

IIE VARSITY COLLEGE

**THE NATURE OF ATTACHMENT BETWEEN STEP-PARENTS AND
ADOLESCENT STEP-CHILDREN IN THE WESTERN CAPE: A STEP-PARENT'S
PERSPECTIVE.**

by

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I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the Honours degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

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ABSTRACT:

This study explored the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescent step-children. This research was based on information gathered from the step-parent's perspective. Interpretivism paradigm and exploratory design were implemented. Participants were recruited in the Western Cape through convenience sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants; audio recording and notes were taken. This data was analysed using thematic analysis and the information was organised into themes and patterns. The findings of this study indicate the following: developing relationships with step-children, lack of appreciation, challenging role concerning how to take care of step-children, step-child's gender and parenting style influenced the interaction between step-parents and adolescent step-children. Future research on the attachments between step-parents and adolescent step-children is required.

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1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Compared to conventional family dynamics involving the biological parents and children, Western countries have witnessed an increase in the stability of remarriages and cohabitations, in combination with a high rate of re-partnering. As a result, stepfamilies are one of the growing family dynamics due to the increasing number of remarriages and cohabitations (Wiemers, 2018; King, Boyd & Thorsen, 2015). The term stepfamily has been used to incorporate a type of family structures (Mathis, 2017; Ivanova & Balbo, 2019). Such stepfamily structure encompasses married or cohabitating couples, in which one partner has a child from a previous relationship (Kail, Cavanaugh & Muller, 2019), as well as complex family forms of couples where both partners have at least one child from previous relationships or even mutual children from the current relationship.

Stepfamilies were regarded to outnumber all other dynamics of families, emphasising a need to understand the emergence and system of stepfamilies. Studies show that the adjustment to remarriage and stepfamily is complex, in particular, step-parents are faced with several challenges (Papernow, 2018a; Wiemers, Seltzer, Schoeni, Hotz & Bianchi, 2018). In addition to numerous challenges, stepfamilies struggle to adjust to new family forms due to indifferences and norms. As a result of several challenges, step-parents struggle to form relationships with adolescent step-children due to lack of attachment between these individuals. Although statistics in South Africa does not necessarily present an accurate picture of remarriages and cohabitation, studies have recorded a 4% increase on step-parents and a 10 % increase among children living in non-nuclear families (Hall, Richter, Mokomane & Lake, 2018).

Based on details about stepfamilies, it is believed that minor children from previous nuclear families will become part of a newly structured step-family in which either a step-father or a step-mother will be present. The National Healthy Marriage Centre (2017) shown that in remarried couples, about 11 % were residential step-parents with at least one adolescent step-child. However, there were a few comparable literatures on the relationship between step-parents and adolescent step-children in the South African context in the researcher's quest for knowledge on the subject. Thus, it was important for the researcher to address the gap in the existing literature

in the South African context with regards to the relationship between step-parents and adolescent step-children in the Western Cape.

1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The researcher's interest on the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescent step-children was motivated by the principles of the attachment theory developed by John Bowlby (1958), who uncovered many of the underlying bond and emotional security between a caregiver and a child. One of the most significant aspects emerging from the attachment theory may be the quality of the relationship between the step-parent and the adolescent step-child in the household. In line with the attachment theory, another consideration may be the subsequent effects that step-parent and step-child relationships may have, particularly on the adjustment of step-parents (Stone, 2017; Teska, 2018).

The step-parent and step-child relationship may be the most significant relationship in predicting the stepfamily unit (Ganong, Jensen, Sanner, Chapman & Coleman, 2020b), and could also be the most challenging and stressful relationship. Step-parents living in contexts with external forces are prevalent and more likely to display ineffective attachment styles (Wiemers, Seltzer, Schoeni, Hotz & Bianchi, 2018). Although a large amount of research on step-parenting and step-family has been conducted in recent years, little is known about the ties between step-parents and step-child adolescents, particularly in the Western Cape (Amoateng, Heaton & Mcalmont, 2017). Within this context, the researcher sought to expand knowledge on the experience of step-parenting in the complex family structure of both step-parents and step-children.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Recently, South Africa has been experiencing high rates of step-parental roles. With predominant cases of remarriages and the increasing rate of cohabitation among couples with step-children, stepfamilies structures are more than ever (Hall, Richter, Mokomane & Lake, 2018; Ganong, Coleman, Chapman & Jameson, 2017a). Step-parents, however, are not exempt from the difficulties of step-family dynamics. In fact, in step-parenting adolescents, step-parents face even greater difficulties as they are compelled to develop and maintain relationships with their step-children. Ganong, Coleman, Chapman and Jameson (2017a, p.171) state that “various factors may be at work in terms of the quality of the relationship in step-parent and step-

child.” Step-parents face several rational challenges while simultaneously addressing the step-parenting integration process, developing ties with step-children, managing children's well-being, and providing financial support to the entire step-parent family.

Much of the research on the relationship between step-parents and step-children focuses more on children within step-families. Research is limited regarding the experiences and challenges in which step-parents encounter in the midst of stepfamily integration (Perry-Fraser & Fraser, 2017). When exploring the patterns of attachment between step-parents and adolescent step-children, and Sooryamoorthy and Makhoba (2016) state that there is a lack of internal research on the specific ties that shapes stepfamilies in the multicultural South African society. This research study provides an understanding of the attachment between step-parents and adolescent step-children, from the viewpoint of step-parents. For the reasons aforementioned, step-parents are particularly at high risk for relationship dissolution. With the additional challenges of step-family dynamics, step-parents are likely to be at greater risk of developing insecure attachments with their step-children due to new family structures (Willis & Limbs, 2017).

1.4 PURPOSE STATEMENT

This study aims to describe the lived experiences of step-parents developing attachments with adolescent step-children because there is limited research available in the existing literature. In this study, Western Cape step-parents are given a stand through the opportunity to share their experiences and challenges of raising adolescent step-child. A further aim of this study is to generate information that may be of assistance to step-parents within stepfamilies and professionals working and providing support to step-parent families and, in particular, step-parents.

Due to the rise in stepfamilies, it is important that psychologists and counsellors focus on strengthening the bond between step-parents and step-children (Perry-Fraser & Fraser, 2017), as well as an awareness of their unique experiences. As there is minimal research on the experience of step-parents raising adolescent step-children within stepfamilies, a qualitative study is required in academic literature to resolve this gap.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Moreover, this research project aims to discover the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescent step-children, with the following **objectives**:

- To identify the patterns of attachment step-parents develop with adolescent step-children.
- To examine the challenges faced by step-parents when establishing relationships with adolescent step-children.
- To focus on the effects of all the factors including gender, culture, parenting style and communication on the step-parent and adolescent step-child relationship.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary research questions which emerged from the objective of the study are as follows:

- What are the patterns of attachment between step-parent and adolescent step-children?
- What challenges do step-parents encounter towards forming relationships with adolescent step-children?
- To what extent does gender, culture, parenting style and communication affect the relationship you have with your step-child?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review discusses theories and research related to step-parent and step-children relationship and step-parent role. Important concepts such as attachment theory, nature of attachment, step-parents and adolescents are defined and discussed as part of the section. The literature also reviews research focusing on the context of step-parent and adolescent step-children relationships. The second half of the review the considers research focused on the possible patterns of attachments between step-parents and adolescent step-children. This section also outlines the multitude of factors considered to be significant in the association between the step-parent and the adolescent step-child.

2.1 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY TERMS

The following key terms that are used in this study are conceptualised, namely attachment theory, nature of attachment, step-parents and adolescents.

