Adolescents' behaviour following parental divorce

According to previous studies, male adolescents often act out their feelings whereas girls internalise them. Amato and Keith (1991:51) and Twaite et al. (1998:148) concluded that the types of changes in the behaviour of adolescent

females following a divorce are different from and more difficult to measure than the types of changes among adolescent males. Whereas male adolescents tend to act out, female adolescents may become anxious and withdrawn. Twaite et al. (1998:148) state that such internalising behaviour problems among female adolescents may not even be noticed by raters such as parents and teachers, but they may have more serious implications for long-term adjustment than the externalising behaviour problems exhibited by male adolescents.

The majority of the respondents mentioned that they had developed and engaged in unwanted behaviours following their parents' divorce. They engaged themselves in self destructing behaviours such as doing drugs, sexual activities, sleeping out and also dropped out of school. Other respondents mentioned that they became aggressive and did not adhere to parental discipline at all. This information demonstrates that the respondents' experienced drastic changes in behaviour. This could be because they were at a transitional phase of their development, as well as because of the family setting transitions.

It is evident that the respondents were emotionally strained by the divorce of their parents; hence their reaction was influenced by the developmental stage they were in. These findings also confirm the results from another study that adolescents generally engage in self destructive behavior such as truancy, school failure, substance abuse, and sexual acting out if they are emotionally distressed (Rose, 1998:88).

Twelve respondents (60%) of whom 50% were males reported that they had developed behavioural problems though it is not clear if it was as a result of the divorce or because they were adolescents. The following excerpts illustrate their experiences:

My behavior changed dramatically after my parents' divorce. I defied house rules and engaged in sexual activities. I did not know if it was because of my parents' divorce or something else (M 18yrs).

I was already naughty but I became worse when my parents divorced. I befriended older boys who were troublesome, slept out and also dropped out of school (M 14yrs).

I was angry and I did drugs to relieve myself from stress but later on I improved (M 18yrs).

I became moody, stubborn and defied house rules (F 16yr).

These responses also indicate that most male adolescents noticed the change in behaviour following the divorce of their parents; however, they were not sure if it was because of the divorce or because of the transitional phase they were going through. The researcher is of the opinion that most of the respondents' behaviour did not only change because of the transitional stage but also due to the fact that they were emotionally unstable. Some respondents said that they became uncontrollable because they were demanding parental attention.

These findings mean that it is crucial for divorcing parents to provide support, warmth, and guidance to adolescents at all times especially when they are in a difficult situation. These findings are supported by the following authors, namely Rice (1995:112) and Bednar and Fisher (2003:610), that parental discipline which is characterised by consistency, motivated by care and love of adolescents and, also have clear, rational, verbal explanations foster moral learning in the youth.

Conversely, eight respondents (40%) indicated that they became very responsible and supportive to their custodial parents. They described their behaviour as follows:

Our finances dropped so I had to assist my mother by taking care of my siblings as well as with the household chores so that she could work for us (F 18yrs).

My mother was severely distressed so I had to support her (M 18yrs).

The divorce worked out better for me as I became stress free and I was able to focus on my studies (M 16yrs).

There was no difference I was the same child as before (F 14yrs).

I adhered to house rules even after the divorce. I knew what my father liked and what he disliked (M 15yrs).

The respondents reported that they had observed that their custodial parents

were distressed or struggling financially, hence they opted to be supportive to them by assisting them with household chores and by taking care of their siblings. Some of the respondents showed that they gave their parents the respect that they deserved like before. Thus, their behaviour did not change after the parental divorce.

These results imply that some older children from divorced families develop substantial maturation after parental divorce. They assume more household and family caretaking responsibilities earlier in their lives than they would have assumed had the divorce not occurred (Henning, 2005:47).

The researcher is also of the opinion that those respondents who did not experience drastic changes in behaviour was because the divorce came as a relief. In addition to the above, the researcher believe that the interpersonal relationship that the respondents had with their custodial parents and their custodial parents' positive adjustment to the divorce helped the respondents to adjust positively toward the divorce. Thus, the circumstances around the divorce determine the outcome for both the children and the custodial parents.

3.5 SUPPORT GIVEN TO ADOLESCENTS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES

The purpose of this section is to present information on professional assistance received by the adolescents from divorced families. This section also presents the type of support the adolescents' families received from maternal or paternal relatives.

3.5.1 Professionals consulted

Thirteen of the respondents (65%) indicated that they did not consult any professional. The following excerpts illustrate the point:

I did not consult any professional because my mother took it for granted that I will be fine. (F 13yrs).

My parents thought I was too young to understand (F 13yrs).

My mother thought I was coping and that I understood why they divorced (F 17yrs).

I pretended to be fine for the sake of my mother so she did not notice that I was negatively affected (M 17yrs).

I was okay with the decision made by mother to quit the marriage (M 16yrs).

I and my siblings were not affected by the divorce because we felt that it was a good idea that they part ways (F 18 yrs).

The respondents' mentioned that their custodial parents thought that they were reducing the adolescents' distress by acting kindly toward them. Other respondents noted that their parents underestimated their understanding of the situation. Some of the respondents indicated that their parents thought that they were coping as they did not show any symptoms of stress, whereas others tried to replace the distress by providing goodies and being lenient with their children. The respondents also showed that some parents saw their children becoming more responsible and assumed that they were coping.

Some of the respondents did not consult professionals as they felt that the divorce was the only option for their parents, hence, they stated that they were not negatively affected. These findings reflect that the majority of the respondents were not afforded the opportunity to consult any professional to be assisted with their situation. Some of them their parents assumed that they were all right as they did not observe any changes in the adolescents' behavior. Besides, the respondents also did not request for professional assistance. This may be attributed to the fact that they did not want to burden their parents or they were not aware of existing professional help.

However, seven respondents (35%) mentioned that they consulted various professionals, namely, teachers, pastors, a psychologist, and social workers (probation officers). The following excerpts illustrate their experiences:

My teacher observed that I was depressed and forced me to talk (F 16yrs).

I was confronted by one of the teachers since I had performed badly in the test (F 15yrs).

I consulted with a psychologist after I fought with my mother insisting that I be in my father's custody (F 16yr-white).

I was arrested and the police referred me to a social worker and I attended a

diversion programme (M 14yrs).

My mother reported me at the police who then referred me to a social worker (M 16yrs).

I spoke to a pastor and asked him to pray for my family (F 17yrs).

The responses reflect that some of the respondents were compelled to open up to their teachers as they were noticed to have problems in concentrating in class. One respondent stated that she was referred to a psychologist after she had an outburst. Some respondents mentioned that they were actually referred to probation officers due to their involvement in unlawful acts or uncontrollable behaviour. Services rendered to the respondents mainly focused on behaviour modification than on therapy. Other respondents received counseling and prayer from their pastors.