2.1.1 Attachment theory

At the core of the step-parents and adolescents, *attachment theory* proposed by John Bowlby (1969) focuses on the fundamental relationships between parent and infant that is essential for development and survival. The attachment theory initially become organised into different styles over time (Bowlby, 1969 as cited in Ganong, Coleman, Chapman and Jameson, 2017a). Researchers describe the attachment theory as a framework that understands the adolescent and parent relationships which influences the adolescent's expectation of parental behaviours (Kail, Cavanaugh & Muller, 2019; Wambua, Ombodo, Bifulco & Kumar, 2018). Similarly, to theory of attachment, step-parent and adolescent step-children have internalised the lack of attachment to their relationship in an insecure attachment both on emotional security and individual attachment (Ganong, Coleman, Chapman and Jameson, 2017a).

2.1.2 Nature of attachment

The *nature of attachment* refers to the quality of attachment that plays a vital role in the stability of childhood and adolescence stage (Lai & Carr, 2018). This is based on the secure and insecure attachments between step-parents and adolescents. Quality of attachment can be formed with fathers, grand-parents or step-parents (Kail, Cavanaugh & Muller, 2019). Remarriage and cohabitation create many stressors and disruptions that attributable to step-parent adjustment such as the quality of

step-child relation. Jensen and Harris (2016) demonstrate that the nature of the relationships in the long term between step-parent and step-child depend on the level of attachment with each other.

2.1.3 Step-parent

The term *step-parent* is used throughout the study when referring to the new family member that the biological mother or father remarries and is involved in raising an adolescent step-child. A step-parent is operationalised as an individual transitioning from being a stranger to a parental figure in a previously developed parentage (Lyness, 2016). Step-parent as a concept is best-recognised and widely used to describe a parent who is not a child's own mother or father but is best known as a step-mother or step-father. Other terms used in the literature when referring to the parent type referred to above are, for example, "non-biological parent" (Ganong & Coleman, 2017).

2.1.4 Adolescent

Adolescent can be presented from a variety of perspectives including a biological and psychological viewpoint. From a biological perspective, adolescence is a developmental phase characterised by sexual maturity (Kail, Cavanaugh & Muller, 2019). Adolescence, from a psychological point of view, is the period defined by tasks of psychosocial and psychodynamic development, such as building our own identity. Adolescence can be categorised from three stages of development: early adolescence involves individuals between the ages of 10 and 13, middle adolescence between the ages of 14 and 17 and, finally, late adolescence between the ages of 18 and the early 20s. From a literature point of view, adolescence is a critical period characterised by the search for attachments and the development of relationships (Jensen & Harris, 2016). However, the term adolescent in this study is defined as a person between the ages of 14-18.

The following section focuses on the chosen theories to show that individual attachments and experiences are real and have been taken seriously.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 Theory of Attachment

Associations between step-parents and step-children are often framed through the lens of attachment theory; specifically, the role of internal working models on relationship outcomes (Ganong, Jensen, Sanner, Chapman & Coleman, 2020b). The attachment theory is a joint work by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (1969) suggests that the caregiver is responsible for adequate response to the infant's basic needs, emotional security and for maintaining a safe and secure environment. According to Scharfe (2017), the infant and caregiver attachment experience can mainly influence the child's emotional, social and cognitive development and disruptive experiences can have long-lasting effects. In these early experiences, the developing child forms internal working models of attachment which can be carried throughout future relationships. The internal working models are mental representations of primary caregiver relationship experiences (Bowlby, 1982 as cited in Ganong, Jensen, Sanner, Chapman & Coleman, 2020b).

Ainsworth and Bowlby also set out expectations or rules for how an individual reacts and responds in adult relationships. Furthermore, there are four categories of attachment styles: secure, insecure, anxious, avoidant and anxious-avoidant (Kail, Cavanaugh & Muller, 2019). Individuals who have secure attachment styles tend to develop interactions that facilitate individual well-being and the development skills needed to establish and promote positive bonds. On the contrary, adults with anxious or avoidant attachment patterns often experience less positive interactions because they suppress their emotions and try to avoid bonding (Gillath, Karantzas & Fraley, 2016; Scharfe, 2017). Notably, the attachment guidelines are not necessarily constant, Scharfe (2017) imply that individuals with poor caregiving experience as children may change attachment patterns in a range of ways. Based on the attachment theory, these interactions are stable throughout life but can be influenced by external factors (Bowlby, 1969, as cited in Willis & Limbs, 2017).

For this study, the attachment theory provides a unique insight of experiences and relationship challenges experienced by step-parents raising adolescent step-children. Research on attachment styles aims at bringing together attachment

orientations and a wide range of relationship outcomes in various close interactions, including relationships between step-parents and step-children (Papernow, 2018b). An individual's attachment style influences how others view relationships, and it is reasonable that step-parents and adolescents should also be influenced. Research shows that one's attachment style is linked to one's parenting style (Jensen & Harris 2017). Insecure step-parents may have difficulties responding sympathetically to the adolescents because they experienced attachment figures that experienced unmet needs. Jensen and Harris (2017) denote that the adolescent that is not responded to in an unsupportive way turns to develop insecure attachment styles.

Furthermore, step-parents with secure attachment patterns may be even more prepared to risk rejection by adolescent step-children, allowing step-parents to interact with them more authoritatively and persistently. Eagle (2017) agree that securely attached step-parents may be motivated to attach and seek opportunities to interact with step-children. On the other hand, step-parents with avoidant attachment styles may commonly perceive the step-parent role as more challenging and overpowering than their secure counterparts do (Jensen, Lombardi, & Larson, 2015 as cited in Papernow, 2018b). This could be due, in part, because step-parents experience an increased level of discontent during the child's adolescence, while adolescents report heightened levels of stress (Gilbreath, 2018; Papernow, 2018b).

Step-parents with anxious attachment styles may vary from securely attached step-parents; they may be less involved in their new relationships. For example, they may feel extremely fearful of the step-child's rejection or lack of reciprocity. In brief, stepparents with avoidant attachment style may be less likely to seek affinity than others, and Ganong, Jensen, Sanner, Chapman & Coleman (2020b) postulate that those with both avoidant and anxious attachment orientations may be less skilful at developing affinity if they try to do so. Step-parents' avoidance has been strongly linked with feeling less close to the step-child, additionally, when step-parents display dismissive and inconsistently behaviour towards the step-child, and insecure relationship may be developed (Eagle, 2017; Willis & Limbs, 2017). Overall, step-parent's pattern of an attachment may influence their willingness to engage with their adolescent step-children and their ability to develop positive relationships with them.

2.2.2 Family Systems Theory

The Family Systems Theory originated by Murray Bowen (1960) is a theory applied to understand human behaviour. The family systems theory uses systems to describe dynamic context and change in the family structure (Ray & Johnson, 2016). It is a context of a family that its members are intensely connected emotionally. Family members strongly influence each other's thoughts, emotions and actions (Palombi, 2016). According to the family systems theory, family members seek each other's support and approval and respond to each other's needs and expectations. Erdem and Safi (2018) state that family members are perceived to be living under the same emotional skin. The family systems theory focuses on the connectedness and reactivity which contributes to the functioning of family members. However, the negative imbalance between partners in a situation may adversely influence the relationship with other family members (Ray & Johnson, 2016).

Within this context, the family is considered as open, goal-oriented, self-management system sharing common aspects of all the systems. Ray and Johnson (2016) suggest that the family system has become a preferred theoretical framework in the investigation of dysfunctional families. Bowen's interpretation transformed the way individuals thought about family psychotherapy and helped to define how family processes may affect the attitude of adult and adolescents towards marriage (Thomas & Priest, 2016; Gilbertson & Graves, 2018). Bowen believed individuals were influenced by interactions and became part of an emotional system. For instance, in most relationships, people seek each other's attention and meet each other's needs. Palombi (2016) agreed that every action influence all other individuals in the family system.

Family systems theory generally deals with ongoing family issues, Erdem and Safi (2018) imply that the system intervenes in those interactional analysis that maintain dysfunctional relationships such as the experience of remarriage or cohabitation. The ongoing family issues and transactional processes represent the crucial elements of family systems (Ray & Johnson, 2016). Further, the family system is made up of system including parent and parent, parent and child, spousal and personal subsystems. These subsystems comprise of important responsibilities,

maintaining extremities, as well as differentiating the subsystems (Ray & Johnson, 2016).

However, stepfamilies have more permeable extremities (Jensen & Harris, 2016), where a non-biological parent is allowed into the subsystem to maintain interactions with step-children. Jensen and Harris (2016) suggest of conceptualising the interaction dynamics found in stepfamilies, compared to original families. Additionally, stepfamilies with children are composed of three primary subsystems: the biological parent and step-parent (marital), stepfather and step-child (adolescent), and the step-mother and step-child.

2.2.2.1 Step-parent and step-child subsystem

The evolution of the stepparent-stepchild relationship is a crucial process as current literature on the literature imply that the well-being of the couple and the stepfamily relies heavily on the ability to develop professional relationships between the stepfamily members (Mathis, 2017). By way of explanation, it may not be possible to create a happy remarriage without also developing a coherent relationship between all members of the stepfamily. As mentioned earlier in the study, there is a high incidence of remarriage in recent years (Wiemers, 2018), family structures have been changing and, as a result, step-parent and step-child interactions is a growing phenomenon within society (Jensen & Harris, 2016).

Step-parent arrival in the new family can threaten the step-parent and step-child relationship as the step-parent and step-child are unsure about the step-parent function in the family system. For step-parents, the step-parent and step-child subsystem may be difficult to be understood, especially when dealing with an adolescent step-child (Jensen, Schafer & Holmes, 2015). When a child reaches adolescence, King, Boyd and Thorsen (2015) indicate that the family faces new organisational challenges pertaining to the adolescent's autonomy and independence. The step-parent and step-child relationship, however, becomes the sanctuary of the stepfamily subsystem. According to Jensen and Harris (2016), the relationship between a new step-parent and step-children may initially be uncomfortable because the new stepfamily members have not yet developed a sense of belonging, nor they have adjusted to the family structure.

The following section will set the pace for the discussion of reviewed literatures based on the subject of the study.

The context of step-parents and adolescent relationship

Predictably, the adolescent step-children will reject the stepmother's efforts at the beginning, which may discourage the step-parent and lead her to a low level of self-esteem (Jensen, Schafer & Holmes, 2015; Teska, 2018). Studies have found that when step-parents (especially step-mothers) offer approval and excitement to adolescent step-children, and when step-children respond with coldness and disinterest, step-parents begin to disengage after a number of perceived failures (Teska, 2018). The step-family members are at risk of developing relationship issues due to negative communication or disengagement of the step-parent. Rainforth (2018) clarify that the image of a step-parent is not the same as that of a biological parent, for instance, the biological parents' efforts and actions -are encouraged, but this is not valid in the context of step-parents.

A step-parent's self-esteem, whose primary role is to take care of the family, depends on the perspective of his or her family (Teska, 2018; Jensen, Schafer & Holmes, 2015). Since, in nuclear families, the process of idealisation is boosting the image of the biological parent. Not only are step-parents not idealised, but they may also be on the receiving end of the anger of the step-children about any role the biological parent did or did not fulfil (King, Amato, Lindstrom, 2015). In contrast, stepchildren, without being aware and responsible, may feel that they have to punish their step-mother for taking over the role of their mother (Jensen & Harris, 2016). In a study on step-parental support and experience conducted by Van Houdt, Kalmijn and Ivanova (2020), it was found that a step-father's perceptions of how his step-children perceive him could contribute to poor well-being and withdrawal because step-fathers generally believe that they are not viewed in a positive light by their step-children and the stepfamily.

International research indicates that step-parents, especially those living with adolescents, are faced with difficulties (Wiemers, Seltzer, Schoeni, Hotz & Bianchi, 2018). The latter comparable studies conducted are rather disturbing, and consideration has been devoted to all interventions and initiatives aimed at

supporting step-parent headed households. In addition, King, Amato, Lindstrom, (2015) found that step-parents usually experience higher levels of stress associated with parenting than biological parents. Additional evidence suggests that the anxiety of a step-parent is linked to the uncertainty associated with the following: their role and responsibilities within the stepfamily, their relationships with and responsibilities towards the step-child, and their relationship with the biological father or mother of the child (Jensen & Harris, 2016; Van Houdt, Kalmijn & Ivanova, 2020).

Attachment styles between step-parents and adolescents

Step-parents and adolescents may find it difficult to establish a bond as circumstances unintentionally bring together the step-parents and the children of their partners. Because of these circumstances, Laursen, Madsen, Obel and Hohwü (2019) argue that there can often be interactions between step-parents and their new stepchildren. Positive relationships, however, depend on the adaptation with which the new stepfamily structure and dynamics accepted by adolescents. Some step-parent's experience attachment difficulties with their adolescent step-children and others chose to develop relationships with selected step-children (Willis & Limbs, 2017). As mentioned in the theoretical framework above, attachment styles have been studied using a theory developed by Bowlby and Ainsworth (1969) that integrates fundamental forms of change in the attachment.

There are four categories of attachment patterns, including secure, anxious, avoidant and resistant attachment styles as presented by Scharfe (2017). Ganong, Jensen, Sanner, Chapman and Coleman (2020b) posit that Bowlby and Ainsworth views of attachment orientations may be useful to understand the associations between step-parents and step-children. Secure attachment style during adolescence, based on the previous study, means that the step-parents are present and responsive to the adolescent, specifically the step-mother (Inthorn, 2015). The anxious style, on the other hand, consists of teenagers anxious about the availability and responsiveness of their step-parents (Lai & Carr, 2018). In the avoidant style, the attributes of adolescents include preventing close interactions with the step-parent due to lack of confidence and communication. Finally, resistant attachment is composed of a separation relationship that results in adolescents who are difficult to console and support (Ganong, Jensen, Sanner, Chapman & Coleman, 2020b)

Studies indicate that step-parent roles vary and are based on the childhood attachments of each individual (Lai & Carr, 2018). Taken together, studies have shown that adolescents respond well when step-parents practice a safer and safe style once the nature of attachment is gradually achieved (Jensen & Harris, 2016). In addition, researchers cited the need for further research on the role of relationships between step-parents and child attachments (Willis & Limbs, 2017). On the contrary, the step-parent and adolescent relationship is understood by some people to include both positive and negative qualities. Rainforth (2018) report that, however, when adolescents are parented by unsupportive step-fathers who only show disciplining roles, results are more distinct. Nevertheless, the step-parent and adolescent relationship is recognised by some people as covering both positive and negative qualities.

Factors that influence the step-parent and adolescent relationship

Several factors have been recognised that may contribute to how well adolescent step-children adapt to a step-parent and step-child relationship. It involves numerous factors for Brennan (2016), such as non-biological parent gender, parenting style, marital status, and the nature of the interaction with the step-child. Guzzo (2018) has described that the following factors contribute to the quality of the relationship between step-parents and step-children in step-families: the gender of the step-child, the step-child's age, culture, communication, and parenting factors. The gender of the step-child influences the adjustment outcome of the step-parent. Some evidence suggests that step-daughters in step-families have more adjustment issues than step-sons do (Brenna, 2016). Girls normally report more stress and anxiety than boys in stepfamilies (Jensen & Harris, 2016).

Jensen and Schafer (2016) state that higher stress can lead to adjustment difficulties for both parties, such as behavioural problems such as alcohol use, drugs, and step-children may participate in early sexual relations due to adaptation problems. Following remarriage, step-parents tend to report an increase in negative behaviours in step-daughters and a decrease in negative behaviour in sons. This is often understood by the close mother-daughter relationships formed by the addition of a step-father prior to remarriage and the perceived threat to that relationship (Guzzo, 2018). Step-parents tend to take on the role of the mother at home and manage

domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning and feel willingly part of the stepfamily (Brenna, 2016). This, in turn, makes girls more resistant to accepting a new step-parent than boys. Age of the step-child factor influences the adaptation of children (Jensen & Schafer, 2016). Adolescents have a harder time than younger children, in part because adolescence is a period of transition in development. The quality of a step-parent and step-child creates change and can create additional stress.