These responses demonstrate how important it is for children to consult professionals after the trauma of parental divorce. Despite the fact that the children could have been exposed to family violence, the change in the family setting does have a negative effect on them. Hence it is necessary that they be offered therapeutic services to help them gain insight into the situation and to also empower them to cope with changes in their lives. The responses also show how teachers and pastors were helpful to the respondents. This implies that it is necessary to equip such professionals with basic counseling skills since they work closely with children and communities. They are also easily accessible and available.

In addition to the above, the findings also clearly indicate how most of the respondents did not consult with any professional either because of their parents' ignorance or lack of information on the available services. Clearly there is a need for social workers to raise awareness on the importance of therapeutic services for children from divorced families.

3.5.2 Assistance provided by the professionals consulted

Seven respondents (35%) who indicated that they consulted at least one professional said that the teachers helped them to refocus, the psychologist

helped them to deal with stress and be sober-minded whilst the social workers assisted them to change their maladaptive behaviour. The following excerpts illustrate the point:

At least I had someone to talk to and therefore I was relieved (F 15yrs).

My teacher helped me to focus on my studies (M 15yrs).

I was calmed down by the pastor (F 16yrs).

The social workers offered me a life skills programme (M 14yrs).

I was warned by the social worker and taught how to behave properly (M 16yrs).

I was encouraged and given hope that things will be okay (F 17yrs).

The respondents showed how they were afforded an opportunity to speak out and express their feelings which they could not have done if they were not compelled by their teachers. These helped them to be relieved and were therefore, able to concentrate on their school work. Those respondents who consulted with the probation officers were provided with life skills which helped them to make the right choices in life. The respondent who consulted psychologists and pastors were offered counseling and support. These responses support the findings by Basson et al. (2008:102) that adolescents have an intense desire to share their emotional needs after parental divorce as it contributes to their healing.

3.5.3 Support by maternal/paternal relatives

Fourteen respondents (70%) indicated that they were assisted by their maternal relatives.

The following citations exemplify the point:

My maternal uncle went up and down with my mother until we were settled (F 15yrs).

My mother's family was always there for us (F 16yrs).

We depended largely on my maternal grand mother for financial support as my mother did not have a stable income (F 17yrs).

After the divorce we moved to my maternal grand parents' house (M 17yrs).

The majority of the respondents were supported by their maternal relatives perhaps because maternal relatives are the closest relatives to many custodial parents. In the African culture it is common for a wife who is divorced to go back to her family with the children. Hence, most of the psycho-social support to divorced families is provided by maternal relatives.

Interestingly, three (15%) respondents indicated that they were assisted by both maternal and paternal relatives. The following excerpts illustrate their experiences:

My paternal grand father was shocked at my father's strange behavior and he felt pity for us and helped us financially (F 13yrs).

Both my maternal and paternal grand parents gave their continued support to my mother (F 16yrs).

My grand parents held quiet a number of family meetings to discuss on how to support us (M 16yrs).

The respondents showed that they enjoyed support from both maternal and paternal relatives. The responses also indicated that the grandparents were concerned about the welfare of their grand children.

Three respondents (15%) said that they did not get any support from their relatives. The following excerpts exemplify the point:

My maternal relatives were helpless and my paternal relatives did not bother to help. F 16yrs).

My father prevented his family and my maternal relatives from intervening in the matter. He did not engage them at all (M 15yrs).

My paternal aunt did not like my mother so she was happy that they divorced (M 17yrs).

These responses reveal that some of the respondents' families were not supported by their relatives either because they were restricted not to intervene or because they were not concerned. Some of the respondents stayed far from their relatives and some were not in good terms with them. These findings reflect that the extent of support provided to divorced families depended greatly on the quality of the relationship they had after the family breakup. These

findings are in line with Portnoy's (2003:130) statement that the splitting of relationships due to divorce can mean the loss of grandparents, the extended family, friends, teachers, coaches, family friends, and others.

The findings can be summed as follows: the majority of the respondents (70%) were supported by their maternal relatives as most of the custodial parents were women and they returned to their families of origin after the divorce. These findings confirm the results from Amato's (2001:356) study that mentions that usually when a marriage is dissolved the couple's individual network is likely to resume its pre-marital characteristics.

3.5.4 Type of support provided by relatives

Fourteen respondents (70%) mentioned that they received both moral and material support from their relatives. The following excerpts illustrate the point:

The two families met to discuss my parents' differences and continued to support us even when the matter could not be resolved (M 16yrs).

My mother was assisted by her relatives to get herself a lawyer, and comforted her. We were also assisted financially (F 16yrs).

Our relatives cheered us up (F 16yrs).

My uncle accompanied her to the divorce court and transported her whenever it was necessary (F 15yrs).

Our relatives helped us relocate and also got my mother a job (F 17yrs).

We were accommodated at my maternal grand parents' house (M 17yrs).

My maternal aunt came and stayed with us for a while and helped my mother with some household duties and also attended the school meetings since my mother was working (F 14yrs).

According to these responses the respondents' families were supported in various ways. Some respondents were provided emotional support, some moral support, some legal advice, some financial and material support. These responses show that the support given to the respondents' families were depended upon the identified needs. The respondents received maximum support from their relatives which was directed at the family as a whole and not at the individual adolescents' psycho-social needs. To a certain extent the

support provided to the respondents' families also helped them to cope with the divorce.

Six respondents (30%) revealed that they received the minimal or no support at all from their relatives. The following citations demonstrate the point:

Our relatives were too quiet. Seemingly they were tired of the fights (F 18yrs).

My relatives only phoned to check on us but they never came to visit us (M 14yrs).

My father did not engage any of my relatives for he did not want them to be involved (M 15yrs).

We did not receive any help from any of them. Apparently my mother had grudges with her in-laws and she did not have close relatives except for her sister who was also married and stayed far from us (M 17yrs).

Some of the respondents' families did not receive any support from their relatives and some only received a phone call to check how they were doing. The respondents' families did not get remarkable support from their relatives due to relationship constraints and for some due to the distance between them. The researcher observed that some relatives were unable to support the concerned families as they formed part of the problem.

3.6 PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE REQUIRED

This section will present the views of the respondents of the kind of assistance required by adolescents from divorced families in order to cope with their situation and which professionals should assist them in that regard. The adolescents' level of understanding of the functions of the different professionals was explored.

3.6.1 Professional assistance required by adolescents to cope with parental divorce

Fifteen respondents (75%) stated that they needed information on how to handle the situation. They expressed their views as follows:

I would like to know the appropriate way for children to react to parental divorce (M 15 yrs).

I needed to be clarified on so many issues that I could not get answers to (F 15 yrs).

How to adapt easily to the changes brought by parental divorce (M 14 yrs).

What to do when parents involve you in their conflicts (M 17 yrs).

What to do when you are depressed (F 16yrs).

What could be done to prevent parental divorce from happening or to prepare the children before it happens (F 18 yrs).

These responses reflect the confusion that the respondents were experiencing. Some did not know how to react. Other respondents showed that they had many unanswered questions around divorce and its effects. Some were torn between the parents and they did not know how to handle that situation while some respondents indicated that they were emotionally affected and yet did not know what to do and where to go. They also did not understand why things happened the way they did to them and their families. Some thought it was a pre-requisite that every child should be brought up in two parent family, so why divorce?

These findings imply that most of the adolescents suffered emotionally since they had many questions in mind and yet there was no one to talk to or to clarify issues to them. It appears that the respondents did not adapt well to parental divorce and unfortunately they did not seek help. These facts reflect that there is a need for information dissemination and education on the available services to children (adolescents), as well as the establishment of support groups for them so that they can talk about their experiences and learn how to deal with their situation in the most positive way.

However, five respondents (25%) believed that to be from a divorced family was a relief and, therefore, did not see the necessity for children to consult any professionals. For these respondents divorce was a better remedy than to be in a violent family. The respondents believed that it was not necessary to go for

therapy but said that professionals should provide for their basic needs since they were faced with many material needs. They also mentioned that only parents should consult professionals for motivation and to receive assistance in finalising the divorce. Other than that, they are of the opinion that professionals such as social workers should provide their families with food parcels, clothes, and accommodation if needed.

These findings imply that for some respondents parental divorce was not traumatic instead they were worried about the source for the provision of their material needs. These findings could also imply that those respondents who were exposed to family violence felt relieved by the divorce.

3.6.2 Adolescents' opinion as to who can offer assistance

Fifteen respondents (75%) named social workers, psychologists, teachers, and pastors as those who could be of help. The following excerpts illustrate their opinions:

I am not too sure but social workers could be of help (M 17yrs).

Social workers could assist if they were taking turns at our schools (F 18yrs).

I think teachers would be relevant as they see the learners on a day to day basis (F13 yrs).

I heard about psychologists though I do not know where they are situated (F 16yrs).

Pastors could be of help as they pray for people not to be distressed and also guide them on what to do (F 17yrs).

These responses show that some of the respondents were not sure if the social workers were the appropriate professionals to assist children from divorced families (people with stress). These respondents thought that social workers only provided help in crisis situations. These results imply that most adolescents view social workers as people who assist people who are desperate or in need of material assistance and, therefore, did not view themselves as hopeless clients.

Some of the respondents indicated that social workers could be helpful to children from divorced families if they were accessible to learners. These findings suggest that social work services should be made accessible to learners. It is, therefore, imperative for the government to employ school social workers.

Some of the respondents pointed out that teachers are in the best position to help children who are distressed as they spend much time with them and they are also accessible to the learners. Another group of respondents mentioned that pastors could be resourceful and appropriate counselors for children in distress. These findings imply that the respondents desperately needed someone to talk to hence they suggested teachers and pastors as professionals that could assist youngsters as they are within reach for most children. Some respondents showed that they were aware of psychological services but they were not aware of where to locate them. This implies that psychologists are not well marketed in the Waterberg district or they are not enough hence they were not accessible to the respondents.

There were five respondents (25%) who did not see the need for adolescents from divorced families to consult professionals. The following excerpt illustrates one of the respondents' view:

Anyone can assist even if s/he is not a professional. Social workers can be consulted for food parcels (M 16yrs).

The five respondents believed that consultation with professionals as a result of parental divorce was not necessary. This could mean that the respondent did not experience pain as a result of parental divorce; instead they were happy that they were free at last. Again the findings could also mean that these respondents might have endured pain prior parental divorce; hence they were not negatively affected by the divorce. The researcher is of the opinion that the respondents had suffered emotionally prior to the divorce and did not consult any professional because they were not aware of the therapeutic services that are available to children and adults who have been traumatized by divorce.

3.6.3 Adolescents' opinion as to how children from divorced families can be assisted by social workers

Twelve respondents (60%) replied that social workers should provide counseling or information on divorce. The following excerpts illustrate their views:

Social workers must connect with such adolescents and let them express their feelings (F 16yrs).

They should prepare adolescents well in advance for the divorce (M 14yrs).

Help them adapt to divorce and address their fears (F 18 yrs).

Provide counseling (F 14yrs).

They must visit or contact all children from divorce families to find out if they are okay (M 17yrs).

The respondents mentioned that social workers should establish programmes particularly for children from difficult circumstances. Some respondents said that social workers should provide pre- and post-divorce counseling for children. Others mentioned that they should follow-ups on children from broken families.

These results reflect that children do need therapeutic services from social workers both prior to and after parental divorce. The findings also highlight the need for social workers to reach out to children from divorced families.

Eight respondents (40%) suggested that social workers should provide material assistance. The following excerpts illustrate their views:

I think they should provide food parcels to divorced families (F 17yrs).

They must help them with grants (M 17yrs).

There must be a shelter for homeless women and children so that women do not have to stay in violent families for the sake of a shelter (F 16yrs).

These findings exemplify that the moral support that these families received from their relatives was adequate; they only lacked funds to make ends meet. Other respondents observed that their mothers stayed in abusive relationships

for the sake of shelter as they were not employed and, therefore, could not afford to provide a home for their children.

The fact that a substantial figure of the respondents mentioned that they thought social workers should provide material assistance to families undergoing difficult situation means that there is a need for such services. The results also indicate that some divorced families do not only require counseling from the social workers but they need some material assistance in the form of social relief, accommodation for the homeless families, as well as information. Social workers can also assist by linking the families with other services such as, maintenance offices and the South African Social Security Agency.

3.7 Custodial parents' opinion about their adolescents' experiences and challenges of parental divorce

3.7.1 Custodial parents' biographical information

All 10 respondents were custodial parents with adolescent children who had experienced divorce themselves. The custodial parents' age ranged between 36 and 59 years, the mean age being 44. Eight respondents (80%) were females and two respondents (20%) males. Four respondents were unemployed at the time of the divorce, three respondents (30%) were temporarily employed, and three (30%) were permanently and gainfully employed. Five respondents (50%) were Pedi speaking, three (30%) were Tswana speaking, one (10%) was Tsonga speaking, and one (10%) was Afrikaans speaking.

3.8 ADOLESCENTS' REACTION AND COPING STRATEGIES TOWARDS PARENTAL DIVORCE

This section will present the custodial parents' observations and views on their adolescent children's reaction and coping strategies after parental divorce.