As they strive for independence and turn to peers for support, adolescents may show a reluctance to establish ties (Kail, Cavanaugh & Muller, 2019). Following a remarriage, adolescent step-children may show some reaction and behavioural change, but once a consistent routine is established, adjustment problems usually disappear (Jensen & Schafer, 2016). The earlier the transition occurs, the more issues may arise, and Lai and Carr (2018) emphasize that remarriage seems to be challenging for early adolescents. Research proves that family dynamics change as new members: step-parents and stepsiblings are introduced (Guzzo, 2018). Furthermore, family traditions and rituals that are partial when the new step-parent is introduced, completely transforming pre-existing family dynamics, have to adjust boundaries between parents and adolescent children. Historically, African cultures are based on community or tribal relationships that have given the stepfamily system additional emotional and economic support (Ahlers, 2016).

However, when step-parents and step-children still harbour feelings of mistrust, positive and productive communication can be difficult to establish. Due to the discomfort and tension associated with having a common relational parent, effective communication between step-parents and adolescent step-children can initially be difficult (Brenna, 2016; Metts, Schrodtt & Braithwaite, 2017). The form of parenting adolescents directly influences the step-parents' well-being (Brennan, 2016). Jensen and Schafer (2016), together with a poor quality of parental functioning, have implications for the behaviour and well-being of the adolescent when parents do not give their children adequate emotional support or control, negative parenting styles such as authoritarian and negligent parenting.

2.3 THE CURRENT STUDY

Based on the above-mentioned literature, it is evident that more research is needed on the attachments between step-parents and adolescents due to the emergence of stepfamily era. Rabe and Naidoo (2015) agree that for broader contributions, the challenge is thus to make available research on family structures in South Africa. Consequently, this research focuses primarily on the exploration of the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescents from the point of view of step-parents. A review of the step-family and step-parent and step-child relationship literature in the current study shows that notable progress must be made in identifying family processes that promote the adjustment of step-parents; however, the researcher notes several existing gaps.

The interactions of young and pre-adolescent children are the focus of many step-parent and step-child studies, with only a few recent studies focusing on adolescent step-children. Few stepfamily studies have incorporated longitudinal data related to stepchildren's adjustment over time. Third, the quality of the step-parent and step-child relationship has often been overlooked as a predictor of adjustment by stepchildren. In order to address these gaps, this study examined the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescent step-children from the perspective of step-parents. Step-parents and adolescents have had attachment and adjustment experiences difficulties. The development of relationships has often been affected by these challenges from infancy to adulthood. Some of these were involved in the forced relocation of certain ethnic groups to regions that separated them from their families and communities, based on Willis and Limbs (2017). This has resulted in a loss of parental identity and a loss of identity that has caused problems with general attachment (Profe, 2016).

2.4 CONCLUSION

This section of the study provided an overview of the relevant literature with specific reference to the step-parent and step-child relationship as a system, the context of the step-parent and step-child relationship, as well as the factors experienced in the step-parent and step-child interaction. A better understanding of the experiences of step-parent and adolescent step-children was obtained by using the attachment theory and the family systems theory. The systemic perspective also provided insight

into the experiences of step-parents in relation to the step-family's various members and the larger system that includes the step-children. The following section discusses the methodology used in the execution of the current study.

3.RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the current research is to provide a description of the unique and meaningful experiences of step-parents of adolescent step-children in order to add information to the relatively limited body of knowledge related to the attachments between step-parents and adolescent step-children. A qualitative research method was chosen on the basis of the exploratory objective of this study. In addition, a qualitative approach links with the interpretative paradigm as it is strongly rooted in understanding daily individual experiences in specific contexts. In this section, the motivation for this choice of research design is discussed. The research process and methodology, research tools, as well as the analysis and interpretation process are described thereafter.

3.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The interpretive paradigm was chosen through the lenses of step-parents to provide a view of the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescents. Moreover, an ontological position is necessary for understanding reality and subjectivity in order to explore this subject. Interpretivism-related research has frequently found that children with responsive parents and secure attachments respond more empathetically (Wiemers, Seltzer, Schoeni, Hotz & Bianchi, 2018). The paradigm of interpretivism will explore the environment's impact on changing the behaviour of an individual (Thanh & Le Thanh, 2015). Moreover, interpretivism seeks to understand a specific context with core beliefs that are socially constructed. Although the interpretive paradigm is not the dominant research model, Thanh and Le Thanh (2015) state that accommodating multiple views and versions of the truth are gaining significant influence.

The interpretivism paradigm will be applied to the experiences and experiences of step-parents when raising adolescent step-children, challenges. Furthermore, this paradigm also covers various aspects of the nature of attachment, such as

adjustment, security, emotions, behaviour and interactions. In addition, the interpretative model is based on the thought that reality consists of the subjective experiences of the external world of an individual (Pham, 2018). As a result, the perspective of interpretivism uses a relativist ontology in which a single situation has multiple interpretations instead of determining the truth. According to Pham (2018, p.4), "ontological view tends to be subjective rather than objective." Furthermore, the research questions formulated are based on finding out what participants view as the most important part of their adolescent attachment subjectively.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The emphasis of a qualitative approach is on the description and understanding of human behaviour (Mohajan, 2018; Maree, 2019; Howitt & Cramer, 2017). The research question tends to be more open. Open research questions refer to questions that are required to be answered in their own words by respondents (Maree, 2019). To obtain their views on a specific phenomenon, the data is gathered from a smaller number of individuals (Maree, 2019). Textual analysis is used in the process of analysing the data to identify themes and to obtain rich descriptions of the experiences of people within a specific context (Maree, 2019). Maree (2019) states that the research choice is between the two approaches. Based on matching the approach to a research problem, fitting your audience's approach, and relating your experiences' approach (p. 26). The researcher opted to use a qualitative approach due to the open-ended nature of the research question of the current study.

The choice of the approach of the researcher was motivated by the study's aim, that is to gain an understanding of how the same phenomenon of being a step-parent to an adolescent step-children is experienced by each participant in this research. Additionally, the researcher chose a qualitative approach because it provides significant details and the richness of the experiences of the step-parents. According to Moore (2017), qualitative researchers are interested in how individuals are by understanding the meaning others attach to their experiences and sense of their experiences in their world. Thus, the researcher chose the exploratory research design as the research method informing this study.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

An exploratory research strategy is applied when little is known about the subject of the study (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). Moreover, the authors claim that exploratory strategy defines the feasibility of the study and develop questions to be explored by the researcher. However, the study focuses on the exploratory strategy to gain new understandings, discover new notions and also to increase knowledge on attachment challenges associated with the step-parent and adolescent relationship through step-parent's perspectives. An in-depth exploratory research technique needs to be explored whether the variables apply in the South African context. The research field will be entered with curiosity from the point of limited literature into providing new data concerning the study (Mohajan, 2018).

A grounded theory will be presented and used to further achieve the objectives identified in the study. Along these lines, grounded theory shares different features with other qualitative designs and is applied to topics that are scarce and in need of improvement (Moore, 2017). Grounded theory will provide an opportunity to investigate different themes and ideas of the data conducted. Moreover, the grounded theory will search for general statements about relationships amongst categories of information. Borrowing from grounded theory, step-parents' experiences and ideas will be processed and categorised systematically. In addition, themes and categories of information emerging from participant's interviews will be conceptualised and formulated as part of the process in the study. The following section focuses on the research plan that enabled the study to achieve its sampling procedures.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

3.5.1 Sampling

A study population is described as a large group of individuals from which a researcher wants to draw conclusions (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). Individuals usually share traits or features in any detailed population. Because of the larger population size in the Western Cape region, for the current study, the researchers selected a suitable sample from this population. The criterion for participants was as follows:

- step-parents from regions in the Western Cape Province parenting adolescent step-children between 15 and 21 years of age.

- It was also required that the step-parent had at least one step-child from a previous relationship biologically related to the other parent and at least in a married or cohabiting relationship.

(Mohajan, 2018) state that sampling in the interpretive paradigm is often purposeful and directed at specific inclusion criteria. These step-parents are not representative of the larger population of step-parents, but they are legitimate in their experience and can stand on their own and in their own light. The sample for this study involved ten (10) step-parents with experience in stepparenting adolescents. These adolescents ranged between middle adolescence (15 years) to late adolescence (21 years) and all resided in the Western Cape. In more detail, the sample of participants entailed nine step-mothers and one step-father. More specifically, nine step-mothers and one step-father were included in the sample of participants. Six of the participants ranged from 30 to 40 years of age, three were between 50 and 57 years of age, and one was in his early 60s. Of the participants, seven were married and three were cohabiting. All the step-parents in this study were members of their stepfamilies and had acted in their part of parenting an adolescent step-child.

The sample for the current study was selected by a snowball sampling method, which is also the type of convenience sampling. The researcher used the technique of snowball sampling to recruit potential participants as it was difficult to find people suitable for the criteria. Naderifah, Goli and Galjaie (2017) specify that when the researcher experiences difficulties with accessing subjects with the target sample, snowball sampling may be applied. To access the research population, the snowballing commenced as soon as the research plan was ready. The researcher contacted two members of the community who knew various community projects in the Western Cape. These individuals introduced the researcher to the gatekeepers of the community projects. Boehs, Boehs, Fernandes and Nascimento (2018) defines a gatekeeper as an individual who controls the researcher's access to the setting and participants.

3.5.2 Data collection

Data collection involves a systematic process of data collection relevant to the research problem, question and goals, using interview techniques, focus group discussions, case studies and narratives (Maree, 2019; Moore, 2017; Pham, 2018).

This study encompassed the following objectives: to gain insight into the quality of attachment between step-parents and adolescent step-children from the perspective of step-parents; to explore the experiences that influence a positive step-parent and step-child relationship and to examine the influence of gender, race, culture, parenting style and communication skills on the nature of step-parent and stepchild relationship. In preparation for data collection, the researcher received approval from the Independent Institute of Education's (IIE) Ethics Committee. Two of the community projects from the Western Cape were the gatekeeper regulating the researcher's access to the participants.

The researcher composed a letter to the organisation (Appendix A) using electronic mail, to invite participants and to request approval to conduct research with the sample individuals (Appendix B). Ten participants were selected via snowball sampling by evaluating the information. This allowed the researcher to identify those step-parents raising adolescent step-children between the ages of 15-21 years, both remarried and cohabitating, and who indicated a willingness to participate in the study. After identifying potential participants, letters were sent via email and interested step-parents returned a signed consent form. Three participants delayed in signing the consent form, however, the participants' delayed response rate was because other step-parents were fearful that the interview may influence their relationship with their step-children. The researcher telephonically responded to the participant's concerns, the step-parents gave telephonic permission and returned the signed forms.

As far as data collection procedure was concerned, the conduction of the research study included the use of semi-structured type of interview. According to Dejonkheerre and Vaughn (2019), semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to present open-ended questions and the participants to openly express their views and perception. Due to geographical barriers, interviews (Appendix F) were conducted online via telephone and email, and the researcher requested the participants to send their written interview responses via email.

However, this was not convenient for some participants because of a lack of internet access or external noise in the environment. As a result, three interviews were

conducted via WhatsApp Messenger. Gibson (2020) refers to WhatsApp as an approved multiplatform messaging software programme used for communication. However, interviews were arranged according to a time suitable for participants. The use of semi-structured interviews assisted step-parents to share their ideas, beliefs and give accounts of their perceptions to help the researcher understand their experience. The following sections explain how data was captured and how the researcher ensured that it was kept private and anonymous.

3.5.3 Data Capturing

A call recorder software application was used during the interviews to capture the conversation between the researcher and the interviewee. The researcher ensured that the voice recorder is approved and can capture phone calls and WhatsApp calls and conversations. According to Maree (2019) voice recording the interview ensures wholes of the non-verbal interaction and provides material for consistency checks. The use of a call recorder did not reduce the need for transcribing to help in the paraphrasing of questions. Shortly after the interviews, the researcher took notes which were used to verify data from the recordings. Moreover, the researcher listened to the audios recorded and took notes to verify data and the transcribed text consisted of 27 pages. After transcribing from the call recorder, the research proofread to provide a brief account of the data captured.

3.5.4 Data Management

Data management refers to the storage of and control over the processing and delivery of data (Maree, 2019). In the proposed study, the researcher ensured that the data collection procedure was performed ethically. To protect the participants, the audio files and transcriptions were encoded, and any identifying information was anonymised. Additionally, consent forms, audio files and transcriptions were stored in a computer and were double-locked with a password and certain files were also key protected. Once the research has been completed, the audio files and other confidential information including the consent forms would be kept secured for future purposes (for at least five years). In the following section, the researcher addressed how the data were analysed.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

In qualitative research, data analysis refers to the procedure followed by the researcher in order to find answers to the research question, the researcher makes sense of the text or images captured (Maree, 2019). Mohajan (2018) describes data analysis as the process which reveals patterns, coherent themes, meaningful categories, and new ideas and in general uncovers better understanding of a phenomenon or process. The data analysis process in this study is guided by the thematic analysis method. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), as cited in Howitt and Cramer (2017), thematic analysis is a widely used method of analysis which helps inexperienced researchers to classify, analyse and describe themes found from the data. The analysis of the data in this study was managed by utilising the inductive way of identifying the themes within the data.

3.5.1 Analysis of interview data

Before beginning the coding process, the researcher read and re-read the data set numerous times. Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to exploration as the process of reading and re-reading data. To achieve familiarity with the depth and complexity of the data content, it was important for the researcher to be deeply involved in the data. By paying attention to repetitions or patterns emerging in the data, the researchers learned to read the data actively. The researcher coded the data electronically and manually to identify patterns and repetitive ideas.

Initial codes were ascribed to the identified ideas (Maree, 2019). The researcher identified and refined the main themes and sub-themes. Some themes were combined to create a coherent pattern, and although differences were evident between the themes, they were not always mutually exclusive. Lastly, the satisfactory thematic map of the data set was created, and the researcher began to further define the themes so that they could be presented for analysis. Specific attention has to be paid on identifying the essence of each key theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006 as cited in Howitt & Cramer, 2017). Thematic analysis was helpful in obtaining a means for the researcher to present the reader with a rich summary of the key components of the initially large body of data.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this section, the researcher outlined the research approach and design. The qualitative research design and paradigm used in the study were described. This information was followed by the explanation of the data collection technique and the data analysis method. On the next section, findings and interpretation of findings are presented.

4.FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of step-parents raising adolescent step-children, and how step-parents viewed the relationship with their role being evaluated. According to the attachment perspective, the relationship quality between step-parents and step-children derive from a developing sense of attachment marked by engagement and emotional availability (Ganong, Jensen, Sanner, Chapman & Coleman, 2019; Jensen & Pace, 2016; Willis & Limb, 2017). This notion suggests that step-parent's experiences can be understood by the extent to which the nature of the relationship facilitates connections between attachments and step-parenting challenges. This section presents the information obtained from the ten (10) participants. This starts with a concise brief description of the research participants, thereafter, the main themes and subthemes are discussed. This section concludes with the trustworthiness of the study.