3.8.1 Children's ages at the time of divorce

The respondents had one to five children whose ages ranged between 3 and 26 years.

3.8.2 Custodial parents' observation of the adolescents' reaction towards divorce

Eight of the respondents (80%) indicated that their adolescent children were distressed, shocked, disappointed, or hurt when they learnt that their parents were to divorce but later they adjusted to the situation. The following citations exemplify their observations:

My daughter was shocked and disappointed. She did not approve of the divorce but could not reverse things since her father had moved on to stay with his new partner.

My children were hurt and ashamed of what people will say about them and at the same time relieved that they will not be exposed to the fights.

My daughter cried bitterly over the fact that we were forced to move out the house.

My 14 year old son was very angry. He was upset with everyone in the family.

The above responses indicate that the respondents' children were sad to hear that their parents were divorcing but since they could not change the situation they eventually adjusted. Other respondents demonstrated that their adolescents had mixed feelings as they were initially embarrassed but also happy that they would not be exposed to family violence anymore. These findings show that the respondents observed the fact that although their adolescents were aware of the marital conflicts they still did not expect their parents to divorce; hence this two-fold reaction following the physical separation. These findings also imply that even if some children were experiencing some instability within their families they took comfort in the fact that they belonged to a two parent family.

However, two respondents (20%) mentioned that their adolescent children were relieved by the divorce of their parents. The following citations demonstrate their point:

My daughter was enough with the violence and therefore felt relieved that it was over.

My son appeared to be relieved when he was told that I am divorcing his father.

The responses demonstrate that the custodial parents thought that their children were relieved and were glad that there would be no more fights. They were pleased with the decision made. For those adolescents who were exposed to severe family violence the divorce of their parents was a relief. These responses support the findings by Henning (2005:26) that adolescents feel a strong sense of relief after parental divorce, especially in cases where the marital relationship was characterised by violence and elevated conflict.

3.8.3 Children who were negatively affected by the divorce

Six respondents (60%) stated that their adolescent children were distressed by the divorce. The following statements reflect their opinion:

My eldest daughter was the most affected. She isolated herself from her friends. It was like her world was torn apart as she was divided between the two of us.

My son took comfort in his peers who then introduced him into wrongful acts such as truancy and doing drugs.

My youngest son was too devastated especially because he could not attend the same school and participate in his favourite sporting activities.

My daughter was distressed by the fact that we had to move out of the house to a smaller house and that I could not afford the luxurious lifestyle she used to have.

More than half of the respondents indicated that their adolescent children were negatively affected by the divorce. These responses imply that the respondents' children became withdrawn; some engaged in wrongful acts, and were distressed by the fact that their lives had to change. This was demonstrated in one of the responses that showed the aftermath of the divorce on the adolescent. For instance the decline in socio-economic status has been shown to be a contributing factor towards adolescents' reaction to divorce. The fact that seven custodial parents (70%) were unemployed at the time of the divorce had a negative impact on their older children.

The above responses affirm the observation made by Johnston Campbell (1988:154) that most adolescents reacted to their parents' divorce by being withdrawn, unresponsive or blocked out to the world. Those adolescents who do not become socially withdrawn turn to their peers for support, who often

influence them to acquire bad habits (Whitebeck et al., 1999:941).

On the other hand, four respondents (40%) indicated that their adolescent children did not have experience negative impact following parental divorce; instead they became happier and more responsible. The following statements reflect their opinion:

My son was more relaxed and he became more focused on his studies.

My eldest daughter was happy and she was more helpful in the house. She also took care of her younger siblings.

These statements demonstrate that the respondents' children were delighted about the divorce. Their school work improved and they were also supportive to their custodial parents. The above findings imply that divorce works out better for some children than for others.

3.8.4 Adolescents' coping strategies as observed by the custodial parents

Six respondents (60%) mentioned that their adolescent children relied on the support from their custodial parents, external relatives, teachers, friends, as well as the church to cope with their distress. The following excerpts illustrate their views:

I was friendly to my children and I was their source of strength.

We were very much close and they were free to communicate about their feelings.

My daughter confided in her teacher after being confronted for poor performance at school.

My daughter became a Christian and she took comfort in the fact that God will see us through.

My children are very understanding and we also got support from our relatives.

I took my daughter to stay with my mother so she was okay to be with her cousins.

My son befriended bad influential friends.

My daughter took comfort in her peer group who then introduced her to wrongful acts.

These statements imply that the majority of the respondents made it through the ordeal of divorce with the support from external sources such as grandparents, friends and teachers, as well as the church. Some respondents indicated that their adolescents got support from them. It means that their custodial parents had positively adjusted to the divorce; hence their children held up to them. It is evident that positive parental adjustment to divorce leads to effective parent-adolescent relationship which fosters a positive adjustment on the part of the adolescent. These findings affirm Burns and Dunlop's (1999:20) and Kaslow and Schwartz's (1987:178) findings that adolescents who see their parents as caring or understanding tend to experience less negative emotions due to parental divorce.

Some of the respondents stated that their adolescent children turned to their friends for support. This implies that adolescents who felt disappointed or rejected by their parents primarily turned to their peers for support and, therefore, often engaged in undesirable behaviour. These responses echo the findings that low quality primary relationships with parents result in depressed emotional states that increase vulnerability to peer influence and peer support (Whitebeck et al., 1999:935 & Knox & Schacht, 1997:475).

It is thus clear that in the event that adolescents are faced with a decline in parental support, external sources of support such as grandparents, friends, or teachers can serve as a buffer from the detrimental effects of their parents' marital transitions.

3.8.5 Challenges encountered by adolescents following parental divorce

Almost all the respondents highlighted the fact that their children were somehow challenged by the divorce. Nine respondents (90%) confirmed it. The following statements illustrate their point:

I confided in my daughter a lot such that I burdened her with my distress but I would feel relieved after talking to her.

The divorce was a challenge because my daughter needed my attention and I was impatient with her due to my distress. She therefore felt rejected.

He was always stressed because of the fact that I could not provide for all their

basic needs and their father was very stubborn and he did not want to maintain them.

My daughter was emotionally affected. She was always sad.

I think it was difficult for my child to accept that she was going to live without the other parent. She missed her father too much.

My daughter was more concerned about what other people would say about us. I could see that she was no longer free to be with her friends

He missed his childhood as he was always home taking care of his siblings and doing the household chores. He also pretended to be strong for my sake.

The respondents indicated that their children were affected by various factors and each of them reacted differently. The statements reflect that the adolescents were challenged by their parents' distress as they had to be there for them which was in turn a burden to them. Some of the adolescents were emotional and, therefore, moody and upset with their family members including their friends. They also isolated themselves as a result of the divorce which means they then suffered the constraint of divorce for a longer period.

Divorced parents are frequently under considerable stress right after the divorce and may be incapable of providing warmth or control; they may be less affectionate, inconsistent in applying discipline, uncommunicative, or unsupportive. These findings are in support of what earlier studies found out. For instance, Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman & Conger (1994:629) stress that a number of studies indicate that divorced custodial parents, compared with married parents, invest less time, are less supportive, have fewer rules, dispense harsher discipline, provide less supervision, and engage in more conflict with their adolescents than married couples. In addition to the above, the findings also imply that if one family member is emotionally distressed the other family members become affected too.

3.8.6 Adolescents' behaviour prior to the divorce

The majority of the respondents described their adolescent children as well-mannered for they committed minor mistakes which they considered as normal behaviour for adolescents.

Eight of the respondents (80%) indicated that they did not observe any behavioural problems in their children prior to their divorce. Only two of the respondents (20%) acknowledged that their adolescent children did have behavioural problems even prior to the divorce due to inter-parental conflicts. These findings imply that most adolescent children did not have behavioural problems prior to their parents' divorce. This could be because they were not exposed to too many marital conflicts or because their parents still had control over them as they were in an intact family.

3.8.7 Adolescents' behaviour following the divorce

Six respondents (60%) stated that they noticed changes in their adolescents' behaviour following parental divorce. They blamed their situation on the unavailability of the father figure as the cause for the children's unwanted behaviour. This substantiates the fact that parental divorce is a distressing factor to most adolescents and, therefore, leads them to indulge in violence, drugs usage, and sexual activities.

Four of the respondents (40%) noted that the behavioural changes that they observed in their adolescent children were normal for the adolescent phase. The following excerpts reflect their belief:

My daughter defied the house rules which I regard as normal due to her stage.

I think it is normal for an adolescent to experiment liquor.

These findings imply that the respondents' children did not show any negative changes in behaviour as a result of their parents' divorce. Instead they experienced normal changes due to their developmental stage. These responses could also mean that warm and supportive family interactions or positive adjustment of the custodial parent to the divorce does reduce the negative consequences of divorce on the children.

3.8.8 Professional service provided to adolescents and the outcome

Six of the respondents (60%) noted that their children did not consult any professionals. Of the remaining four respondents (40%), two replied that their adolescent children were confronted by their teachers. One mentioned that her daughter consulted a church member, and one got intervention from a social worker as a result of the adolescent child being in conflict with the law. One of the respondents said that:

My son was arrested for bullying other children and was taken through some diversion programme which helped to modify his behaviour.

These findings show that very few of the adolescents consulted professionals voluntarily. This implies that even the custodial parents did not consider taking their children for professional help. This could be due to a lack of information or out of ignorance that the divorce might impact negatively on their children.

3.9 PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE REQUIRED

3.9.1 Assistance needed from social workers by adolescents from divorced families

Eight respondents (80%) mentioned that social workers must provide counseling services to adolescents from divorced families. The following statements illustrate their views:

They should assist adolescents to be at ease with their situation.

They should provide counseling to adolescents because they need someone to talk to and also listen to their frustrations.

They should be provided with counseling since they experience a difficult situation of being torn between two people whom they both love.

I think they should interview them so that they understand what is going on their minds and therefore advice them accordingly.

I think they should interview them in order to reach out to their inner feelings since I believe that they might be keeping the pain inside which may explode in future.

Social workers must intervene or mediate between the two parents so that their differences do not affect the welfare of their children.

These findings show that there is a dire need for social workers to assist adolescents from broken families.

Two respondents (20%) replied that they wished that social work services could also be made available at schools so that they can be easily accessible to learners with social problems.

3.10 CONCLUSION

The adolescents were open about their experiences and feelings about the divorce of their parents. They demonstrated the various challenges that they faced following the divorce of their parents.

The findings are supportive to the findings by Henning (2005:46) that for some children, although the family life might have been unstable before the divorce, it still provided some form of support and protection. For instance, some of the respondents preferred to be in two parent families rather than to be with a single parent. They preferred to tolerate the inconsistencies within the family than to lose their families altogether, just as some people prefer physical inconveniences or injuries rather than death itself.

The findings also confirmed the findings by Amato and Keith (1991:53) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980:35) that parents also feel depleted by the divorce hence, they become reluctant to inform their teenagers about their decision because they suspect that it might have psycho-social effects on both their present and future.

It was also established that some of the adolescents' relationships with their custodial and non-custodial parents were strained due to parental distress. These findings support the findings by Anderson et al. (1992:180) that divorced parents do not easily meet the emotional needs of their adolescents while the adolescents are the most vulnerable and in need of support. The findings also reflect Twaite et al.'s (1998:218) argument that divorce results in a number of significant changes in both family organization and in the relationships that exist among family members.

The findings are supportive of previous studies by Amato (2000:1275) and Twaite et al. (1998:148) that adolescents from divorced families are likely to become truant or show academic or behavioural problems rather than those from two parent families. One third of the respondents showed that they had difficulty in concentrating on their school work. For others the interruptions in attention were evident but not totally disruptive. Some respondents were found to developed deviant behaviour as a result of parental divorce.

The findings revealed that support by relatives, friends, teachers, and pastors were imperative during such a family crisis. This information suggests that it is necessary to equip the society particularly the other professionals, with training so that they can assist with the identification and referral of children who are traumatised and/or emotionally unstable.

The findings illustrated that such distressed children were not brought to the attention of the social workers by their parents either because their parents were overwhelmed by their circumstances or because the parents thought that the divorce had a minimal effect on the adolescents. It is essential for social workers to be accessible to learners at schools as this will enable them to design appropriate prevention programmes. Besides, learners would also be assisted to go through the transition of life with ease.

CHAPTER 4

MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to highlight the major findings of the study by means of a summary, conclusion, and recommendations. The findings are based on the responses of 20 adolescents from divorced families aged between 13 and 18 years and 10 custodial parents of adolescents from divorced families. The adolescents' respondents were interviewed about their feelings towards parental divorce, their reaction, the support system that was available and the professional assistance that is required by adolescents prior and after parental divorce. The custodial parents' data collection instrument focused on their observation of the adolescents' reaction to divorce and coping mechanisms.

4.2 RESTATEMENT OF MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The researcher was prompted to undertake the study due to the fact that she observed that the majority of the children who were in conflict with the law were from disorganised families as a result of, among others, divorce, separation, and desertion. The study conducted by Matsafu (2005:39) revealed that children from divorced families are at high risk of being exposed to social and psychological problems such as delinquency and engaging in criminal activities.

Adults and youngsters do not perceive things the same way, what youngsters perceive as serious problems are not necessarily what parents believe them to be. For example, parents' thought that their adolescent children coped with the divorce whereas the adolescents felt challenged by the divorce and could not express their feelings. Considering this fact, the researcher is of the opinion that most of the emotional needs that adolescents from divorced families have are not entirely met by social work and psychological services that are being provided.