4.1 PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the themes and subthemes that emerged through the data gathered from the step-parents that were interviewed and based on the five steps of qualitative data analysis as discovered by Braun, Clarke and Weate (2016). Moreover, themes will be introduced separately and accompanied by subthemes with their supporting data from the interviews. In addition, the interviews were explored according to the three research topics: (1) the nature of attachment on the step-parent and step-child relationship, (2) Challenges that step-parents experience when establishing relationships with adolescent step-stepchildren and (3) the factors influencing the step-parent and step-child relationship.

All of the participants who engaged in the study were step-parents who were either remarried or cohabitating and parented adolescent children from a previous relationship. The step-parents had children of their own at the time of the stepfamily formation and at the time of the study. Furthermore, the step-children were between the ages of 15-21 years and primarily lived with their step-parents, which implies that the participants are attached. For reasons of confidentiality, the participants' background information and their contexts had to be discussed with great care to maintain the anonymity of the step-parents involved in the study and that of their families.

The following four themes emerged from the data analysed:

Theme 1: Developing relationships with step-children

Theme 2: Lack of appreciation

Theme 3: Challenging role

Theme 4: Dealing with complexities

The nature of attachment on the step-parent and step-child relationship.

Theme 1: Developing relationships with step-children

Establishing relationships between the step-parent and the adolescent step-child emerged as a strong element of step-parent's experiences. The quality of this relationship takes to shape both the step-parent and step-child's well-being. All ten individuals reported a meaningful improvement in their life experience, as a direct outcome of raising a step-child. The data shows that it has been a meaningful process for the participants to establish relationships with their stepchildren. The connectedness between step-parents and step-child was a determining factor in the step-parent and step-child relationship.

1.1 Connectedness

Nine of the participants referred to the connectedness of the relationship between themselves and their step-children and a willingness to work effortful towards the relationship. Participant C spoke of the extremely close relationship she has with her step-son:

I believe that because I was so accepting of my spouses' children and willing go extra miles and connect with them as I would to my children. Me and my step-son are very close, a bit like he is my biological child.

1.2 Stability

Eight of the participants identified that the step-child brought a sense of stability in their lives and participants were able to maintain stability within their functional family structures. Based on the step-parent experience, some step-parents stated that the development process of relationships involves an initial stage in which the step-parent focuses on establishing a warm, mutually respectful closeness with the child.

Step-parent and step-child relationship quality not only plays a greater influence on a step-parent's marital well-being also boosts the step-child's emotional security.

Challenges that step-parents experience when establishing relationships with adolescent step-children.

Theme 2: Lack of appreciation

One of the main themes that the participants strongly highlighted is the lack of appreciation of a step-parent's role by step-children which includes unappreciative stepchildren as a subtheme. Additionally, this was a focal point for seven of ten participants in which they emphasised that although they invest significant effort and time on the relationship with their step-children, however, they mostly have experienced a lack of acknowledgement from the step-children themselves.

2.1 Unappreciative step-children

Five participants claimed that they find it difficult to adjust and control the unmannerly behaviour of the step-children. These five participants also shared their challenging experiences of working hard for their step-children without earning rewards and respect in the form of gratefulness from their stepchildren. Step-parents specifically step-mothers attempt to fulfil a parental role but do not receive the same acknowledgements, which is believed a mother would typically receive from her biological children.

Theme 3: Challenging role

The participants all stated unexpected challenges and difficulties in their roles as step-parents to adolescent step-children. Seven participants mentioned the stressors and demands that accompany the role of being a step-parent. Moreover, the participants all have conveyed the opinion that, although they had been aware of the responsibilities associated with step-parenting prior to being part of the new family structure. However, the data obtained from the participants propose that they have encountered challenges in more than a few domains. The challenges include the financial burden placed on the new member of the family.

3.1 Financial burden

Seven of the participants' answers suggest that stepfamily structures experience additional financial demands in comparison to nuclear families. Finances are extended to manage not just the step-child but the whole household in which the step-child reside. The following participant highlighted her frustration with finances. Participant F expressed her concerns as follows:

I understand that it is my role to make sure that every child's need is supported however my step-daughter is spoilt. I struggle a lot when she demands something more expensive than our financial plan, especially luxuries.

Most step-parents have not only assumed a "hands-on" role in helping with the care of the step-child but with the whole family. This also suggests that step-parents are obligated to contribute to the maintenance of their step-children and lack communication skills in terms of negotiating with step-child's family.

The factors influencing the step-parent and step-child relationship.

Theme 4: Dealing with complexities

Another theme which emerged from the interviews related to the complexity of raising an adolescent step-child. Moreover, participants mostly referred to the issue of stepchild's gender and parenting style, regarding complexities such as their relationship changing over time. All the participants who raised these issues usually referred to the quality of the step-parent and step-child relationship as difficult pertaining to these effects.

4.1 Step-child's gender

The issue of gender emerged across all the interviews. It was proposed that the step-child's gender had a significant result on the quality of the step-parent and step-child relations, which mainly resulted in a shift of dynamics within the family system. Participant D has conversely shared a rich perspective of how his situation with his step-daughter:

My wife had found it easy to connect with her step-son, however, the relationship with me and my step-daughter is more difficult... I think girls find it hard to connect with their step-fathers.

4.2 Parenting style

Another factor described by almost all the participants was the discomfort they encountered concerning their views in relation to their parenting styles. With regards to this matter, seven participants, particularly step-mothers have adopted an authoritative parenting style which has contributed to many of the adolescents being negative and hostile towards their step-parents. These findings demonstrate that there are differences in the ways in which females and males process and adjust to their experiences of raising adolescent step-children. Although the male participant has highlighted a positive relationship with the opposite gender, female participants emphasise on negative relationships with their step-daughters while making sense of their experiences.

4.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study explored the lived experiences of ten step-parents living with adolescent step-children in the Western Cape. This research problem was driven by the argument that the increase in remarriages leads to challenges within the step-child and step-children relationship. Catayonic, Igna, Colle, Dolom and Samonte (2020) state that step-parent role often has a challenging time defining the role and interacting with the step-children. Nonetheless, the study revealed a gap in illustrating the experience of step-parents in the step-parent and step-child relationships. The findings in this study clarify the challenges and contributions towards attachments between step-parents and step-children. The following discussion outlines how the research findings can be identified in the context of the relevant theory and literature review.

The nature of attachment on the step-parent and step-child relationship.

The developing principle of attachment theory is that an individual's ability to establish relationships and the quality of those relations is based on the individual's interaction with a primary caregiver. Participants in this study were questioned based on their interactions with their step-children, their step-parenting role, perceptions on the quality of their relationship and to what extent these factors influenced their current step-parent and step-child relationships. Most participants in this study experienced connectedness and stability within their relationships with their step-children, which showed a positive sense of attachment. In contrary to previous

literature, which implied that relationships between step-parents and their adolescent children are dysfunctional than those between biological parents and children (Lai & Carr, 2018; Jensen & Harris, 2016; Teska, 2018), the present study found that it was the nature of the relationship and the level of connection which controlled the attachment between step-parents and step-children, rather than the biological bond. A proper exploration of step-parent and step-child contexts and adjustment also involve positive dyadic relationships and emotional security (Laursen, Madsen, Obel and Hohwü, 2019).

Challenges that step-parents experience when establishing relationships with adolescent step-children.

Lack of appreciation regarding the relationship expectations and the role of the step-parent are critical issues that have caused challenges in the step-parent and step-child relationship. It is important for step-parents within stepfamilies to have direct conversations about their relationship expectations and their role within their new family (Rainforth, 2018; Teska, 2018). Similarly, step-parents in this study experienced challenges regarding their role and were uncertain of the step-parent and parental role, which was mentioned as the most challenging role by most participants. Still, other participants saw themselves as adult figures in their step-children's lives and stressed out over financial responsibilities and replacing their step-children's biological parent.

Papernow (2017) found that after the formation of a step-parent and step-child relationship is a challenging and difficult process that occurs over a long period of time. However, the challenges experienced by the participants in this study such as the role step-parents have to adjust to, the amount of time required to fulfil their role, frustrations and financial responsibilities which all lead to lack of acknowledgement by step-children link to similar difficulties that were stated on by researchers such as Cann-Milland and Southcott (2018); Papernow (2017) and Wiemers, Seltzer, Schoeni, Hotz and Bianchi (2018).

The factors influencing the step-parent and step-child relationship.

The present study found that many of the participants regarded their step-parenting experience as complicated. The participants commonly mentioned being faced with

complex factors such as the step-child's gender and parenting styles which mainly caused lack of communication. These findings relate with literature that suggests a link mainly between parenting styles and step-parents in stepfamilies which shows too much control with little or no support (Catayonic et al., 2020; Jensen & Schafer, 2016). In this study, step-mothers reported more complexities with step-daughters in comparison to step-mothers with step-sons, due to them implementing authoritative parenting.

Only one participant identified as a step-father had a step-daughter and the step-parent and step-child relationship for this participant was unbalanced due to other influencing factors such as gender. Generally, participants received more negative feedback from their adolescent step-children as they possibly do not impose the same parenting style as the biological parent. However, it was also found that the step-child's gender played the main role in how step-parents experienced their role in step-children. Evidence shows that step-child's gender impacts the step-parent's adjustment and satisfaction with their relationship (Ivanova & Balbo, 2019; Mathis, 2018; Jensen & Schafer, 2016). For example, one participant (step-father) described the relationship with his step-daughter as 'disengaged.' Some study has found that step-fathers played a more involved role in their step-son's lives than with step-daughters (Lai & Carr, 2018). Step-parents and step-children dynamics may be complex due to how step-mothers and step-fathers develop foundations with their adolescent step-children.

4.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

4.3.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the degree to which the research findings are true and consistent with reality (Maree, 2019). To maintain credibility of this study, the researcher managed the following provisions: the researcher provided a detailed description of the step-parents and their unique attachment experience and the researcher related the results of this study to the existing body of knowledge on step-parent and step-child relationships to evaluate whether their findings were consistent with past research. Credibility was ensured by the utilisation of triangulation. Triangulation is a validation of results which uncovers biases when only one researcher is exploring an instance (Maree, 2019). In this study, the researcher used data

triangulation by means of data triangulation comparing her themes that emerged with prior research on the subject.

4.3.2 Transferability

Maree (2019) refers to transferability as a generalisation in which the findings of the study apply to settings outside the study phenomenon and when the audience views the findings as insightful applicable to their own experiences. the researcher has been as truthful and as objective as possible by describing the research process in detail, the results of the study should be transferable to other similar populations or contexts in the manner described by Korstjens and Moser (2018).

4.3.3 Dependability

Maree (2019) describe dependability as a level to which the reader is convinced that the findings are real and has occurred as the researcher claims. To enhance the dependability of this study, dependability was achieved through in-depth descriptions of the unique data generated and participants selected.

4.3.4 Confirmability

To ensure that the researcher's motivation, background and perceptions do not influence the consistency of the data, the researcher has to practice conformability throughout the study (Maree, 2019). The findings of this research address the research question accurately. However, unanticipated information was also reported by the participants, indicating that the researcher correctly reported on the participants' experiences and ideas rather than their own goals and preferences.

5.CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescent step-children. In this study, rich information was obtained pertaining to the participants' experiences of being step-parents to adolescent step-children. The findings of this study showed that in the early stages of step-family development, the participants experienced particular difficulties and stressors that are unique to step-parents. This study suggests pathways through which healthcare professionals can implement specific and appropriate perspectives and intervention strategies, rather than simply applying perspectives and interventions from step-family literature that are openly focused on the experience of Western families. In addition, the findings of this study also illustrate how attachment styles, generational patterns and parenting behaviour

affect the quality of the relationship between step-parents and their step-children dynamics.

5.1 IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

When working with step-parents, it is important that practitioners and clinicians have inclusive language, which is actually dependent on the family structure and their preference. In addition, it is vitally important that counsellors and clinicians help individuals identify their roles, expectations, and attachments to the step-child within stepfamilies. This research study also suggests that step-parents in the Western Cape need to engage in family counselling and or have deliberate relationship conversations as well as how the step-parent will function within the family system. Jensen and Harris (2016) suggest that it is important for step-parents to normalise that the step-parent and step-child unacceptance related to stepfamily dynamic will occur.

5.2 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

5.2.1 Informed consent

A consent form which is voluntarily and without intimidation was drafted and completed by the participants. Additionally, the form includes information as to the aim of the study, participant's and researcher's role in the study, duration of the investigation, the benefits of participants from the study and what will happen to the research findings. Concerning the first interactions with the research site, ethical concerns were clearly communicated to the gatekeeper and all the participants. The consent form was carried out to the participants using electronic communication such as email and telephone to present an outline of the investigation.

5.2.1 Debriefing of participants

The researcher ensured that the participants were debriefed before the investigation was conducted. The researcher provided participants with debriefing during the interviews. In addition, the purpose of the interview being recorded was explained and the information gathered was transcribed but kept secured until the conclusion of the study.

5.2.2 Confidentiality

In order to protect the privacy of the researcher, the researcher considered several factors to protect the participants and their families. These factors included being

sensitive to the data obtained from the participants and protecting the identity of the participants and their families, as identified by Korstjens and Moser (2018). At all times, the researcher kept strictly confidential the identity of the participants and the information they provided. The step-children were not involved at any point in the research.

5.2.3 Respect for participants and their involvement

This study is aware of and respects individual differences such as culture, language, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status. Therefore, the methods applied are selected because they reinforce respectful research with step-parents. Concerning adults being part of the study, particular consideration was taken and their ideas were respected rather than stigmatised. Furthermore, the study ensured that the involvement of participants does not result to harm and that there are no risks during the investigation. The following segment will highlight the constraints in the study.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the findings of this study provide valuable insight and information on the experiences of step-parents in the South African context of adolescent step-children, there are certain limitations to this study. The findings are not representative of all step-parents raising adolescent step-children, due to the homogeneous nature of the participants being step-parents or step-mothers who all live in the Western Cape, the small sample used in this study, and the specific inclusion criteria. The findings of this study are therefore not necessarily representative of the diverse groups of the South African population. Another limitation of this research is that only the perspective of step-parents was considered and not the experiences of biological parents and step-children. If all the members of the stepfamily are involved, a more complete image of the process of stepfamily structure and the development of stepfamily relationships can be achieved. The study relies on technology for data collection techniques; however, email and telephone interviews lack social cues that provide complete insight into the participant's experience. In addition, some participants lack access to email or even struggle with internet connectivity, which resulted in delayed response rate.

This study explored the nature of attachment between step-parents and step-children from the step-parent's perspective. The findings of this study indicate that

step-parents parenting adolescent step-children experienced challenges in their “journey” to develop positive attachments. These challenges include a lack of appreciation, challenging role, financial burden, facing indifferences such as step-child's gender and parenting style. The findings of this study may assist professionals working with step-parents into understanding that the step-parent and step-child interaction is a gradual process.

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Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



30 June 2020

Student name: Asisipho Mngcangeni

Student number: 17597774

Campus: Varsity College Cape Town

Re: Approval of Honours in Psychology Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

Supervisor: Dr Serahni Symington

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Symington", is written over a horizontal line.

Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC): Dr Marizanne Grundlingh

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marizanne Grundlingh", is written over a horizontal line.

Appendix B: Exploratory Information Sheet



LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Dear potential participants,

I am a Psychology Honours student at IIE Varsity College. I am studying and exploring the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescent children in the Western Cape through the experience of step-parents. I would like to invite you to take part in this research study. As a student researcher, I am seeking for your ideas and perspectives on the relationship a step-parent might have with their adolescent step-child. I am interested in interviewing participants with the following qualities:

- You are identified as Western Cape resident.
- You are in a marital relationship or cohabitating.
- You have experience with step-parenting and adolescent step-child.
- You are part of a stepfamily or a blended family.