The researcher also realised that the future of children from divorced families is at stake since most of the programmes offered by social workers are reactionary and not proactive to the needs of children who are experiencing

discomfort in their homes, particularly due to the divorce. Many adolescents experience confusion over parental divorce. Therefore, social workers need to facilitate identification and expression of divorce-related feelings by affected adolescents.

4.3 RESTATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Divorce cuts across cultures, religions, socio-economic classes and races. According to South African statistics the officially recorded divorces for 2003 were 31 566. In the same year there were a total of 33 424 minor children involved in their parents' divorce. Studies conducted on divorce proved that the impact of divorce is the same for both adults and children.

The researcher's observation was that most teenagers who were affected by various social ills were from broken or dysfunctional families. For instance, the majority of teenagers who committed or attempted suicide, those that are living in the streets, those that have a high rate of failing at school, and those that are repeatedly in conflict with the law are reported to be from one parent families.

Parental divorce during adolescence interferes with the normal developmental process of finding an individual identity and developing emotional attachments outside the family. If teenagers lack proper parental support they become vulnerable and have to depend on their peers for support and, therefore, often adopt unwanted behaviors.

The changes in the family setting after parental divorce also put adolescents at risk. Some of the challenges faced by adolescents include the decline in the standard of living, maternal depression, inter-parental conflicts as well as a change of environment.

Almost all of the services provided to adolescents from broken families by the helping professionals are reactionary and not proactive. The programmes offered focus on the presented problems instead of dealing with the root cause. Thus, youngsters experience emotional instability as a result of parental divorce

and they do not receive therapy.

The high case load compels social workers to focus more on statutory services than prevention or early intervention services. Hence, children of divorced parents are subjected to post-divorce adjustment and trauma for the rest of their lives as they are not provided with counseling. The lack of services provided to children undergoing difficult situations propelled the researcher to undertake the study.

4.4 RESTATEMENT OF AIMS OF THE STUDY

4.4.1 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences and challenges faced by adolescents from divorced families. The investigation also intended to highlight the needs of these children which may be met through social work intervention.

The aim of the study was achieved. Each respondent indicated that he or she was affected by the divorce of his or her parents in one way or the other (cf p.87). The challenges encountered derived from the divorce itself and its aftermath. The challenges encountered include witnessing maternal depression, a decrease in the standard of living, the inability to fit in with their peers, and negative feelings such as anger which made some of them to engage in delinquent behaviour.

The study also highlighted that adolescents from divorced families were in need of therapeutic intervention (counseling) and material assistance.

4.4.1.1 Objectives

The specific outcomes of the study were:

To determine the relationship of adolescents with their custodial and non-custodial parents including siblings (after parental divorce)

This objective was met. Eleven respondents (55%) indicated that their relationship with their custodial parents had severed due to maternal depression. Three respondents (15%) related that the relationship with the

custodial parents was unstable. However, six respondents (30%) indicated that they had a good relationship with their custodial parents (cf p.70). Fifteen respondents (75%) stated that there was tension between them and their non-custodial parents fostered by the conflict between the parents. However, six respondents (30%) mentioned that they related well with their non-custodial parents. Eleven respondents (55%) indicated that their relationship with their siblings was strained and attributed it to the degree of conflict existing between the parents whereas seven (35%) said that they matured early as they took care of their younger siblings. Two respondents (10%) indicated that they did not have siblings (cf p. 74). The findings also showed that if a family member is emotionally unstable the other members become affected too.

To determine the adolescents' ability to initiate and maintain relationships with their peers after parental divorce

This objective was met. Nine respondents (45%) stated that they found it easy to initiate and maintain relationships with their friends as they found comfort in their friends (cf p.74). Five respondents (25%) mentioned that they had difficulty to keep up the relation with their friends as they were pre-occupied with their family problems (cf p.75). Another four respondents (20%) indicated that they could not initiate or maintain friendship with their peers for fear of rejection (cf p.75). Only two respondents (10%) indicated that they maintained relationships with the friends that they had prior to the divorce.

To determine the type of support obtained by the adolescents from their maternal/paternal relatives after paternal divorce

This objective was achieved. The majority, that is, fourteen respondents (70%) indicated that their families received moral and material support in the form of housing (accommodation) food, and money from their maternal relatives. Only six respondents (30%) stated that they received the minimal or no support at all from both their maternal and paternal relatives due to distance or existing conflicts among them (cf p.96). Two (20%) of the six custodial parents (60%) indicated that their adolescents confided in their maternal relatives this helped them cope with the divorce (cf p.105).

To assess social work services and other professional assistance received by adolescents from divorced families

This objective was achieved. Thirteen (65%) respondents mentioned that they did not consult any helping professional. Thus, there were no therapeutic services provided by social workers to these adolescents from divorced families. However, seven respondents (35%) revealed that they consulted the following professionals: teachers due to poor concentration at school, pastors for spiritual counseling and to be prayed for, as well as probation officers due to their involvement into unlawful acts and/or their uncontrollable behaviour.

To formulate hypotheses for future in-depth research

Based on the major findings of the study, the following hypotheses were developed:

- If both parents could inform their children of the impending divorce at a level appropriate for each child, children would less likely be traumatised by parental divorce.
- If parents and adolescents could be provided with post-divorce counseling they would alleviate long-term emotional complications.
- If adolescents find their custodial parents to have adjusted well to the divorce they would not be overburdened with the responsibility of taking care of their parents and siblings' well-being and, therefore, would focus on their own development.

4.5 RESTATEMENT OF ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

The assumptions for the study were as follows:

Divorced parents become overwhelmed by their circumstance and are likely not to relate well with their adolescents.

This assumption was supported by the findings of the study as eleven respondents (55%) indicated that their relationship had severed due to maternal depression (cf p.69). Fifteen respondents (75%) said that their relationship with their non-custodial parents was strained as a result of interparental conflicts (cf

p.71). The fact that other family members were not happy affected the family as a whole.

The loss of an intact family makes adolescents feel ashamed and therefore, they isolate themselves from their peers.

This assumption was not supported by the findings. Only four respondents (20%) indicated that they feared rejection, thus could not initiate and maintain relationships with their peers and not because they were embarrassed or ashamed (cf p.75). This could be because for some community members divorce still carries a social stigma.

Adolescents are usually not informed of their parents' intention to divorce.

This assumption was not supported by the findings. Fourteen respondents (70%) mentioned that they were informed about their parents' intention to divorce just before the physical separation by one of the parents. However, six respondents (30%) said that they overheard their parents talking to other people about the divorce (cf p.76-77).