In order to decide whether or not you want to be part of this current research study, you should be aware that if you volunteer, you will be asked to take part in an interview with me. Each participant will be interviewed individually, and the interview will be recorded. Findings from this study may help to fill a gap in the increasing relationships between step-parents and adolescent step-children. In addition, the results will also increase the knowledge of the challenges step-parents experience when parenting an adolescent step-child. The study seeks to enrol ten participants. The interview will be about 45 minutes to an hour. However, interviews will be conducted via email or by telephone and arranged at your convenience.

This study has been approved by the IIE Research Committee at Varsity College, thus, there is no risk in participating in this interview. In addition, interviews will be recorded, and I may take notes. All information will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be used in the study results. Participants may withdraw anytime if they feel uncomfortable. If you are interested in participating, know anyone suitable for this study or have further questions and concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your time and your participation in advance.

Thank you,

Asisipho Mngcangceni

IIE Varsity College

School of Psychology and Communications

Appendix C: Consent form



CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I _____ agree to participate in this research conducted by Asisipho Mngcangceni about the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescents.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. **I understand:**

1. I agree to be interviewed for this research.
2. I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.
3. My name and personal details will remain anonymous.
4. My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.
5. There will be no consequences should I choose to withdraw from the research.
6. I may choose not to answer some of the questions that are asked during the research.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix D: Consent form for Audio Recording



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO RECORDING

I _____ agree to allow Asisipho Mngcangceni to audio record my interviews as part of her research project that explores the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescents.

This research has been explained to me and I understand my involvement in the study.

I agree that:

1. The interview may be recorded.
2. My confidentiality will be ensured.
3. My name and personal details will remain anonymous.
4. The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer.
5. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will have access to these recordings.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix E: Gatekeeper's letter



Student Researcher:

Asisipho Mngcangceni

Honours in Psychology

Department of Psychology and Communications

IIE Varsity College

To: Gatekeeper

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

I am currently conducting research into the nature of attachments between step-parents and adolescent step-children in the Western Cape. The study aims to draw different insights specifically from step-parents in the Western Cape, as there are limited studies focusing on this topic in the South African context. In the long term, the study can contribute towards the improvement of application for addressing stepfamilies at large before it guides step-parents with various strategies in improving their relationships with adolescents.

Participating in this research will enable these step-parents to get an insight into their attachment styles with the adolescents and know factors that may influence their relationship. I intend to gain a full understanding of the attachment between step-parents and adolescents through the step-parents' experience. Participants will partake on individual interviews through email prompts and telephone to share their knowledge and experiences. However, these interviews will be explained both in English and in IsiXhosa for participants to obtain an insight into the investigation.

There will be no risks involved and all the information captured will be kept confidential. The company's and member's names will remain anonymous.

Participation is voluntary and there will be no giveaways or rewards given. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any stage and will not be penalised. Participants are expected to demonstrate whether they agree or disagree to partake in the study by completing an agreement form. As required, participants who wish to be audio recorded while doing the interview may also complete the agreement form for audio recording. All the information captured may be kept safe as it will be used to gather the research project but will be discarded once the study is complete.

This research is conducted under the supervision of Dr Serahni Symington at the IIE Varsity College (). You are welcome to contact me should you have any queries regarding the research or any other related issue.

Your support and willingness to allow your organisation members to participate in this research are appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Asisipho Mngcangceni

Contact details:

E-mail:

Telephone number:

Appendix F: Gatekeeper's Approval



TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: 'The nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescents in the Western Cape: A step-parent's perspective.'

STUDENT: Asisipho Mngcangceni

STUDENT NUMBER: 17597774

E-MAIL ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE NUMBER:

SUPERVISOR: Dr Serahni Symington

E-MAIL ADDRESS:

DECLARATION BY THE FOUNDER:

CONSENT FORM TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR ORGANISATION

I _____ the gatekeeper of _____
(name of organisation) from _____
(address).

A. HEREBY TO CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:

1. I / the participant is invited to participate in the above-mentioned research project which is undertaken by Asisipho Mngcangceni for Honours in Psychology in the School of Psychology and Communication at the IIE Varsity College.

2. The following aspects have been explained to me/the participant:

Aim: To explore the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescents from the perspective of step-parents in the Western Cape region of South Africa.

2.1 I understand that my/ the participant's involvement is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw from the study or inform the researcher of my discomfort.

2.2 Harm: there will be no harm against the participants.

2.3 Confidentiality:

My organisation and its personal details will not be exposed to any discussion by the investigator.

2.4 Voluntary participation:

My participation is voluntary.

It is my decision whether or not to participate and the decision I take will not affect me.

2.5 Access to findings:

The research report will be available in the library and the IIE Repository.

2.6 The information above has been explained to me by Asisipho Mngcangceni in English and Xhosa.

2.7 No pressure will be used on the organisation to agree to participate.

2.8 The company and its members will be offered an opportunity to ask questions.

Signature (gatekeeper): _____

Date: _____

Appendix G: Interview schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Before we begin the interview, I want to thank you again for taking your time to talk with me about your experience in being a step-parent. My study is focused on exploring the nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescent step-children in the Western Cape. I am also curious about how step-parents' challenges are related to their experience of adopting a parental for adolescent step-children. Regarding the interview, your responses are confidential and will be recorded and transcribed.

Instructions:

- The interview includes 10 questions and may take 45 minutes to an hour.
- There more detailed your responses, the better.
- There are no wrong or incorrect answers.
- If some of the questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them.

Getting to know the participant:

- Tell me about yourself (age, current occupation, marital status and family structure.
- Please tell me what you enjoy the most about being a step-parent.

The nature of attachment between the step-parent and the adolescent step-child.

1. What kind of experiences do you have about the step-parent and step-child relationship?
2. How did it take for you to develop a close relationship?

Challenges that step-parents encounter when forming positive relationships with a step-child.

3. Can you tell me a story about a time when you experienced a challenge with you, step-child?

4. How did the challenge influence your sense of attachment with your step-child? Has it changed now?
5. What is your biggest fear about raising your step-child?

Factors that may influence the step-parent and step-child relationship.

6. To what extent does gender, culture, parenting style and communication affect the relationship you have with your step-child?
7. How do you think the adolescent developmental phase affects the form of your relationship?
8. How does living in the same household influence your relationship with the step-child?
9. What other factors that may prevent you from forming a positive relationship with your step-child?
10. Finally, what can step-parents do to form a successful and healthy relationship with their step-children?

Appendix H: Summary document table

The nature of attachment between step-parents and adolescent step-children in the Western Cape: A step-parent's perspective

Research Purpose	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Research Problem	Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis Method	Anticipated Contribution	Anticipated Findings
To describe the lived experiences of step-parents developing attachments with adolescent step-children.	What are the patterns of attachment between step-parent and adolescent step-children? O What challenges do step-parents encounter towards forming relationships with adolescent step-children? O To what extent does gender, culture, parenting style and communication affect the relationship you have with your step-child?	To expand knowledge on the experience of step-parenting in the complex family structure of both step-parents and step-children.	Increase of Western family structures. South Africa has been experiencing high rates of step-parental roles.	Attachment theory (Bowlby) Family systems theory (Bowen)	The ontological position is necessary for understanding reality and subjectivity to explore this subject.	Qualitative	Via email and telephone	Thematic analysis- four phases.	Professionals gain an understanding of steamy dynamics.	Step-parents find it hard to develop attachments with step-children due to the factors mentioned in the study.
Key concepts						Population				
Attachment theory Nature of attachment Step-parent Adolescent						step-parents from regions in the Western Cape Province parenting adolescent step-children between 15 and 21 years of age.	Sampling	Limitations		
							Convenience sampling	Research only on step-parents. Excludes step-children		