Divorce is a possible contributory factor to earlier maturity among adolescents.

This assumption was supported by the findings. Six respondents (30%) reported that they became more responsible in support of their custodial parents and, therefore, lost their childhood experience. They took care of their younger siblings as well as assisting with the household chores (cf p.83). Another eight respondents (40%) mentioned that their behaviour changed for the better as they became very responsible and supportive to their custodial parents (cf p.90). These respondents' maturity was accelerated and, therefore, they were deprived of a carefree childhood.

Adolescents from divorced families are likely to perform poorly at school and develop delinquent behaviour

This assumption was supported by the findings as fourteen respondents (70%) stated that their school performance deteriorated (cf p.83). Some indicated that

it started even before the divorce. Twelve respondents (60%) stated that they became delinquent (cf p.89). The respondents were emotionally affected and they associated with bad friends due to frustration and anger.

Maternal relatives are usually the ones that provide moral support to adolescents from divorced families rather than paternal relatives.

This assumption was supported by the findings. Fourteen respondents (70%) said that their families were assisted by maternal relatives whereas three respondents (15%) stated that they were assisted by both maternal and paternal relatives (cf p.96-97). Four respondents (20%) indicated that they consulted their maternal relatives to inform or seek help regarding their parents' decision to divorce (cf p.80). Two (20%) custodial parents indicated that their adolescents were assisted by their maternal relatives to cope with the divorce (cf p.105). In the African culture most divorced women return to their families of origin hence, the support for the adolescents was from their maternal relatives rather than their paternal relatives.

Adolescents' from divorced families do not receive therapeutic intervention services as their parents are not aware of the distress they have.

This assumption was supported by the findings. Thirteen respondents (65%) reported that they did not consult any professionals at all whereas seven respondents (35%) stated that they consulted teachers, pastors, and probation officers after being found to be psychologically affected, reported to the police for being involved in unlawful acts and uncontrollable behaviour (cf p.91-92).

Six custodial parents (60%) mentioned that even if they had observed that their children were negatively affected by the divorce, they did not take any initiative of getting professional help for them. It could be because they were not aware of the existing professional services or because they were overwhelmed by the divorce (cf p.105).

4.6 SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS

The summary of the major findings of the study are:

- Adolescents from divorced families are faced with multiple challenges. The fact that they knew that their housing and economic status were going to change as a result of parental divorce was most frightening for them. Some of the changes that they had to cope with included the reduced amount of contact with the non-custodial parent. The fact that they had to move from their family home or change schools and also adapt to new environments had an impact on them. Some also had to adjust to the decreased standard of living whereas some had greater responsibility placed on them. The transition from a two parent family to a single parent family affected their psycho-social functioning (cf p.84).
- The ongoing parental conflicts added to their burden as they were torn between the two parents. This also strained their relationships with their custodial and non-custodial parents or their siblings.
- Six respondents (30%) did not enjoy a carefree childhood like other children. The custodial parents of these adolescents had to go to work and often burdened the adolescents with additional responsibilities, for example taking care of their siblings, or helping out with household chores. When children forfeit their childhood they are likely to experience a void in their lives and may become bitter.
- Fourteen respondents (70%) showed that the adolescents had feelings of sadness, anger, bitterness, and a sense of missing out on the experience of growing up in a two parent family (cf p.81). The respondents regarded themselves as different from other children who were living with both parents.
- The findings of this study revealed that the adolescents' ability to initiate and maintain relationships varied. While nine respondents (45%) showed that they were able to initiate or maintain their relationships, four (20%) indicated that they became isolated and withdrawn (cf p.74-75).
- The findings also revealed that thirteen respondents (65%) school performance was affected by parental divorce as they were emotionally

and psychologically unstable. However, seven respondents (35%) indicated that their school performance was only affected for a short while and later improved again. Only one respondent (5%) mentioned that his school performance improved after parental divorce as he was able to focus on his studies (cf p.84).

- Twelve respondents (60%) indicated that they experienced behavioural changes shortly after their parents' divorce, while eight respondents (40%) expressed that they became more competent (cf p.89-90).
- Although six respondents (30%) indicated a more cognitive approach to understanding the reasons why their parents became divorced, eight respondents (40%) expressed the fact that they felt betrayed by their parents who did not make an effort to prepare them for the divorce so they were taken by surprise.
- According to the custodial parents, the divorce only had a minimal effect on their adolescents when compared to previous studies which indicated that the effects may be much more serious and long-lasting than originally thought. Possible reasons for this misconception by the parents may be due to the fact that parents are preoccupied with their own pain and adjustment. Furthermore, children may hide their own distress by withdrawal, while parents think that they are coping.
- More than half of the respondents' (60%) showed that although they were aware of the services provided by social workers, they did not utilise them either because they were reluctant or they thought that social workers only intervened when there was a crisis. Some experienced discomfort in their families even prior to the divorce but did not request professional assistance.
- There is a need for social workers to provide material assistance to these families since they go through a lot of emotional turmoil.
- The programmes offered by social workers are reactionary rather than preventative. They wait for adolescents to contact them for assistance rather than engaging in outreach programmes that would enable adolescents to come forward and receive appropriate services to help them understand and cope with parental divorce.

4.7 CONCLUSION

Parental divorce during adolescence does indeed interfere with the normal developmental process of finding an individual identity and developing emotional attachments outside of the family. However, the study does suggest that not all adolescents were negatively affected by the family dissolution. Some were indeed relieved by it.

Ninety five percent of the respondents indicated that they experienced some form of stress as a result of the parental divorce due to the rearrangements in their households. Hence, some were forced into a state of accelerated maturity and some developed unacceptable behaviour. (cf p.88-89).

Most of the adolescents suffer the consequence of parental divorce in silence. The researcher also observed the respondents' willingness to share their experiences and challenges facing their day-to-day lives following their parents' divorce. They were open and frank when sharing their problems. These findings imply that there is a dire need for these children to have someone to talk to and to express their feelings.

The findings from this study also affirm findings from previous studies that the factors that protect adolescents' self esteem from adverse effects of divorce are diminished inter-parental conflict, effective parent-adolescent relationships, positive adjustment on the part of the custodial parents, and low maternal depression.

There are two sets of parameters that affect children, namely the parent-parent relationship and the parent-child relationship. The two are interdependent. If one suffers others become affected. That is, if parents do not relate well with each other the child's relationship with either one or both parents becomes affected too. This statement supports the family systems theory which has been supported by the findings of this study.

The rights and duties of husbands and wives are cancellable by virtue of them being made on paper and legalised but those of children and parents are not cancellable because of the biological fact emanating from generation and birth. Hence, the relationship between children and parents must be given preference over that of ex-partners.

4.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion made, it is recommended that:

- More in-depth qualitative research should be conducted among adolescents from divorced families in order to shed more light on their reactions towards parental divorce and their needs.
- Social workers and other helping professionals should develop intervention programmes that would assist adolescents to deal with their feelings and problems that stem from the divorce.
- Social workers should design programmes and train community leaders such as teachers, or pastors to assist in the identification of children at risk and those experiencing psycho-social problems.
- Social workers and psychologists should embark on awareness campaigns about services that they provide for couples and families going through divorce.
- Social workers should assist divorced parents to organize support groups that would enable participants to share their experiences.
- Social workers should encourage couples going through divorce to attend pre- and post-divorce counseling.
- The Department of Education should collaborate with the Department of Social Development to deploy social workers to school who would be accessible to learners particularly those at risk and those whose parents are going through divorce.

4.9 CLOSING STATEMENT

What youngsters perceive as their most serious challenges are not necessarily what professionals or parents believe them to be. While most parents may view divorce as a solution to their problems, few children seem to want the divorce. For the children, divorce can influence not only their relationships with each parent, but also their schooling, friendships, emotional and psychological health.

Although the elements of physical residence, financial resources, and emotional commitments have been discussed more in terms of their negative aspects than the positive ones, this does not mean that all the adolescents from divorced families are miserable. Regrets about the loss of the original family may continue throughout the adolescents' lives, but do not necessarily dominate their lives.

Furthermore, since this was a voluntary sample, consideration must be given to the possibility that some of those who did not take part in the study would have given responses that might have altered the data sharply in one direction or the other.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to the development of knowledge that is both practical and useful for social workers and other helping professionals working with families and children of divorce. Understanding the experiences of adolescents after parental divorce could improve and increase the support that is available to such adolescents and help alleviate the long term negative effects of divorce.

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**APPENDIX A
LETTER TO THE RESPONDENTS**

Tel: 014 717 2261
Fax: 014 717 5504
Cell No: 0722848108
drive

P.O.Box 2474
Modimolle, 0510
100 Nelson Mandela

Modimolle

Dear Respondent

Research on experiences and challenges faced by adolescents from divorced families in the Waterberg district in Limpopo Province.

I am a social worker employed by the Department of Health and Social Development at Limpopo Province based in the Waterberg District. I am currently registered for a Master's Degree in Social Work at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus) exploring the above-mentioned topic.

You have been chosen to take part in this study because I have confidence that your participation will add value to it.

Please take note that:

- There are no right or wrong answers;
- All information will be kept confidential;
- Anonymity is guaranteed.

Your willingness to participate in this study is highly appreciated.

Sincerely

Ms. Mogoane O M

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ADOLESCENTS

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Gender:

Male	
Female	

Age: _____

Ethnic Group: _____

Grade at School: _____

Parents' marital status: _____

Parents' employment status: _____

Religious Affiliation: _____

How old were you when your parents divorced? _____

SECTION B: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

1. How would you describe your relationship with your custodial parent after your parents' divorce?
2. How would you describe your relationship with your non-custodial parent after your parents' divorce?
3. How would you describe your relationship with your siblings after your parents' divorce?
4. Describe how you initiate and maintain relationships with peers.

SECTION C: ADOLESCENT'S REACTION TOWARD PARENTAL DIVORCE

5. How did you learn about your parent's intention to divorce?
6. How did you react to the news?
7. Whom did you inform about your parent's intention?
8. How did you feel after the divorce?
9. What are you missing the most as a result of the divorce?
10. How was your school performance affected by the divorce of your parents?
11. What type of extra-mural activities were you involved in before the divorce of your parents?
12. Were you able to participate in those activities after the divorce of your parents?
13. What challenges did you have due to the divorce of your parents?
14. Which of the following behaviour did you display before the divorce of your parents?

	Yes	No
Adhering to house rules		
Defying house rules		
Stealing other children's belongings		
Fighting other children		
Skipping school/truancy		
Smoking dagga		
Drinking alcohol		
Engaged in sexual activities		

Other, specify _____

15. Which of the following behaviour did you display after the divorce of your parents?

	Yes	No
Adhering to house rules		
Defying house rules		
Stealing other children's belongings		
Fighting other children		
Skipping school/truancy		
Smoking dagga		
Drinking alcohol		
Engaged in sexual activities		

Other, specify _____

SECTION D: SUPPORT GIVEN TO ADOLESCENT CHILDREN FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES

16. Did you consult any of the following professionals?

	Yes	No
Teacher		
Counselor		
Pastor		
Social Worker		
Psychologist		

Other, specify _____

17. How did the person that you have consulted in question 11 assist you?

18. Who of your maternal/paternal relatives have offered you support?

19. What type of support/assistance has your relative provided?

SECTION E: PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE REQUIRED

20. What type of assistance do you require in order to cope with the divorce of your parents?

21. Who do you think is the right person to offer such assistance?

22. In your opinion, how do you think children from divorced families should be helped by Social workers?

Thank you for your participation

Mogoane O M

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CUSTODIAL PARENTS

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Gender:

Male	
Female	

Age: _____

Ethnic Group: _____

Religious Affiliation: _____

Ethnic Group: _____

Employment status: _____

How long have you been divorced? _____

SECTION B: ADOLESCENTS' REACTION AND COPING STRATEGIES
TOWARDS PARENTAL DIVORCE

1. How old were the children when you divorced?
2. How did the children react towards the divorce?
3. Among your children who was negatively affected by the divorce?
4. How did your adolescent child cope with the divorce?
5. What challenges did your child have after the divorce?
6. Which of the following behaviours did your child display prior the divorce?

	Yes	No
Adhering to house rules		
Defying house rules		
Stealing other children's belongings		
Fighting other children		
Skipping school/truancy		
Smoking dagga		
Drinking alcohol		
Engaged in sexual activities		

Other, specify _____

7. Which of the following behaviors did your child display after the divorce?

	Yes	No
Adhering to house rules		
Defying house rules		
Stealing other children's belongings		
Fighting other children		
Skipping school/truancy		
Smoking dagga		
Drinking alcohol		
Engaged in sexual activities		

Other, specify _____

8. What type of professional services were provided to your child(ren) after the divorce?

9. In your opinion, how did your adolescent child benefit from such an intervention?

10. Mention the people who supported you through the divorce and the type of support they provided to you and your child(ren).

11. Did your child consult any of the following professionals?

	Yes	No
Teacher		
Counselor		
Pastor		
Social Worker		
Psychologist		

Other, specify _____

12. How did the person that your child consulted in question 11 assist him/her?

SECTION E: PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE REQUIRED

13. What type of services do you think social workers should offer adolescent children from divorced families?

Thank you for your participation

Mogoane O M